

## Points to make - in letters/emails/phone calls re: Refugees Off PNG

Here are a large number of points that you could use in a submission or letter/email/phone call.

It's suggested you choose two or three points that resonate with you, and then **write them in your own words**.

Politicians give letters more weight if they are from a range of individual constituents expressing their concern, rather than pro forma letters which indicate an orchestrated campaign.

### Political viewpoint

- The Labor government should be congratulated for bringing refugees and asylum seekers who were held on Nauru to Australia. It needs to take a similar approach to those who remain trapped in PNG
- Australia has effectively 'dumped' people in PNG, having detained them there for nearly 10 years - Australia continues to have a responsibility for these people
- It was a Coalition Government decision to end the agreement with PNG and 'wash their hands' of those still left in PNG. That decision totally disregarded Australia's moral responsibility and legal responsibility under international law. The Labor government should not be accepting that flawed decision and perpetuating this injustice
- The UNHCR has been absolutely clear that the refugees and asylum seekers left in PNG are Australia's responsibility
- The Australian Government has assumed the PNG government will take responsibility for the welfare of these people
- The Australian Government needs to re-engage with PNG and work to constructively on safe resettlement options
- This will continue to be a political problem for the Australian Government (both at home and overseas) until it is fully resolved
- There are currently about 1,100 people in Australia who have been previously transferred from Nauru and PNG. Bringing another 80 will not significantly change that, but it will completely resolve the issues on Nauru and PNG
- For ALP politicians: abandoning refugees in PNG is inconsistent with ALP policy

### Health viewpoint

- We are actively harming their mental health
- Some need to be brought to Australia for medical care which is not available in PNG
- Some are so unwell with mental illness (e.g. severe depression) that they are unable to engage in assessment processes for resettlement. They need to be brought here for medical care to get them better so that they can engage with a resettlement pathway.
- Urgent medical treatment is needed for the approximately 80 refugees and asylum seekers who remain in PNG. Their physical and mental health has been destroyed by a decade of indefinite detention in intolerable conditions.
- There is not adequate medical support or emergency response for refugees - 2 examples illustrate this:

01/02/2023 - a refugee in Nauru inflicted self-harm and tried to kill himself. Another refugee intervened and helped to get him to hospital, as there was no response to phone calls to the hospital.

02/02/2023 – a refugee in PNG tried to kill himself. Help was provided by another refugee to stop him. Support included staying with him and intervening. There was no service response.

- Some refugees have harmed themselves or attempted suicide as a result of the despair and hopelessness they feel after the years of suffering and uncertainty they have been subjected to.
- There have been 14 preventable deaths from offshore detention that Australia is responsible for. We must avoid any further deaths.
- Currently, 13 of the men in PNG are too unwell to engage in any process for resettlement, they need to be brought here for medical care.

#### Safety viewpoint

- We are exposing these refugees to danger, they are not safe in Port Moresby, one of the most dangerous cities in the world. They are at risk of assault
- There have been multiple assaults on the refugees and asylum seekers in Port Moresby, some resulting in serious injury requiring hospitalisation
- Refugees and asylum seekers in Port Moresby are targeted and attacked by local gangs. They have even been attacked in their accommodation

#### Other

- The government needs to take urgent action now and evacuate all those remaining in PNG. They have been held in PNG for 10 years. Enough is enough
- Waiting for resettlement in a third country will take much too long (e.g. up to 3 years for resettlement in NZ). We should not abandon them. They should be brought here while awaiting resettlement
- Some are not eligible for resettlement in Canada, US or NZ, so they need to be brought here until a resettlement option found
- Asylum seekers and refugees in offshore detention have been held for 3600 days (as of the end of May 2023)
- As of June 2023, there are 83 asylum seekers and refugees, previously held in Australia's immigration detention camp on Manus Island, who are now abandoned in Papua New Guinea.
- Quote from Senator Nick McKim: *"It is within Labor policy to offer all the refugees still in Nauru or PNG transfer to Australia on a temporary basis pending resettlement in a third country. Leaving them behind sick and without hope is cruelty for its own sake. Labor must better than this"* Senator Nick McKim, 18 December 2022
- Some have immediate family here in Australia and we are forcibly keeping them apart
- Holding refugees and people seeking asylum offshore is an extraordinary waste of public funds.
  - The cost of the offshore regime since 2013 -14 has been approximately \$1billion per year - this is an outrageous waste
  - The recent contract with US prison operator MTC for Nauru is for \$420 million dollars for three years - keeping open the prospect of more people seeking asylum being sent there.

## **Proposed Solution**

The solution to this problem is to offer all of the refugees and asylum seekers in PNG the option of being transferred to Australia while awaiting resettlement.

When they are transferred to Australia, they should be allowed to live in the community and provided with appropriate support and medical care. They should not be placed in locked detention as this will further harm their mental health.

## **Your request to the MP:**

If it is a letter or email, the most effective 'ask' is to ask the MP to "make representations on my behalf to the Minister for Home Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and to inform me of the outcome". Normally Ministers are obliged to respond to letters coming from other MPs (so they have more impact than a letter from a member of the public). As Foreign Minister, The Hon Penny Wong is also relevant for any arrangement with PNG.

If it is a phone call to their office, the best 'ask' is to request that the staff member who takes your call conveys your views to the MP.