



Chaldean Australian Society Inc.

**CAS Submission
to the Department of Immigration and
Border Protection on
*Australia's
Humanitarian Programme 2015-16 and
Beyond***

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Chaldean Australian Society Incorporated
6/25 Barbara Street, Fairfield NSW 2165
PO Box: 961 Fairfield NSW 1860
Phone: (02) 9728 4170 Fax: (02) 9728 1540
E-mail: chaldeanaus@live.com Website: www.chaldeanauss.org.au

About the Chaldean Australian Society (CAS)

The Chaldean Australian Society (CAS) is a community-based and not-for-profit organisation established in 1993 to serve the Chaldean community in NSW. CAS addresses the settlement needs to the increasing numbers of Chaldeans arriving to Australia under humanitarian entry and family reunion and the majority of them settle in Fairfield, Liverpool, Mount Druitt and South Western Sydney areas. CAS maintains the Chaldean culture and at the same time assists the engagement of Chaldeans with the Australian society. CAS provides advocacy, information and referral, settlement-related advice, community development programs, and social activities.

About the Chaldeans

The Chaldeans are the indigenous people of Iraq who speak the Chaldean language, a form of Aramaic, in addition to Arabic, the official language in Iraq. Chaldeans are Eastern Rite Catholic, led by the Patriarch of Babylon and affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. The Chaldeans form the major part of Iraqi Christians.

The Chaldeans in Australia

The migration of the Chaldeans to Australia began in the 1970s. There are now more than 20,000 Chaldeans in Australia most of them in Sydney and Melbourne. In recent years there has been increasing migration of Chaldeans to Australia due to the war and events in Iraq. According to the Settlement Report ^[1], published by Department of Social Services: (4,058) Chaldean Catholic migrants settled in Australia from 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2014. In Sydney most of Chaldeans live in Fairfield, Liverpool, Blacktown and South Western Sydney areas. In Melbourne most of Chaldeans live in Hume city area.

The Situation of the Chaldeans in Iraq and Neighbouring Countries

In the last ten years after the 2003 events the Chaldeans as all Christians suffered and they are still suffering from persecution in their home country Iraq because of their Christianity. A number of Chaldeans were accepted as refugees in Australia. As Australians, Iraqis, and Chaldeans we appreciate this and we are very grateful to Australian government for resettling in Australia Iraqi refugees over the previous years.

The situation in Iraq is still critical and still there is persecution against the Christians (Chaldean, Syriac, Assyrian, and others). Terrorist organisations (groups and members) in Iraq are targeting, threatening, torturing, and even killing Christians and consequently many Christians fled Iraq for their safety to seek asylum in countries like Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey.

Recently the Islamic State, a jihadist militant group, has occupied Mosul city and Christian towns and villages in Nineveh plain, Nineveh province, in north of Iraq. ISIL has occupied Tikrif, Batnaya, Tikrif, Qaraqosh, Bartella, Karmless, and other Christian habitations. Christians were forced to flee from Mosul city and Nineveh plain to the Kurdistan region or to the neighbouring countries to Iraq. The Christian community in Mosul and Nineveh plain is almost as old as Christianity itself. For the first time in the history of Iraq, Mosul and Nineveh plain are now empty of Christians.

The Christians lost everything. They lost their towns and villages. They lost their lands, possessions, jobs, money and a number of them lost family's members, relatives, or friends. They lost everything for just being Christian.

It is estimated that about 120,000 Christians fled Mosul city and Nineveh plain. A large number of them are still in critical conditions in camps, public places, schools, churches, parks, and under construction buildings in Duhok and Erbil provinces in Kurdistan region. Others were able to manage to flee Iraq to the neighbouring countries like Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan and also they are in very bad conditions. It is expected increasing in numbers fleeing Iraq and seeking asylum in the neighbouring countries.

The hope to return to their villages and towns diminishes with time. Their towns and villages are still occupied by ISIL. They lost trust in their neighbours from Arab Sunni towns and villages who have joined ISIL and looted (with ISIL) their houses and possessions. The action of the international community until now has made no difference to them adding to that the international leaders are talking that it takes years to degrade or destroy ISIL.

CAS Points of Views Regarding Australia's Humanitarian Programme 2015-16 and Beyond

1- Chaldeans Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Neighbouring Countries to Iraq

The Chaldeans refugees and asylum seekers in neighbouring countries to Iraq are in very critical conditions and in need for all types of support from the international community including the Australian community. The humanitarian aid and resettlement are required to help them. Our society (Chaldean Australian Society) serves and supports Chaldean people in Sydney and there are many concerns from our Chaldean members to the situation of their families, relatives and friends in Iraq and in the neighbouring countries.

We hope the Australian government will continue providing resettlement in Australia to Iraqi Chaldean asylum seekers in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Syria including those who are recently displaced from Mosul city and Nineveh plain and this is because:

- They are genuine refugees
- The degree of persecution and discrimination they face is very high (they lost everything)
- They have links to Australia through their families, relatives, friends and Chaldean community who are willing to support them

Recommendation 1: The Australia's Humanitarian Programme 2015-16 and Beyond to consider widely Iraqi Chaldean refugees and asylum seekers in neighbouring countries to Iraq like Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Syria.

2- Places Allocated to Iraqis in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria

Department of Immigration and Border Protection has announced that "in 2014-15 the government has committed a minimum of 2,200 places for Iraqis, including ethnic and religious minorities fleeing the violence in northern Iraq to neighbouring countries". This is very good news reflecting the compassion and generosity of the Australian government and the Australians to the humanitarian disasters.

This announcement which came in August 2014 in the wake of Christians, Yazidis and other minorities' crisis in Mosul city and northern Iraq, it is clear that the intention of the Australian government is to include those displaced people who fled their home country Iraq escaping from ISIL.

Taking into account the current long processing times for granting humanitarian visas either under SHP or refugee program (referred to Australia for resettlement by UNHCR) we think chances of recently displaced Iraqis to get visas from these 2,200 visas are very little. Thankfully, these 2,200 places are very helpful predominantly to the thousands of Iraqi asylum seekers in neighbouring countries (Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria) who are waiting (for long times or years) for processing their application to Australia under an orderly process. But as the intention of Australian government is to help those Iraqi people of ethnic and religious minorities who recently fled ISIL violence in northern Iraq, so it is anticipated from the Australian government to continue providing resettlement in Australia to those Iraqis in the coming years.

From August 2014 till now, thousands of applications were lodged at DIBP from Iraqis (particularly ethnic and religious minorities). This reflects the size of humanitarian disaster and also the willing of these communities in Australia to support and propose their families and relatives. We think the intake of Iraqis in Australia Humanitarian Programme to reflect this size of applications lodged by Iraqis.

Recommendation 2: The Australian government to allocate at least 3,000 places for Iraqis, including ethnic and religious minorities fleeing the violence in northern Iraq to neighbouring countries in 2015-16 Australia's Humanitarian Programme and another 3,000 places in 2016-17 Australia's Humanitarian Programme and taking into consideration increasing these numbers if the size of the offshore humanitarian programme is increased.

Recommendation 3: Most Iraqi places to be granted for Iraqi ethnic and religious minorities who are suffering from persecution in Iraq and have no more safe haven to stay in Iraq.

3- Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) Priorities and Permanent Protection Visa Holders

Commenting on item 4 “Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) Priorities”, page 7, of “Information Paper - Australia’s Humanitarian Programme 2015-16 and Beyond - December 2014” provided by DIBP. We want to bring your attention to the following points regarding proposing by permanent protection visa holders:

- In form 842 “Application for an Offshore Humanitarian Visa”, part G – Humanitarian Claims, page 23, Published by DIBP (design date 12/2014) ^[2], it is mentioned that:

“Decision makers assess humanitarian claims for all applications including those proposed by Protection (subclass 866) and Resolution of Status (subclass 851) visa holders. This will include an assessment against the following 4 factors:

 - the degree of persecution or discrimination to which you are subject in your home country, and
 - the extent of your connection with Australia, and
 - whether or not there is any suitable country available, other than Australia, that can provide for your settlement and protection from discrimination, and
 - the capacity of the Australian community or (in the case of a Community Proposal Pilot application) any proposers of your application, to provide for the permanent settlement of persons such as you in Australia”.

This indicates clearly that applications proposed by protection visa holders like all proposed applications should be assessed against the four factors mentioned above. This means that should be assessed according to the degree of persecution or discrimination, the extent of their connection with Australia, etc.

- Permanent visa holders who are granted protection after lawful arrival in Australia applied to the Department of Immigration to come to Australia and their visas were granted by the department. Then they applied legally for protection visa according to the Australia’s onshore humanitarian programme. It was up to Australia to accept or refuse their applications according to their humanitarian claim and granting them protection visa or not. They do not do anything wrong. We think lawful arrivals should be able to propose their families and relatives under SHP and their applications to be assessed by the department according to the four factors mentioned above and to be likelihood for granting visa to their families or relatives.

- We do not think that the Department of Immigration advised the permanent visa holders (particularly lawful arrivals), when they applied for their protection visas, that if they want to propose their families under SHP their applications are likely to be refused. It is inappropriate and difficult to tell them now that “if they have lodged applications or want to lodge applications to propose their families under SHP their applications will likely be refused”.

Recommendation 4: The Australia's Humanitarian Programme through its SHP should work towards enhancing the family reunion of Australian citizens and permanent residents including those holders of permanent protection visa. It is the aim of the Programme to reunite the refugees and asylum seekers with their family in Australia.

Recommendation 5: The SHP to consider and assess the humanitarian claim of family members, including immediate family members, of people who have been granted permanent protection visas in Australia through the onshore component of the Programme and proposing their family who are subject to discrimination in their home country. The genuine humanitarian claim should be accepted.

Recommendation 6: Putting the lawful arrivals and illegal maritime arrivals that are granted permanent protection visa in the same category of “SHP Priorities” does not look fair for lawful arrivals.

References:

- 1- Settlement Reports: Top 25 Religions by Migration Stream, Department of Social services
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/09_2014/national_-_religion.pdf
- 2- Form 842, Application for an Offshore Humanitarian Visa, DIBP, 2014
<http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/842.pdf>

For further information about this CAS submission contact Dr Emad Arabo, Secretary and Administration Coordinator, at email: earabo@chaldeanauss.org.au and phone: (02) 9728 4170

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