

8 January 2018

Mr. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi
Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
Islamabad, Pakistan

Refugee advocates across Asia call for long-term safety for Afghan refugees in Pakistan

Dear Hon. Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi,

We are writing to you from the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), a network of more than 320 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries committed to advancing the rights of refugees across the Asia Pacific region.

As you're aware, on 3rd of January 2018, the Pakistan Government extended the validity of the Proof of Registration (PoR) cards by a further 30 days. Whilst any extension to the PoR arrangements that provides legal protection to Afghan refugees is of course positive, we consider a 30-day extension to be both myopic and inadequate.

The international community is cognizant of the fact that Pakistan has generously hosted more than 1.5 million Afghan refugees for over 35 years. Such action by Pakistan to provide this number of people with protection for so long is admirable and is a true testament to the generosity and benevolence of the Pakistan population.

However, it must be remembered that as one of the world's longest-running refugee situations, many Afghan PoR cardholders have spent their entire lives in Pakistan. In fact, the majority of these individuals have been born, educated, married and employed in Pakistan. Despite these contributions and connections to the country, life for Afghani refugees is kept in a constant state of flux due to the current PoR arrangements. Therefore there is an urgent need for the Pakistan government to prepare a long-term sustainable solution. Any short-term renewals/extensions will only lead to overall negative effects for refugees as well as the country as a whole.

PoR cards are extremely important to the everyday life of Afghan refugees present with Afghanistan. Should the card not be renewed, refugees will undoubtedly face increased risks of police abuse, harassment, detention, exploitation and even discrimination. Without the provision of long-term legal status, Afghan refugees are unable to create stable livelihoods and are in constant fear of being involuntarily deported. Such deportation to Afghanistan may place them at risk of persecution.

The most recent PoR card extension was the sixth such extension in recent times. This current practice of short ad-hoc extensions, whilst affording the refugee population a small degree of protection, creates an overwhelming sense of insecurity and uncertainty. Refugees are left confused and uncertain about what the future may hold and what rights they have.

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network urges the Pakistan government to extend Afghan refugees' legal status until stable security conditions return in Afghanistan. At an absolute minimum, we believe that the next extension should provide validity until July 2018 i.e. the date of the next general elections in Pakistan. Ideally, the government should develop a special mechanism to consider Afghan refugees as a 'unique case' and subsequently grant them long-term leave to remain.

Sincerely,



Evan Jones
Programme Coordinator
Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)