

MEDIA RELEASE

Seven years on – hundreds of asylum seekers caught in Australian purgatory – what is the plan?

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In July 2013, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd put in place the policy that ensured no people who arrived in Australia by boat would ever gain permanent settlement in Australia but would instead be sent to PNG and Nauru.

On this seventh anniversary of that decision, the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia highlights the deteriorating situation for the nearly 400 people still in PNG and Nauru, and the hundreds still in closed detention in Australia.

For the people who have been rejected by the US, the Federal Government has no plan for their safe and permanent resettlement.

Some 200 people were medically evacuated from Nauru and PNG under the short-lived Medevac legislation for urgent medical treatment in Australia. They remain in crowded closed detention in makeshift facilities in Brisbane and Melbourne.

St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Claire Victory today reiterated the Society's call for their immediate release into safer accommodation in the community. Some have family members in the community, while others have offers of support and housing with friends.

'A safe and permanent re-settlement must be found for all as a matter of urgency, whether they are in detention in Australia or elsewhere,' Ms Victory said.

'Deteriorating mental health is an issue for many of these men. You can't treat and improve someone's mental health while they remain in the environment causing that condition.

'Understanding this, the Federal Government has already released most of the people it brought to Australia **prior** to the Medevac legislation, at least into community detention.

'But we understand not one of the 200 evacuated under Medevac has been released into community detention.

'These men are being punished for the way they got here.

'Despite repeated calls for urgent action by medical people, the Ombudsman, the Human Rights Commissioner and NGOs (including the St Vincent de Paul Society), the Federal Government has done nothing and given no reason for its lack of action.

'After seven years, what is the plan for releasing people from closed detention and for their permanent resettlement in a safe country?' Ms Victory asked.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 conferences located in individual parishes across the country.

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