



Turnbull Government should accept New Zealand offer and avoid 'cruel and punitive' measures: ALHR

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) is calling on the Turnbull Government to accept an offer from the New Zealand Government to resettle refugees from Nauru and Manus Island and urges Members of Parliament to reject radical proposed legislation that would prevent irregular maritime arrivals – including recognised refugees – taken to a regional processing centre since 19 July 2013 from ever making a valid application for an Australian visa.

The New Zealand Minister for Immigration, Michael Woodhouse, has confirmed to ALHR that Australia has failed to utilise even one of the 150 annual places available to refugees from Nauru and Manus Island under the New Zealand Refugee Quota Programme. A total of 300 refugees could have been settled in New Zealand under the agreement (see attached) since the 2014/15 financial year.

“Yet again, we’re seeing a proposal for unnecessarily cruel and punitive measures designed to punish asylum seekers and refugees when far more humane, legal and viable options exist,” Co-Chair of ALHR’s Refugee Rights Sub-Committee, Rebecca Dowd, said.

“If Australia will not accept the refugees on Nauru and Manus Island itself, then the government must immediately accept New Zealand’s offer. If the proposed changes to the *Migration Act* go ahead, the government will no longer be able to hide behind the excuse that sending refugees to New Zealand would serve as a backdoor way for them to enter Australia.

“The government repeatedly states that its border protection policies are working. So why are these changes even necessary? ALHR is concerned the proposed measures are discriminatory. Mr Turnbull’s statement on Sunday that ‘a harmonious multicultural society depends on the Australian Government being in control of its borders’ gives an insight into the real motivations behind the government’s policies,” she said.

According to Khanh Hoang, also Co-Chair of ALHR’s Refugee Rights Sub-Committee, the proposed changes would once again push responsibility for protecting these refugees back onto other countries.

“Australia should be cooperating with countries in the region to find sustainable solutions, not shirking its responsibilities and expecting others to shoulder them,” he said.

“Seeking asylum is not a crime. Refugees must not be treated as criminals.”

ENDS

To arrange an interview with either Rebecca Dowd or Khanh Hoang, please contact Matt Mitchell on 0431 980 365 or media@alhr.org.au