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Media release: for immediate release Friday 19 July 2013

ALHR criticises refugee proposals for Papua New Guinea

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (**ALHR**) expressed grave concern at the announcement by the Prime Minister that asylum seekers and refugees would be sent to Papua New Guinea.

The President of ALHR, John Southalan, said "Australia joined the Refugee Convention in 1954, and both sides of politics readily wave this treaty in relation to other countries. But the Convention is not about pushing refugees and asylum seekers from your shores to somewhere else in the hope that improves your electoral chances".

The Labor Party seek to justify this proposal explaining that PNG has agreed to the Refugee Convention. The Coalition has criticised earlier proposals involving Malaysia, saying Malaysia hadn't signed the Convention, and later suggested Nauru be involved after it had signed the Convention.

The Convention is about helping and protecting people who are fleeing persecution. "Australia's obligations are not met by effectively engaging in the people trade itself: paying poor and needy countries to take asylum seekers and refugees who sought Australia's protection", said Southalan. On the day the PNG proposal was announced, the media also reported the Nauru Government as calling on men on the island to help act as security guards. "These countries are struggling to meet their own needs", Southalan added, "When considering the millions of refugees and displaced persons which other countries house when they flee across borders from conflict in neighbouring countries, this proposal is shameful".

"In sending asylum seekers and refugees to PNG, Australia will be exposing these people to greater harm", explained Southalan. Papua New Guinea made reservations, when it joined the Refugee Convention, indicating it would not be bound by obligations regarding refugees' entitlements to work, to education, and to not be expelled. Papua New Guinea has also not signed the treaty against torture. Southalan warned: "These are very serious deficiencies in the legal protections which Australia considers important".

ALHR has earlier raised concerns about the Government's [enhanced screening processes](#), and the statutory [amendments to the migration zone](#).

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Australian Lawyers for Human Rights is a network of Australian lawyers active in practising and promoting awareness of international human rights standards in Australia. ALHR has a national membership of over 2500 people, with active National, State and Territory committees.