

**For immediate release**

## **Legal Stay for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan Will Again Come Down to the Wire**

*Bangkok, 26 June 2018, 10:00:* On 30 of June 2018, the government-issued Proof of Registration (PoR) cards for Afghan refugees in Pakistan will again expire. This will be the third such expiry in 2018 alone. The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) urges the Pakistan Government to provide a long-term extension for Afghan refugees living in Pakistan.

Since their inception, the extension of the PoR cards has been ad-hoc and unpredictable. For example, on 3 January this year the government extended the cards by 30 days. This was subsequently extended by a further two months and then again for a further three months. This on-going practice of short extensions, whilst offering a small degree of protection from harassment and possible deportation, has created an overwhelming sense of anxiety and uncertainty within the general refugee population. With only several months respite provided at a time, refugees are constantly left wondering what their future may hold and how much longer they may be permitted to remain. Notably, this practice of short extensions also makes it incredibly difficult for the international community to properly allocate resources to support Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

The international community is well aware that Pakistan has provided protection to more than 1.5 million registered Afghan refugees for more than four decades. As hosts of one of the world's most protracted refugee situations, such generosity cannot be overstated. However, this long-term hosting arrangement has meant that many Afghans have developed significant ties to Pakistan. In fact, a large number of the 1.5 million have spent the majority of their lives in Pakistan, having contributed both economically and socially for their entire lives. As such, it comes as no surprise that this group of refugees also has very limited – if any – connection to Afghanistan, making it incredibly difficult for many to return to a country they barely know.

Evan Jones, Programme Coordinator at the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) refers to the approach by the Pakistan Government as “falling far short of the protection that is actually required” In addition, he stated, “Afghanistan cannot be classified as a safe country as the government is quite simply unable to guarantee that refugees can return in safety and dignity. Any returns at this point in time would be not only premature, but would unnecessarily place many lives in danger.”

So far in 2018, there have been significant numbers of returnees from both Iran and Pakistan leaving for Afghanistan. As at 20 June, there have been more than 337,000 returns from Iran and a further 15,300 from Pakistan. Whilst numerous governments and international agencies have ostensibly classified these returns as ‘voluntary and spontaneous’, rights groups across the region have questioned the voluntariness of such returns. In addition, there are major concerns as to the subsequent safety of those who have already returned to Afghanistan.

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network strongly urges the Pakistan government to extend Afghan refugees’ legal status until stability and security returns to Afghanistan. With sections of Afghanistan still occupied by the Taliban and Islamic State, any forcible returns will undoubtedly only result in secondary displacement and upheaval. In a time when the world is witnessing the largest numbers of forcibly displaced persons in history, we request the Pakistan Government to showcase their leadership on this issue and provide long-term safety to these individuals. By engaging with stakeholders inside Afghanistan, Pakistan will be better placed to discuss and devise a sustainable solution strategy for this longstanding pending issue.

# Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network

Advancing The Rights Of Refugees

In The Asia Pacific Region

**About APRRN:**

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network is a network of over 340 civil society organisations and individuals from 28 countries in the Asia Pacific region committed to advancing the rights of refugees, through joint advocacy, capacity-strengthening, resource sharing and outreach.

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