

MEDIA RELEASE

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Tim Costello: “Bolster refugee & aid programs to handle massive world crises in Ukraine and Afghanistan”

Australia’s refugee program and overseas aid must both be increased to reflect the twin crises of Ukraine and Afghanistan, according to Micah Australia - a coalition of Christian organisations and churches committed to rallying a Christian voice for justice.

Micah welcomes the Prime Minister’s commitment to fast-track visa applications from Ukrainians fleeing war, along with the flagged intention to provide additional aid and refugee places.

At a Ukrainian Church service in Sydney yesterday, the PM said he had “no doubt” Australia will be taking numbers in addition to our normal program, but that those details are yet to be worked through.

“The Prime Minister is right to affirm Australia’s commitment to the people of Ukraine using a combination of sanctions, aid and visas for those able to make such applications,” said Tim Costello, Executive Director for Micah Australia.

“The challenge is how these well-intentioned promises will be accommodated, given the successive cuts to both Australia’s refugee program and our overseas aid program.

“If Australia is going to help in any meaningful way in both Afghanistan and Ukraine, then Australia’s refugee and overseas aid programs must both be expanded.

“The upcoming federal budget and forward estimates provides the right opportunity to turn good intentions into concrete plans for those fleeing and those who remain caught up in two of the worst humanitarian crises we’ve seen since the end of World War II.”

Despite the overwhelming need, the Australian Government cut its annual Refugee and Humanitarian Program in 2020 by 5,000 places to a capped program of just 13,750 places. Those cuts should be reversed immediately, and we continue to call for a special and additional intake of 20,000 refugees from Afghanistan, reflecting our long-term involvement and commitment to its people.

Likewise, Australia’s development cooperation budget, measured both as a share of national wealth over time and compared with other OECD donors, has remained at historic lows over the last several years. In 2021-22 Australia’s ODA is estimated to reach just 0.21 per cent of GNI and, on current projections, will fall to an estimated 0.18 per cent in 2024-25.

Australia currently ranks 21 out of 29 OECD economies for ODA as a percentage of GNI – below the UK (0.7 per cent), Canada (0.31 per cent) and New Zealand (0.27 per cent), well below the OECD donor average (0.32 per cent), and even below that of smaller economies such as Hungary (0.27 per cent).

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