

MEDIA RELEASE

22 October 2019

Medevac legislation repeal would be a new low

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council President, Claire Victory has urged Senators to vote against the repeal of the Medevac legislation which ensures there is no political interference with the medical assessment and application process to evacuate refugees and asylum seekers held in offshore detention to Australia for urgent medical treatment.

On 4 July, the Senate referred the provisions of the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee for report by this Friday 18 October.

Ms Victory said the repeal of the Medevac legislation would represent a new low in the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees by an Australian government.

‘Until the passage of the legislation in February this year, sick asylum seekers and refugees were waiting an average of two years, in some cases up to five years, for transfer to Australia for medical treatment.

‘Doctors, not politicians should be making these decisions.

‘Almost all parties, including medical and legal experts, acknowledge the Medevac legislation is working well, providing for a number of temporary transfers so far.

‘A number of transfers previously awaited the outcome of long and resource-intensive court cases, causing deep depression in many detainees, suicide attempts and frequent self-harm.

‘The legislation greatly expedited the transfer process, providing clear timeframes for decisions, while affording opportunity for transfer refusal at each step of the process.

‘Transfers can be refused by the Minister on national security and character grounds, but any refusal on medical grounds is referred to the Independent Health Assessment Panel (IHAP), which includes representatives from the AMA as well as government medical officers.

‘It is notable that people transferred under Medevac remain in detention while in Australia.

‘A return to the chaotic arrangements that preceded Medevac would risk the lives of more innocent people.

‘The Independent Health Advisory Panel reported in March 2019 that specialist medical care was not reliably available on Manus Island and there was no access to high quality in-patient psychiatric care in Nauru.

‘While the problem has now shifted to Port Moresby in PNG, demands on specialist medical care there simply cannot be met.

‘The St Vincent de Paul Society has written to all Senators in the Federal Parliament asking them to oppose the repeal of the Medevac legislation. The fate of many psychologically, physically and spiritually damaged people, including the large proportion subsequently found to be genuine refugees, is in their hands,’ Ms Victory said.

The National Council is currently considering the report which was tabled in the Federal Parliament last Friday.

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