

Australia's Labor government bars entry to Iranians trapped in US-Israeli carnage

Mike Head
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On Wednesday, the Albanese Labor government made more explicit and blatant its move to block Iranians trying to flee the criminal US-led bombardment that has already killed and maimed thousands of civilians and destroyed basic infrastructure, including schools and hospitals.

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke used his new powers, handed to him by legislation rushed through parliament with Liberal-National Coalition support two weeks ago, to issue a “control determination order” barring access to Australia for all Iranians—currently about 7,000—holding valid tourist visas.

This further demolishes Labor's claims to be supporting the illegal US-Israeli war, and sending air-to-air missiles, an advanced warplane and a troop contingent to join it, in order to free Iranians from oppression or protect people in the Persian Gulf region.

Not only is Labor continuing to politically and materially support an historic crime—a blatant war of aggression that threatens the entire Middle East and the world—it is barring entry to anyone possibly seeking to flee to safety.

Burke insisted that the travel ban, initially for six months but potentially extendable indefinitely, was in the “national interest.” That also underscores the calculations, essentially pro-war propaganda, involved in the government's much-hyped decision, also two weeks ago, to offer humanitarian visas to seven members of the Iranian women's soccer team.

“They are welcome to stay in Australia,” Burke told a press conference when he boasted of the soccer team visas. Five members of the team later changed their minds as the onslaught on Iran intensified, leaving just two remaining in Australia.

Now, Wednesday's travel ban affects thousands of Iranians who had planned visits for family, educational, sporting, cultural or business reasons, paid visa fees and made travel and accommodation bookings.

Burke's statement displayed contempt and indifference toward those trapped in the bombardment, describing them as people who had simply planned a vacation. “Decisions about permanent stays in Australia should be deliberate decisions of the government, not a random consequence of who had booked a holiday,” he said.

When Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and his ministers welcomed the assault on the people of Iran within three hours of US President Donald Trump announcing it on February 28, they claimed it was a war for the liberation of the Iranian people.

Albanese, Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles and Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong began their February 28 statement of support by saying: “Australia stands with the brave people of Iran in their struggle against oppression.” They parroted the cynical claims of Trump that the aim was to create the conditions for the Iranian people to overthrow the Tehran regime.

That was always a lie. The devastating bombardment has nothing whatsoever to do with freedom from oppression, any more than the ongoing US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza, the US partnership with brutal dictatorships throughout the Middle East, from General el-Sisi's military regime in Egypt to the murderous monarchy in Saudi Arabia, or the US backing for the murderous dictatorship of the Shah of Iran from the 1953 US-British coup to the 1979 Iranian revolution.

The war is another, even more barbaric, intervention to try to establish unchallenged US control over the resource-rich and strategic Middle East as a platform for war against China and Russia, with Labor's full commitment.

Burke sought to minimise the brutality of the visa cancellations by saying the government would give “sympathetic consideration” to the Iranian parents of Australian citizens. Under the legislation, others holding tourist visas can apply for a “permitted travel certificate,” which Burke may grant if “satisfied in all the

circumstances that it is appropriate.” That is an arbitrary, unreviewable discretion.

Labor’s legislation hands extraordinary political powers to the home affairs minister, in collaboration with the prime minister and foreign affairs minister, to bar entry to people from any designated country, even if they hold a valid visa to visit Australia. These powers could be used to ban entry from other war-ravaged locations, such as Lebanon, Gaza, Sudan and Afghanistan, from where people may seek safety or asylum.

A Home Affairs Department official revealed earlier this month there were more than 7,200 temporary Australian visa holders within Iran, with the number of temporary visa holders growing to more than 40,000 across the broader region affected by the conflict.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) said the government’s decision was a “massive betrayal” and a “breathhtaking moral failure.” Jana Favero, the centre’s deputy chief executive, said in a media statement: “In the moment that people need safety the most and their country is being torn apart, the Albanese government is slamming the door closed on people from Iran.”

Just a day before the decision, the ASRC had sponsored a media conference at parliament house in Canberra drawing attention to the plight of Iranian asylum seekers who were previously incarcerated on the remote Pacific island of Nauru for years before some were finally brought to Australia between 2015 and 2018 for urgent medical treatment.

The Labor government has continued to deny these refugees permanent humanitarian visas, leaving their lives in limbo on short-term bridging visas and exposing them to the ongoing danger of being deported back to war-devastated Iran.

“Many of them arrived in Australia as children more than 14 years ago, before being forcibly sent to Nauru, where they were detained for years and subjected to serious abuse, trauma and medical neglect,” the ASRC said.

Favero pointed to the contrast with the treatment of the soccer team members and the people who had fled the war in Ukraine. About 34,000 Ukrainians were granted visas to enter Australia after the Ukraine war began in February 2022, triggered by the Russian invasion in response to mounting US-NATO provocations. The comparison only highlights the pro-imperialist war calculations behind Labor’s policies.

As refugee groups have pointed out, the barring of entry to Iranians echoes the Trump administration’s own travel

bans and its violent Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) mass deportations, as well as recalling Australia’s blocking, together with the US, of Jewish refugees trying to escape the Nazi Holocaust in the 1930s.

This is part of a wider lurch in Australia and internationally toward demonising immigrants and refugees fleeing war and poverty, blaming them for worsening domestic social conditions, reflected in the cost-of-living and affordable housing crises now being vastly intensified by the war on Iran.

Increasingly, Labor is seeking to outdo the Coalition and the far-right anti-immigrant One Nation by slashing intake numbers of immigrants, refugees and international students. This takes to new depths Labor’s historic anti-refugee record—from the Keating government’s pioneering the mandatory detention of asylum seekers in 1991 to the Albanese government’s reopening the Nauru imprisonment camp in 2023.

The Albanese government has also prevented the return home of 11 women and 23 children—all Australian citizens with valid passports—who have been detained in primitive concentration camps in Syria since 2019. This constitutes an historic assault on the core democratic right of citizenship, setting a precedent for wider use, particularly under wartime conditions.

Around the world, the ruling capitalist class is trying to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment, nationalism and patriotism to divide the working class globally, and prepare for further wars.

To defeat this, workers and young people must defend the basic democratic right of people to asylum, as well as to live and work where they choose, with full social and citizenship rights. This is essential to build a unified mass movement of the working class globally against war and for the establishment of workers’ power and socialism to reorganise society on the basis of social and human need, not imperialist domination and corporate profit.



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