



Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project

First Step after Getting a Permanent Visa

Mahammad's family is in Quetta. His wife and three children live in fear of their lives because Pakistan is now very dangerous for Hazaras from Afghanistan. The first thing Mahammad did when he got a Visa as a refugee was to start planning how to see his family and how to get them out of danger. This has been an uphill battle and it is no way near completion. He did manage to get to Pakistan and see them for a few weeks. A very poignant moment for us was Mahammad showing us his children still asleep on the morning he had to leave. He did not wake them—just took their photos.

As part of the work of BASP, we are assisting a number of people like Mahammad with all the paper work needed. This is time-consuming, complicated and costly. Indeed another hill to climb! Prior to August 2012, people in Mahammad's position, wishing to bring their families to Australia could do so as part of the Special Humanitarian Program (SHP). However, this became increasingly difficult because of the long wait entailed. Early this year it was being estimated that families would be waiting for fifteen to twenty years to get to Australia as part of this program.

This was because in 1996, under the Howard Government, the onshore program (people arriving here by air or boat and being given refugee status) and the offshore program (refugees brought to Australia as part of our response to refugees needing resettlement) became numerically linked. This meant that for every asylum seeker who was accepted into Australia, one place was taken away from people in need of international protection across the world and also from family reunion places available in Australia. It has long been the contention that these two programs should be de-linked.

The Expert Panel (established in July 2012 to advise the Government about asylum seekers drowning at sea) recommended that in future those who arrive through irregular maritime means should not be eligible to bring their family to Australia under the Humanitarian Program, but should seek to do so within the family stream of the Migration Program. The government has made regulation changes to implement those recommendations. So those arriving by boat on or after 13 August 2012 are no longer eligible to propose their family under the Humanitarian Program. One of the results of this is moving from a way of getting family here that did not cost very much to one that is very expensive for people who have just got a Permanent visa, and are struggling to get work and set up a home from scratch.

For Mahammad this is

Making application - \$2060

Travel to Islamabad for Medical checks - \$500

Health check costs - \$480

Getting marriage and identity documents - \$1500

Air travel - \$6000 - \$7000

Total: approximately between \$11,000 and \$12,000 for his family!