

MEDIA RELEASE

Vinnies says PNG decision is no solution

21 October 2021

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society has condemned the Federal Government's decision to end Australia's resettlement arrangement with Papua New Guinea by the end of 2021 without putting in place adequate arrangements for the people who are at the centre of the changes.

Commenting on the Minister for Home Affairs Karen Andrews' announcement on 6 October, National President Claire Victory said Australia is abandoning 123 men in PNG, many of whom have no option for settlement in a third country.

'From 1 January 2022 the PNG Government will assume full management of regional processing services in PNG and full responsibility for those who remain,' Ms Victory said.

'The Society shares the PNG bishops' concerns that the PNG Government has neither the financial resources nor the necessary services to support these men. This is an unconscionable action by Australia.

'These men live with trauma and complex medical conditions after fleeing their homeland and then enduring more than eight years of suffering in PNG. They live with poor security, the constant risk of COVID and the anxiety that comes from not knowing what the future holds.

'Those who remain in PNG will not have the resources to support themselves in achieving a safe and settled life.

'We agree with Bishop Vincent Long that assistance from Australia, the USA, New Zealand and Canada is urgently needed to resettle those who do not want to stay in PNG.

'We call for the Australian Government to initiate action with these other three countries to find a way forward before 1 January 2022.

'The obvious elephant in the room is the offer from New Zealand for these people to resettle there, an offer which has been on the table for nearly a decade.

'But the Australian Government has not accepted New Zealand's offer and has given no plausible reason for not taking it up. Our government should accept the offer immediately.

'The Society calls on the Home Affairs Minister to release the 88 people evacuated from PNG and Nauru, but who are still in detention in Australia, as their continued detention has no justification. They cannot now be sent back to PNG nor to their country of origin.

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

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