

MEDIA RELEASE

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**If Australia will not resettle refugees from Nauru & Manus Island, other countries must;
ALHR writes letters to Governments of Canada, Germany, New Zealand and the United States
pleading urgent action**

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) is deeply disappointed that the recent release of the Nauru files – detailing assaults, sexual abuse, child abuse, self-harm attempts and dire living conditions – has not triggered major policy change by the Australian Government. Some 2,000 people remain trapped on Nauru and Manus Island. More than 1,400 of these individuals have received positive refugee status determinations, and the process continues. Immediate access to protection for those recognised as refugees is necessary. Resettlement on Nauru or Manus Island is not a feasible or durable solution for those found to be refugees.

If the Australian Government will not act, then the international community must.

Benedict Coyne President of ALHR today stated: “ALHR has written to the Immigration Ministers of New Zealand, Canada, the United States and Germany, urging them to resettle recognised refugees from Nauru and Manus Island. All of these countries have demonstrated considerable generosity with respect to their resettlement intakes, particularly in response to the crisis in Syria. New Zealand previously offered to resettle 150 refugees from Australia’s offshore processing centres, but the Australian Government refused. ALHR is concerned that if countries such as these do not offer resettlement places, refugees will be sent to countries that do not have the capacity to adequately protect and provide for their rights.”

Rebecca Dowd Co-Chair of ALHR’s Refugee Rights Sub-Committee stated: “There is no denying that it is the Australian Government’s responsibility, working with the Governments of the Republic of Nauru and Papua New Guinea, to find durable solutions for recognised refugees in these two countries. We will not stop pushing Australia to assume its international responsibilities and accept these people. But given the gravity of the situation facing these individuals, the time is ripe for other countries to take action.”

Dowd continued: “We expect that if one or more of these countries were to offer to resettle refugees from Nauru or Manus Island, Australia would attempt – again – to block it. The Australian Government is determined not to offer any ‘incentive’ for people to board boats in Australia’s direction. But they cannot have it both ways. If the Government claims, on the one hand, not to have effective control over what happens in Nauru and Manus Island, then on what basis can it decide where refugees are resettled to?”

Coyne further explained: “ALHR reaffirms that the principle of international cooperation underpins the entire refugee protection regime. Responding to refugee crises, such as the situation on Nauru and Manus Island, is a global responsibility. The United Nations has found that the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers violates the Convention against Torture, in addition to other human rights protections. Arguably, the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees on these islands amounts to crimes against humanity, which would trigger a responsibility to protect on the part of the international community.”

“The international community must step in to protect this vulnerable population,” Coyne pleaded. “This harmful regime simply cannot go on.” **[The letters are attached to this media release].**

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ALHR was established in 1993 and is a national network of solicitors, barristers, academics, judicial officers and law students who practise and promote international human rights law in Australia. ALHR has active and engaged National, State and Territory committees and a secretariat at La Trobe University Law School in Melbourne. Through advocacy, media engagement, education, networking, research and training, ALHR promotes, practices and protects universally accepted standards of human rights throughout Australia and overseas.