

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 19 OCTOBER 2010

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(249) Program 2.1: Refugee and Humanitarian Assistance

Senator Cash asked:

- 1) What has been the reaction of Amnesty International and the UNHCR to this new information?

- 2) Are you aware of comments from UNHCR which indicate that the security situation in Afghanistan is the worst it has been for over a decade?

Answer:

The Australian Government maintains regular contact with a range of stakeholders, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Amnesty International (AI), in relation to refugee matters, including country of origin information. These agencies also produce country of origin information reports which are made available to protection decision makers.

Australian media reporting has indicated that refugee groups, including AI, have disagreed with some of the recent country of origin information available to decision makers relating to the situation for Afghan Hazaras. A representative from the UNHCR has also been reported as questioning some of the information. Given the complex and dynamic nature of the situation in Afghanistan, it is reasonable to expect that there will be a range of views on this issue.

Many sources of information on Afghanistan, including reports by the UNHCR, note that the overall security situation in Afghanistan is difficult. However the situation varies from province to province. In considering persecution under the Refugees Convention, it is important to differentiate between the issue of a person's relative safety and security, and whether the person is a refugee as defined by the Convention.

In order for a person to be found to be a refugee, decision makers must be satisfied that the individual has a well founded fear of persecution for one or more of the Convention reasons of race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group. Protection decision makers rely on a very wide range of recent and reliable sources in conducting their assessments.