

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

31 July 2020

Senator Kimberley Kitching
Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs,
Defence and Trade
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade - References,

Re: Submission to the inquiry into issues facing diaspora communities in Australia

Amnesty International Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Reference Committee's inquiry into issues facing diaspora communities in Australia.

It is well recognised that families often become separated when people are displaced. **Processes around, and the ability to, reunite with overseas family is a significant issue facing diaspora communities in Australia.**

Amnesty International Australia recommends that:

- (1) the existing Community Sponsorship Programme (CSP) be improved, including by making it easier for family to sponsor refugee family members residing overseas; and
- (2) temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders are able to sponsor their family members to join them in Australia; and
- (3) the government increases the amount of visas under the Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) to allow for family reunion.

The *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* protects the right to family life, and repeated UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusions have emphasized the importance of maintaining family unity. To uphold this, the Australian Government must do more to allow for family reunification of those who are separated due to displacement.

Community Sponsorship Programme

We live in a world where people have no option to flee their homes and countries - and rely on the kindness of strangers to help them start again. Australia has had a CSP since 2016 to facilitate this kindness through the sponsorship of refugees.

While it is a welcome start that Australia has recognised the potential of community sponsorship, the Government's model has significant flaws that impact the diaspora communities' chance of reuniting with their family. There are only a small number of refugee placements through the CSP. The costs for sponsoring are exorbitant, including an approximately \$20,000 visa application fee, additional fees for family, a bond of \$20,000, plus airfare, medical screening and settlement costs. Applications are only received for those aged between 18 and 50, who have an offer of employment, personal attributes to enable financial self sufficiency within 12 months of arrival and who are willing to live and work in regional Australia.

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia and regional ethnic councils including those in Wagga Wagga, Shepparton and Bendigo have also shared with Amnesty International Australia that the current CSP has significant negative mental health impacts on families in their communities who are eager to reunite utilising this pathway.

By reducing costs, providing adequate support services, minimising delays, and allowing for family to sponsor refugee family members residing overseas who are in need of international protection, the Australian Government will go a long way towards addressing issues that diaspora communities have with the CSP - and particularly by making it easier to reunite families.

Temporary Protection

Currently, TPV and SHEV holders cannot sponsor their family members to join them. They will never be able to reunite with their loved ones. People are forced to live with the fear of what could happen to their family in their home country, increasing the difficulty for them to properly settle into their new life.

The allowal of TPV and SHEV holders to sponsor their family members to join them will alleviate stress and improve mental health in diaspora communities.

Special Humanitarian Programme

The SHP is the main way a refugee in Australia can seek to reunite with family members. However the number of places is limited, and the demand outstrips the number of places available. This backlog often means that refugees have to wait many years to reunite with their families. More places are needed under the SHP to help facilitate family reunification.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this inquiry. Should you require further information, or to organise a meeting, please contact Joel Clark at joel.clark@amnesty.org.au or on 0424 242 112.

Yours sincerely,



Samantha Klintworth
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Amnesty International Australia