



Joint MEDIA RELEASE: Sunday 9 August 2020

Release refugees to stay @homesafelywithus

A coalition of refugee support groups today offered to open their homes to asylum seekers and refugees currently held in Australia's immigration detention centres.

The **@homesafelywithus** initiative is being offered to the Commonwealth Government as a concerned community response to reduce overcrowding and the risk of Covid-19 cluster outbreaks in immigration detention facilities.

The move follows an Australian Border Force (ABF) announcement last week that it needs to relieve capacity pressure across the immigration detention network in Australia and will transfer people under a 501 classification to the reopened Christmas Island detention centre.

"For months medical experts have warned there is a high risk of coronavirus cluster outbreaks in overcrowded immigration centres and the hotels being used as alternative places of detention," said Pamela Curr, spokesperson for RAN (Refugee Advocacy Network) and the **@homesafelywithus** coalition of support groups.

"Releasing asylum seekers will reduce the public health risk which is paramount at the moment," Ms Curr said.

"It will also save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars being wasted on all this unnecessary security around administrative detention because Government refuses to give refugees and people seeking asylum the protection they deserve.

"This is all so costly and unnecessary - spending millions on keeping people who pose no risk in immigration detention," said Ms Curr. "It is totally unnecessary to be moving people around like pawns on a chessboard during a pandemic when there are homes for them to go to.

"The safe, sensible and cost-effective thing to do is to release people who came here seeking asylum into the safe keeping of their families, friends and supporters. There are more than enough family and friends ready to welcome refugees into their homes and communities."

While the ABF has said the Christmas Island option would only be used for people whose visas have been cancelled on past conviction or character grounds and whose deportation has been delayed due to Covid-19 travel restrictions, refugee supporters are concerned about a hidden agenda to move around 200 refugees brought last year from PNG and Nauru for medical treatment.

The medical evacuees are still being detained in suburban hotels in Melbourne and Brisbane. Many have still not received the medical treatment they need.

“Our real fear is that the medical evacuees may be moved from the eastern states to the Yongah Hill detention centre 100 km outside Perth,” Ms Curr said.

“Yongah Hill has limited access to medical treatment and would remove vulnerable people far from the support of their families and other supporters in the community,” she added.

Convenor of ARAN (Australian Refugee Action Network), Marie Hapke said over \$7billion has been spent keeping refugees on Manus, in PNG and Nauru since 2013.

“Now, yet another bucket of money is being spent on Christmas Island which has become a monument to the Government’s punishing treatment of people who need our protection,” Ms Hapke said.

She urged the Government to recognise the **@homesafelywithus** initiative as a commonsense solution against the alternative of keeping people indefinitely detained at unnecessary risk of infection with Covid-19 and at massive cost for years to come.

“There is no plan for these people. Australia should not be a country that deprives innocent people of their freedom, especially during a global pandemic”, Ms Hapke said.

The **@homesafelywithus** coalition of refugee supporters currently includes the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project, Grandmothers for Refugees, Refugee Action Coalition Sydney, and Rural Australians for Refugees.

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@homesafelywithus coalition groups as at 9 August:

Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project

Grandmothers for Refugees

Rural Australians for Refugees

Tassie Nannas

Tasmanian Refugee Rights Action Group

Refugee Action Collective Queensland

Refugee Action Campaign, Canberra

Refugee Action Coalition Sydney