



Uniting Church in Australia Assembly

Media Release

An Immediate Moratorium on Offshore Transfers

The Uniting Church in Australia is one of more than 100 Australian organisations calling for an immediate moratorium on transfers to immigration detention facilities on Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea.

The call by churches, human rights groups, aid agencies, faith-based organisations and others follows the case of a five year-old girl who attempted to commit suicide after an extended period of detention on Nauru.

“The plight of this poor young girl is a tragic example of the damage the Australian Government is doing by sending asylum seekers into such unsafe, harsh environments,” said Rev. Elenie Poulos of UnitingJustice Australia.

“The recent Moss Review and Cornall Reports into immigration detention highlighted shameful and disgusting examples of sexual abuse and violence against detainees on Nauru and Manus.

“The Federal Government’s wilful refusal to intervene to protect these vulnerable people is tantamount to condoning this abuse,” said Rev. Poulos.

The five year-old girl who self-harmed had shown signs of sexualised behaviour. She has been diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder and is currently being held in Darwin’s Wickham Point detention centre.

“We call on the Australian Government to show some compassion for a young vulnerable girl and not return her, nor any other vulnerable people to Nauru or Manus,” said Rev. Poulos.

Joint statement by Australian organisations and community groups

24 April 2015

We, the undersigned, call for an immediate moratorium on the transfer of asylum seekers to Nauru and Manus Island until the safety and security of vulnerable asylum seekers can be guaranteed.

The recent Immigration Department-commissioned independent investigations, the Moss Review into the failures of protection for children and women on Nauru, and the Cornall Report into the ruinous conditions on Manus Island, illustrate the inappropriate levels of protection and security inherent in the current system.

The Australian Government, in accepting all recommendations of the Moss Review, has acknowledged that major changes are needed at Nauru to ensure that women and children can be kept safe from physical, psychological and sexual abuse.

The Moss Review also highlighted serious deficiencies in conditions at the Nauru detention centre and noted that asylum seekers had concerns about their personal safety and privacy. The Review concluded that asylum seekers' safety should be considered paramount and that the Australian Government needs to do more in relation to infrastructure, policing and staffing, including ensuring that staff are properly trained on issues of personal safety and privacy for asylum seekers.

Conditions at Manus Island are no better: after two years of operation, a majority asylum seekers have still not had their applications processed and only a handful of people have been moved to the Lorengau transitory facility. Over 950 men remain at the Manus Island detention centre, continuing to live in fear. Recommendations from the Cornall Report into the Manus Island detention centre have not been implemented to a satisfactory standard.

As appropriate care is not available on Manus Island or on Nauru, over 200 asylum seekers and accompanying family members who have been in offshore processing facilities are currently in Australia for medical treatment.

Many of those detained on Manus Island and Nauru are now suffering significant mental distress including post-traumatic stress disorder. Returning those people, including children, to the place of their suffering and even to the place where they may have experienced sexual abuse, amounts to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment.

Fear of return to Manus Island and Nauru is so acute that self-harm and attempted suicide have rapidly escalated amongst this group. Part of their fear is due to the Government's removal of procedural fairness, which means they are held incommunicado, without phone access to lawyers, family or friends, for hours and have their personal belongings packed by detention centre officers while they wait to be removed offshore. Because the Immigration Department does not reveal who will be transferred each week, hundreds of people have heightened anxiety for days before each scheduled transfer.

Asylum seekers and refugees have legitimate fears for their safety, and the Australian Government has not implemented meaningful changes to detention conditions at Nauru or Manus Island to ensure they comply with both its own commissioned reports as well as Australia's obligations under international law.

We call for an immediate moratorium on transfers to offshore detention centres, at least until such a time as all recommendations of the Moss Review and Cornall Report have been fully implemented, and the Australian-funded detention centres comply with minimum international standards for the treatment of the people detained there.

This statement is supported by the following organisations:

Refugee Council of Australia (statement coordinator)
 A Just Cause
 ACOSS
 ADRA Australia
 Amnesty International Australia
 Apollo Bay Rural Australians for Refugees
 Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce
 Australian Coalition to End Immigration Detention of Children
 Australian Council For International Development
 Australian Education Union
 Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
 Australian National Committee on Refugee Women
 Australian Refugee Association
 Ballarat Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Network (BRASSN)
 Ballarat Community Health
 Ballina Region for Refugees
 Balmain for Refugees
 Baptist Care Australia
 Bayside Refugee and Advocacy Association
 Befriend a child in Detention
 Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group
 B'nai B'rith Australia/New Zealand
 Braidwood Rural Australians for Refugees
 Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation
 Brisbane Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Network (BRASS)
 Buddies Refugee Support Group, Sunshine Coast
 Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia
 Caritas Australia
 Castlemaine Rural Australians for Refugees
 Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne, Office of Justice and Peace
 Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, Justice and Peace Office
 Catholic Diocese of Darwin
 Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba, Social Justice Commission
 Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace
 Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Archdiocese of Brisbane
 Catholic Social Services Australia
 Centacare South West NSW
 Centrecare (WA)
 Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University
 Centre for Refugee Research, University of NSW
 Children's Rights International
 ChildFund Australia
 ChilOut
 Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees
 cohealth
 Combined Refugee Action Group, Geelong
 Common Grace
 Communicare
 Compassion and Justice for Refugees, South Australia
 Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW
 Corangamite Grandmothers against Detention of Refugee Children
 Cyber Christian Community WA
 DASSAN (Darwin Asylum Seeker Support Network)
 Dominican Sisters of Eastern Australia and the Solomon Islands
 Edmund Rice Centre Mirrabooka
 Edmund Rice Centre Sydney
 Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, Australia
 Geelong Interchurch Social Justice Network

Grandmothers Against the Detention of Refugee Children
Institute of Sisters of Mercy, Australia and Papua New Guinea
Islamic Council of Victoria
Jesuit Refugee Service Australia
Jesuit Social Services
Jews for Refugees
Liberty Victoria
Melbourne Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office
Missionaries of the Sacred Heart
Multicultural Services Centre of WA
NSW Council of Civil Liberties
NSW Teachers Federation
NT Council of Social Service
Oxfam Australia
Pax Christi Australia (NSW)
Plan International Australia
Presentation People's Social Justice Group, Ballina
Presentation Sisters Queensland
Presentation Sisters Western Australia
Quakers, WA Regional Meeting
Refugee Advice and Casework Service
Refugee Advocacy Network
Refugee Advocacy Service of South Australia Inc (RASSA)
Rural Australians for Refugees, Bellingen and Nambucca Districts
Rural Australians for Refugees, Daylesford and District
Rural Australians for Refugees, Armidale
Safe Asylum
Sanctuary Australia Foundation
SCALES Community Legal Centre
SCARF Inc, Illawarra
Sydney Justice and Peace Coalition
Sisters of Mercy Parramatta
Sisters of the Good Samaritans
Social Responsibilities Commission, Anglican Diocese of Perth
South Australian Refugee Health Network
South Australian Council for Civil Liberties
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia
Surf Coast Rural Australians for Refugees
Tasmanian Asylum Seeker Support
The Tasmania Opportunity
Victorian Arabic Social Services
Townsville Multicultural Support Group
UNICEF Australia
Uniting Church In Australia
Victorian Council of Social Service
Victorian Council of Churches
VOICE Australia
Warrnambool Rural Australians for Refugees
Welcome to Australia
Western Region Ethnic Communities Council
Women's Health in the South East
World Vision Australia
Wyndham Community and Education Centre