

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
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Dear Committee members

A safe and permanent future for my wife and baby daughter: submission to the inquiry into family reunion (Pre-Committee version)

My name is Rohullah. I am a father, a landscape gardener, a welder, a keen fisherman and a refugee.

I have lived in Swan Hill in Victoria since 2012. I work for the Swan Hill Rural City Council looking after parks and gardens. I have been an SES volunteer for more than six years. I am 33 years old and I am married with a beautiful young daughter, Jasmine.

But my wife and daughter are not with me - they are in Afghanistan. I have never met or held my daughter. I do not know if we will ever be able to live together as a family. The Australian Government has given me a temporary protection visa that lets me stay in Australia but never bring my wife and daughter here.

I have been here for nearly a decade, but have only been able to visit my family twice. I haven't seen my wife Nooriya for two years. I was so excited when we found out she was pregnant - I bought so many baby clothes for Jasmine. But I couldn't travel last year, so I missed Jasmine's birth. I'm still waiting for the chance to meet her. Now she has grown out of the clothes I bought without ever wearing them. It was painful to look at that pile of clothes last year. Eventually I took them to the op shop.

I wanted to be there for Jasmine's first birthday but I missed that too. I have gotten to know my daughter mainly through photos on my phone.

I was 25 years old when I first came to Australia, and I was grateful to finally have somewhere I could be safe and have a home. At that time there was no such thing as temporary protection visas. But then the law changed. It was a depressing time when I learned how a temporary visa would change my future and keep me apart from my family.

The problem is not only that my family is living on the other side of the world. Everything about this situation is worse because my wife and daughter are in a dangerous place.

All my life, Afghanistan has not been safe for Hazara people. As the Taliban controls more of Afghanistan it gets worse every single day. I am forced to read about every shooting, every bomb blast. I'm forced to check the lists of people who are killed or injured. I don't want to, but I have to because my baby is still there.

My wife is a strong woman but I worry about her raising a child by herself. We worry about our daughter too. She is growing up now and starting to notice a lot about the world. I am worried she will grow up not really knowing who her father is.

I know there are thousands of other people like me. They are passing the time asking themselves, when will I see my child? Is my family safe?

In Swan Hill I am part of support group for other refugees from Afghanistan. Through this group I have learned how many people are stuck in limbo and don't know when they will see their families again. They are working. They are paying their taxes. They are trying hard. But they have sadness in their hearts.

Sometimes I feel like I am carrying the weight of their sorrow too. A friend of mine last saw his wife 11 years ago when she was pregnant. His child is now 11 years old and he is not allowed to bring them to Australia. Other people have gone through painful divorces because their partners told them in tears that they could not keep waiting forever. People are still on bridging visas years after they should have been given some certainty. Their kids are growing older and missing one of their parents. It is a cruel system.

People like us cannot plan. We cannot concentrate. Our bodies are here, but part of us is always thinking about our families. We finish a day's work in Australia, and then come home to updates about who is still alive and who is dead in Afghanistan.

Temporary protection visas were invented to make this our fate. We cannot go back to our country but Australia does not want us to truly make our homes here. I have experienced what it is like to lose my land and my country. Now I am not allowed to be with my family.

Am I going to have to spend the best years of my life alone? Is my daughter going to spend all of her childhood without me?

I want the Australian Government to understand what this is doing to me, to my wife and our baby, and to the thousands of other families. I just want a permanent and safe future, and I want to be able to give the same to my daughter.

Yours sincerely

Rohullah Hussaini

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