

6 November 2017

A Joint Catholic Statement on the Humanitarian Crisis on Manus Island

A week after the official closure of the Manus Island detention centre, more than 600 refugees and people seeking asylum languish inside, unsafe and uncertain about their futures.

After forcibly transferring the men to Manus Island in 2013-2014, the Australian government and its sub-contractors have now abandoned the centre and the island, leaving vulnerable people seeking asylum without access to medical care, psychiatric treatment, food, water, or electricity.

Our government has failed to provide these men with any safe alternatives. The UNHCR has [condemned](#) alternative accommodation in Lorengau as unsuitable and unfinished. Human Rights Watch is the latest of several international organisations [reporting on](#) locals assaulting and robbing refugees across the island with local police making little effort to investigate these crimes. People in the centre have been subject to multiple attacks over the years, one of which caused the death of Reza Barati in 2014.

Australia's offer to relocate refugees in PNG to Nauru is no solution at all given the environment there is similarly beset by crippling uncertainty, epidemic rates of attempted suicide and mental illness, physical health ailments, well documented incidents of sexual and physical abuse, and the absence of critical infrastructure across the island. Unlike PNG, Nauru has never undertaken to provide permanent settlement for its caseload of refugees; with a population of only 10,000, it can't.

The US resettlement deal appears to be stagnating and the Australian government continues to refuse New Zealand's offer to resettle 150 recognised refugees.

We Australians have a humanitarian crisis on our doorstep in Manus Island. It's our fault and we should do something about it right now.

Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA), Catholic Social Services Australia, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia, and Jesuit Social Services (JSS) jointly declare:

- The men on Manus Island have the right to food, water and shelter; to freedom and liberty; to be free from inhumane and degrading treatment; and to seek and receive protection.
- The Australian Government is legally and morally responsible for the lives of these men who have been arbitrarily and indefinitely held in limbo for more than four years.
- The only humane resolution to the current impasse is for the Australian Government to bring every refugee and person seeking asylum on Manus Island to Australia where they can be permanently resettled or have their claims processed in safety and with dignity.
- Offshore processing for the purposes of deterrence, whether in PNG, Nauru or anywhere else, is inhumane and unsustainable, and must cease to be a part of any Australian policy.

We urge all Australians to express their concern for the desperate circumstances of the men on Manus Island by contacting your local federal MP to demand an immediate change to this expensive, unworkable and unprincipled policy.

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