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February 5 2014

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Minister for Immigration and Border Protection
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister Morrison,

The Uniting Church in Australia is the third largest Christian denomination in Australia. Since its inauguration in 1977 the Church has been active and outspoken on many issues of justice and peace as we seek to live out our commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through UnitingJustice Australia, the justice and advocacy unit of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia, we have a long history of positive engagement and advocacy for the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, and have spoken out on behalf of vulnerable men, women and children who often have no voice of their own.

As a community, the Uniting Church holds a strong belief that God calls us to contribute in a positive way to the development of a just and hospitable society. We are called by our faith to speak with those at the margins, the vulnerable whose lives are strongly affected by the decisions that your Government makes, and to assist in giving them a voice.

In January 2011, the Uniting Church joined with over 70 organisations to express our deep concern over the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Australian Government, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees that permitted the involuntary repatriation of unsuccessful asylum seekers back to Afghanistan. While this MOU expired on 11 January this year, the threat of deportation and the grave risks that involuntary transfers carry still looms large for many at-risk individuals.

I write to you today to seek your assistance and direct intervention in the case of a 65-year old Hazara man who is scheduled to be deported imminently.

When his case was heard by the Refugee Review Tribunal in early 2013, it was found that there was a real risk to his life if he was sent back to his home province of Uruzgan.

We are dismayed, however, at the finding that he would be safe if repatriated to Kabul. There is overwhelming evidence that those belonging to the Hazara minority are not safe in Afghanistan – including those who have fled to Kabul from the highly unstable surrounding provinces.

In 2013, the United Nations expressed deep concern over the appointment process and eligibility of the five new members to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, and the fragile nature of human rights in the region – particularly the rights of the Hazara minority, with a predicted escalation of violence in the region ahead of the 2014 presidential and provincial council elections. According to a report released by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), the number of civilians killed or injured in the first half of 2013 rose by 23 per cent compared to the same period last year, owing mainly to the increased use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) by insurgents. The report documented 1,319 civilian deaths and 2,533 injuries – a total of 3,852 civilian casualties – in the first half of the year alone.

Over 40 Afghan Members of Parliament wrote to the Prime Minister in November 2013, urging the Government to reconsider the transfer of unsuccessful asylum seekers back to the country. They cited the deteriorating security in the region and an inability to offer protection to those returned as key factors in their appeal. Ambassador Nasir Andisha has echoed these calls, and has additionally expressed concern for the safety and wellbeing of the man scheduled for deportation.

The individual in question has no contacts or family links in Kabul, is both illiterate and unskilled. He has not lived in Afghanistan since the 1980s and has lost contact with any remaining extended family members in the country. We strongly believe that, given his particular vulnerabilities, he is eligible for complementary protection, and should be permitted to remain in Australia.

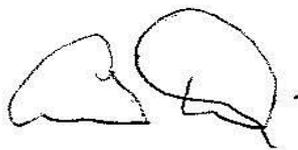
The Christian faith, along with many other religious traditions, places at the core of its moral teachings the principles of welcoming the stranger, caring for the neighbour in need and treating others as we ourselves would want to be treated.

We urge you to intervene in this case to ensure that this man is not deported to a region where he faces very real risks to his life.

Grace and Peace,



Rev Terence Corkin
Assembly General Secretary



Rev Prof Andrew Dutney
President