

MEDEVAC REPEAL – REFLECTIONS AND ACTIONS

Message from Paul Power, Refugee Council of Australia

I email you with a heavy heart. This morning, the crucial Medevac law, which the Refugee Council of Australia has been so involved in, was repealed.

This law, which was passed in February after a historic loss on the floor of the House of Representatives, ensured doctors not Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and the bureaucrats working with him made medical decisions for people offshore.

Before Medevac, 12 people died in offshore detention, many of them died of completely treatable health issues. Medevac was introduced to ensure that people could get the appropriate care they needed, when they needed it.

Medevac provided a small measure of humanity for those offshore. Nearly 200 people obtained medical treatment in Australia thanks to this law. Lives were saved.

Medevac's repeal is a cruel and vindictive political move by this Government. In the end, Senator Lambie voted with the government to repeal the bill, although she was in tears, unable to say what concession she had extracted from the Government for it. Right now, we need to pivot the full force of our people-powered movement on the government.

Can you call their parliamentary offices to implore them to resolve the crisis of offshore detention, and resettle those remaining to safety?

Click here to get tips for your call and to register that you've made it:

https://action.refugeecouncil.org.au/medevac_call?utm_campaign=medevac_repeal_email&utm_medium=email&utm_source=refugeecouncilaus

Together, we need to show the Government that the public still stands with the medical community – the 5000 doctors who spoke out, the 13 peak medical colleges, dozens of medical whistle-blowers and the Australian Medical Association – in their calls for medical treatment and a safe and secure future for the people detained offshore.

I know you are sad and angry right now. I am too. This is a cruel and cynical move by government concerned more with its own pride than people's lives. Let's harness our feelings and take action. Let's show that our spirit and our commitment to change, will prevail.

Call Peter Dutton and Scott Morrison now and ask them to ensure safe resettlement for all those on Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

I want to assure you we will continue to fight against injustice and inhumanity. We will continue to work for policies that we can be proud of. We will not stop so long as there is a single person detained in Nauru or Papua New Guinea.

In fact, I recently returned from a trip to Papua New Guinea with my colleagues, where we spoke directly with the PNG government about the situation facing the men there, especially those trapped on Manus. We are also advancing in our work with colleagues in Canada to provide resettlement options for those who cannot access the US deal, through the Canadian private sponsorship of refugees program. This is just some of the work we are doing behind the scenes to explore all the avenues to support these men and women.

Yours in hope,
Paul Power, CEO
Refugee Council of Australia

Message from Shen N from Get Up

I write this to you from Parliament House in Canberra, in what feels like the belly of an enormous beast from which little good ever comes.*

You'll excuse me the feeling because today, **in its latest 'success', the Morrison Government took away medical treatment from sick people offshore.** It's devastating.

Earlier this morning the bill *repealing* Medevac passed the Senate, **with the votes of a tearful Senator Lambie and a smug One Nation getting it across the line.**

The one little protection guaranteeing transfer and treatment of sick people in offshore detention without battling it out in court – gone.

Senator Lambie suggested a deal had been done which could secure a safe future for those offshore, but wouldn't reveal details. One can only hope.

But all we know in reality, is that today the Morrison Government showed its true colours. The humiliation of a public defeat on the floor of the House of Representatives earlier this year, when a former member left the party after crossing the floor to vote for a life-saving medical bill, needed to be avenged.

It didn't matter that before Medevac became law, 12 people died in offshore detention.

It didn't matter that *nothing* the Government claimed turned out to be true. There were no 'floods' of people after Medevac passed, Christmas Island detention centre remained empty of Medevac transfers. The impending armada of dastardly criminals who were going to arrive turned out to be a fizzle of false Murdoch front pages.

And it didn't matter that, during the 9 months Medevac was in place, nearly 200 people received treatment that had been denied them for 6 years. Doctors reviewed patients, doctors made decisions, and Minister Dutton was required to listen to them for the first time.

The only thing that mattered was that Prime Minister Morrison and Home Affairs Minister Dutton needed a victory.

Well let's make that victory as pyrrhic as possible. Let's mobilise the enormous community that brought the Kids off Nauru, and got the Medevac Bill passed, and held it in place for 6 months after this Government came to power – until it took a crying Senator voting for something she really looked like she didn't want to, to have it pass.

Let's take the 51,000 of us who signed a petition, the thousands who've marched in rallies, the 12 medical colleges that spoke out, the 5000 doctors that signed open letters, the celebrities who pinned ribbons for those offshore onto their red-carpet outfits. Let's take all of us, and turn all that power on the Government and continue the fight for those 535 people who remain offshore.

Today is a tough day, but know this – together we will keep fighting till everyone offshore has found a safe and secure future. I know that because almost 200 people came here this year thanks to a law Morrison and Dutton fought tooth and nail, and if we keep fighting Morrison and Dutton will have no choice but to take the rest to safety.

Together, let's start by turning this people-powered movement straight at Dutton and Morrison. [Can you help flood their parliamentary offices with calls to make sure people offshore keep receiving the medical care they need, and resettle the people still on PNG and Nauru to safety](#) (click on the link to get the phone numbers and register your call)

In determination,

Shen, Renaire and Daney for the GetUp team

*Good does come from this place when a huge people-powered movement inspires politicians of conscience to buck party fiat, work together on a compromise and cross the floor to vote for the Medevac Bill. I know that this place, Parliament House, did that too. So I'm not going to give up on it, and neither should you!

Message from David Burke, Human Rights Law Centre

The Morrison Government has repealed the Medevac laws – lifesaving laws that allowed doctors to decide when seriously ill people detained in Nauru and PNG needed to be transferred to Australia for medical treatment.

We have seen our politicians once again disregard the safety of the women and men it has deliberately kept trapped in offshore detention for more than six years.

For the last two weeks, I have been in Canberra with our partners doing everything in our power to convince our politicians to stand up for humanity.

We have fought hard to keep the Medevac laws in place because they worked. They put medical decisions back where they belong – in the hands of doctors, not politicians or bureaucrats.

We are deeply disappointed that today, the Morrison Government chose to terminate this lifeline. But this cruel and cynical move to keep innocent people trapped in limbo will not go unanswered.

We will redouble our expert legal action, we will amplify our advocacy in coalition with NGO allies and we will rally the support of thousands of people, like you, who are appalled by Australia's cruel and inhumane refugee policies.

Because when we stand together, we have an incredible impact – as we saw when the last remaining child was brought to safety from Nauru.

There are still over 500 women and men who the Government continues to detain offshore after six long years.

Together, we will fight for these people. We will stand up for compassion and dignity. And we will not stop until every person is rebuilding their life in safety and freedom.

Thank you again for your support. Donations to HRLC, to fund their legal work for the people offshore can be made here:

https://www.hrlc.org.au/donate?utm_source=campaignmonitor&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=medevacrepeal

David Burke
Legal Director, Human Rights Law Centre

An excellent article by Katharine Murphy was published in the Guardian, which also gives a good summary of what actually happened in Parliament: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/04/medevac-repeal-gives-morrison-a-political-win-but-prompts-intense-moral-discomfort?fbclid=IwAR3so661ArCgceg8NyOCu3ncik9kXJdghX0xL_DRevDQqdl1msM1UATQtKo