



PO Box A147, Sydney South NSW 1235
info@alhr.org.au alhr.org.au

Media release

For release on Monday 22 May 2017

VISA APPLICATION DEADLINE AN UNPRECEDENTED ATTACK ON ASYLUM SEEKERS

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) is deeply concerned at the Turnbull Government's October 1 deadline for 7,500 asylum seekers to lodge applications for protection or face possible deportation and cuts to their welfare.

These measures affect the Legacy Caseload: asylum seekers who arrived in Australia by boat between August 2012 and December 2013, who have been living in the community on bridging visas such as Temporary Protections Visas (TPVs) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas.

"ALHR condemns this announcement as an unnecessary and unprecedented attack on asylum seekers in Australia," ALHR Refugee Rights Subcommittee Co-Chair Khanh Hoang said.

"These asylum seekers are subject to a 'fast-track' processing system that provides for minimal procedural fairness and merits review. It is therefore crucial that they are given adequate time and assistance to prepare their claims".

"The government knows that lodging a protection visa is a complicated exercise and that many asylum seekers will need to rely on pro-bono legal assistance. It is also well aware that the centres offering such assistance are already stretched beyond capacity," he said.

"The Australian Government has previously cut funding for interpreters and legal assistance, thereby increasing waiting times. Setting an arbitrary date – 1 October – disregards the fact that some of these asylum seekers were only invited to apply for protection as recently as last December. They waited years to be able to apply, yet are now faced with an unreasonably tight deadline to do so."

"Given the deadline, asylum seekers face an impossible choice. They must either submit an application — without legal assistance — before the deadline or risk destitution and/or deportation. Without legal assistance, applications lodged are likely to be inaccurate and incomplete, meaning that people may incorrectly be refused a visa and sent back to a place where they would face persecution".

ALHR calls on the Australian Government to remove the 1 October deadline and to provide sufficient support to community and refugee legal centres to ensure that asylum seekers are given the adequate opportunity to present their applications for protection.

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