**MEDIA RELEASE**

**July 17 2020**

**Seven years of suffering: time to end offshore detention**

This Sunday, July 19, marks the day in 2013 when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that people seeking asylum, arriving by boat, will never be settled in Australia and would be processed offshore.

Seven years on, hundreds of refugees and people seeking asylum remain on temporary visas or indefinitely detained on PNG, Nauru and here in Australia.

As a result of the offshore detention regime, 13 people have lost their lives, families have been separated and lives and dreams put on hold.

Prolonged time in detention is continuing to take a significant toll on the physical and mental well-being of refugees and people seeking asylum.

More than 400 people continue to be trapped by Australia in PNG and Nauru. People transferred to Australia are still languishing in detention facilities, including 120 in hotels, where medical care and safe conditions during COVID19 are grossly inadequate.

Countless Parliamentary and Departmental inquiries, UN investigations, reports by the Australian Human Rights Commission, and numerous whistleblowers, including the government’s own doctors have repeatedly told us the same horrific truth – that Australia’s detention regime has delivered gross abuses and has left people who sought safety here in a state of hopelessness.

Before the passing of the Medevac legislation, those transferred to Australia for medical treatment was the result of highly taxing and resource intensive court cases that spanned months and years. The average wait for transfer after recommendation was two-to-three years, with some people still waiting for as many as five years for adequate medical treatment.

It’s been seven years of deliberate abuse, seven years of appalling conditions and seven years of our Government abrogating its responsibility to fulfil our obligations under the UN Refugee Convention. It's time for a permanent resettlement solution.

The Morrison Government must either take up New Zealand’s offer of resettlement for those not being considered for the US deal or provide resettlement pathways here at the latest by the end of 2020.

Jana Favero, Director of Advocacy and Campaigns, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre said:

“Seven years without freedom. Seven years in limbo. Seven years of lost opportunities. Enough is enough. The Morrison Government can and must give the men, women and children impacted by the brutality of offshore processing a safe and secure home today. Freedom is a basic human right. Denying people this right is completely wrong and inhumane.

Farhad Rahmati, civil engineer, human rights activist and Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation (BITA) detainee.

“I have been in seven years of forced isolation. I always wanted to have a family but that opportunity has been taken away from me. In the last seven years I could have had children that are at school but instead I am alone.

“We are human beings like everyone else. We want to be free, breathing fresh air and to live our lives. Instead our lives are on hold.

Amnesty International Australia Refugee Advisor, Dr Graham Thom said:

“Offshore processing was only ever meant to be a temporary ‘solution’ - yet they never considered how it could be concluded. The damage done to people's lives, who’s only wish was help from Australia, to live their lives free of persecution, is both profound and unconscionable.

“The only reason people are still being held in these completely unacceptable conditions is a lack of political will do anything. It’s past due that we stopped using people’s lives as political footballs and get them to safety.”

*GetUp Human Rights Director, Renaire Druery said:*

“For seven years this government has chosen to play politics with people’s lives – knocking back resettlement offers with New Zealand, ignoring medical experts’ calls to move people into the community through the pandemic and threatening to take away mobile phones.

“The Morrison Government could give the women, men, families and children they’ve detained for seven years safety and a future right now – all that’s missing is a government with a heart and the political will.”

RACS Centre Director and Principal Solicitor, Sarah Dale said:

“This harsh and abhorrent system is designed to punish those that dare to ask for our protection.”

“Lives have been lost, spirits completely broken. The Government must act now to provide a permanent settlement solution for people who have already suffered 7 years too long. This should never have happened and cannot continue.”

Human Rights Law Centre Legal Director, David Burke said:

“For seven years the Australian Government repeatedly laid bare its cruelty of innocent people in our care. The Government has intentionally ripped apart families. Hundreds of children suffered for years offshore and were denied safe childhoods. People who were simply asking for help have lost some of the best years of their lives. Thirteen men have died.

There is no justification for the Morrison Government continuing to lock people up here and overseas. This dark chapter in our history has to end.”

**ENDS**

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