



COVID-19 Ministerial Group

Minute of Decision

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Oral Item: Afghanistan

Portfolio **Foreign Affairs**

On 17 August 2021, following advice that a community case of COVID-19 had been identified in Auckland, Cabinet authorised a group of Ministers comprising the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for COVID-19 Response and Associate Minister of Health (Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall) to have Power to Act to take decisions on Alert Level 4 timings and settings [CAB-21-MIN-0324].

Following discussions on 19 August 2021 with officials and Ministers, the group of Ministers with Power to Act, together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Immigration and Minister of Defence:

- 1 **noted** that on 16 August 2021, Cabinet:
 - 1.1 agreed in principle to the deployment of New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) assets and/or personnel to assist with the extraction of nationals and approved Afghan citizens;
 - 1.2 agreed in principle that Afghan nations may be considered for resettlement in New Zealand, if they:
 - 1.2.1 worked directly with the NZDF, NZ Police, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) or other New Zealand agencies during the Provincial Reconstruction Team period (2003-2013) or since, or were employed by third parties who worked alongside these agencies; and are able to be verified by those agencies;
 - 1.2.2 provided material assistance to the Inquiry into Operation Burnham and can be verified by relevant parties; and
 - 1.2.3 there are reasonable grounds to believe that the safety or well-being of the individual or their immediate family has been put at risk from their association with New Zealand in Afghanistan, and that no other partner government (e.g. US, Canada) would bear greater responsibility for their welfare;
 - 1.2.4 this would apply to individuals or/and their immediate nuclear family only;
 - 1.3 directed Immigration New Zealand to work with NZDF, NZ Police, MFAT and other relevant New Zealand agencies to enable visa processing for those who meet the criteria for resettlement, as set out in the above paragraph;

1.4 authorised a group of Ministers (the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Immigration and Minister of Defence) to have Power to Act to take further decisions on New Zealand's response to the situation in Afghanistan and the deployment of New Zealand Defence Force assets and personnel to assist with international efforts to extract nationals and approved Afghan citizens, and the criteria for resettlement;

[CAB-21-MIN-0323]

- 2 **noted** the briefing by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and officials on the fast moving situation in Afghanistan, and the planning under way to identify and support New Zealanders and eligible Afghans for safe travel to New Zealand;
- 3 **noted** that, based on the available information, there were around 192 people who had been identified as requiring New Zealand assistance to leave Afghanistan (including New Zealand citizens and residents, Defence, Police and other agency personnel), and that this number is expected to increase;
- 4 **agreed** that people in Afghanistan with a valid New Zealand visa can also be included in exit flights if space permits, and granted a border exception to enter New Zealand;
- 5 **agreed** that, for clarity, NZDF will lead work on the ground in Afghanistan, supported by Immigration New Zealand, and that MFAT, with the assistance of other relevant agencies, will work with Australia for the purposes of getting people back to New Zealand;
- 6 **noted** that further advice will be submitted to Ministers in due course on the implications for New Zealand's Refugee Quota Programme.

Janine Harvey
Cabinet Office
