

MEDIA RELEASE

Releasing Refugees from Detention is a Start but More Needs to be Done

1 February 2021

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia welcomes the Federal Government's recent decision to release 58 refugees (previously medically transferred to Australia) held indefinitely in detention centres and hotels in Melbourne.

National Council President, Claire Victory said these refugees had become pawns in a battle of political ideology in Australia, even though most had been confirmed as refugees by the governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea prior to their medical transfer to Australia under the 2019 Medevac laws.

'We call on the Morrison Government to release around 200 people who are still detained across Australia after their arrival for medical treatment,' Ms Victory said.

'The impact of almost eight years detention, and the uncertainty of indefinite detention on the men's mental health has been well documented.

'The men have been released on bridging visas, which leaves them vulnerable and largely unsupported in the community.

'We call on the Australian Border Force to brief not-for-profit organisations, such as the Society, who will be providing support to those being released into the community.

'The Australian Government should be working with not-for-profit organisations to ensure that these people have access to a financial safety net and are not left destitute. Not-for-profit organisations have to rely on much-needed donations to provide this support and donations have been stretched during the pandemic.

'These people have been detained for so long – it is unreasonable to expect them to find a place to live, get a job and secure an income overnight.

'The release of these people on a short-term visa which provides no path to safe and permanent resettlement is not good enough.

'The Morrison Government must now release its plan for a permanent resettlement solution for all these people.

'It is unclear why the Morrison Government continues to refuse to take up the long-standing offer for resettlement in New Zealand. There are also other people in Australia on these short-term visas who need help,' Ms Victory said. .../more

In our 2021 Federal Budget submission, the St Vincent de Paul Society has called on the Federal Government to:

- extend the Special Benefit Payment to up to 515 people who have been or are likely to be moved from community detention to Final Departure Bridging Visas.
- make SRSS payments based on need, such as for those awaiting assessments or a review of their claims for protection, including claims before the courts.
- discontinue denial of SRSS payments to persons because they are studying or otherwise deemed eligible to work.
- reinstate the 2014 eligibility criteria and fund the SRSS program at levels that existed prior to the 85 percent cut in funding since 2017-18.
- extend JobSeeker to people on bridging visas currently ineligible for income support
- remove penalties for Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders accessing Special Benefit in light of the pandemic and remove restrictions on accessing Special Benefit for Temporary Protection Visa or SHEV holders who are studying.

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

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