



Refugee Council of Australia

7 October 2014

Australia must stop returns following torture of asylum seeker

The president of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has again pleaded with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to suspend forcible returns of asylum seekers to Afghanistan, following the news on the weekend that an asylum seeker returned in August was subsequently abducted and tortured.

Phil Glendenning, who visited Afghanistan in mid August, had asked Departmental officials in late August not to proceed with the forced return of Zainullah Naseri, informing them of the serious deterioration in security conditions in the country he had witnessed during his visit just a week earlier.

“I have visited Afghanistan on seven or eight occasions in the past nine years and, while I have witnessed situations of high risk on past visits, the security situation during my visit in August was worse than I had ever seen.

“When I heard just after my return to Australia that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection was organising the forcible return of Mr Naseri, I contacted senior officials of the Department to brief them on what I had observed and heard in Afghanistan during my visit.

“I told them about the killing in July of 14 members of the Hazara ethnic group who had been travelling by bus in Ghor province, the shelling of parts of Kabul where Hazara people were living, the failure of the police to offer protection to residents of some neighbourhoods, the high risk associated with travel between Kabul and Mr Naseri’s family home in Ghazni province and the bumper stickers on cars in Kabul which say that people who work with foreigners should be killed.

“It was clear to me, from my discussions with the Department that the Government was acting on information that was out of date and was not aware of the extent of the deterioration in security within Afghanistan during the course of this year. While I was given a polite hearing by the Department, my concerns were ignored and Mr Naseri’s forced return to Afghanistan was completed.”

On the weekend, *The Saturday Paper* published a report about Mr Naseri’s experiences since his return to Afghanistan – his abduction and torture by the Taliban, the attempt to extort money from his family, his hellish escape and his appalling predicament now in Kabul. Mr Naseri was abducted a week before an Australian citizen, Sayed Habib Musawi, was killed while returning to Kabul from a visit to relatives in Ghazni province.

Mr Glendenning has written to the Acting Secretary of the Department today again pleading for the Government to suspend all plans to return asylum seekers to Afghanistan.

“It is clear to me that Afghans who have worked with organisations based in western countries and Afghans who have lived in western countries, including those who have been returned after attempting to seek asylum, are at particular risk now in Afghanistan.

“Our Government repeatedly claims that its motivation in stopping asylum seekers travelling by boat to Australia is to save lives. It would be grossly hypocritical of the Government to continue forced returns of Afghan citizens knowing that their return could well mean a death sentence.”

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