

JUSTICE & FREEDOM for REFUGEES

End Detention – Permanent Visas – Safe & Secure Futures

Palm Sunday
National Day of Action
10 April 2022



JUSTICE FOR REFUGEES means:

- **Releasing ALL refugees and people seeking asylum from detention**
- **Permanent visas and family reunion for all refugees**
- **Fair and timely assessment of all claims for refugee status**
- **The right to work and access to Centrelink benefits for all refugees and people seeking asylum**
- **Ensuring that people still held on Nauru and in PNG have safe resettlement options either here in Australia or in New Zealand**

Australia's treatment of refugees is harsh, punitive, and is in breach of international obligations under the UN Refugee Convention. People fleeing political oppression and wars in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and the Middle East have held for years in detention.

This is in contrast to Australia's response to the refugee crisis at the end of the Vietnam War in the early 1970s. Just over 2000 Vietnamese arrived by boat following the fall of Saigon; none of them were detained. Australia resettled around 80,000 Vietnamese refugees in total. It shows that resettlement of much larger numbers of refugees is possible.

Why the detention of refugees must end

The imprisonment of refugees in the Park Hotel in Melbourne has been widely reported since Novak Djokovic was detained there in January. Unlike Novak, 28 men remain in the hotel after nearly 9 years of detention. These men who were held in PNG and on Nauru for nearly over 7 years, were brought to Australia with 160 others for medical treatment in 2018 under the now repealed Medevac legislation. These men continue to be detained - for absolutely no reason.

There are around 280 people who are seeking asylum being held in immigration across Australia (Home Affairs statistics Sept 2021). Over 200 refugees and asylum seekers are being held in Nauru and PNG, many without any prospect of safe meaningful resettlement.

No other country in the world has mandatory and indefinite detention of refugees. Long term detention strips away hope and leads to serious physical and mental health problems. As former Australian of the year psychologist Patrick McGorry said "detention centres are factories for producing mental illness".

What else need to change?

The Australian government has ignored the call for a special intake of 20,000 to provide safety for people suffering persecution and starvation in Afghanistan. Instead the government has offered only 15,000 over 4 years taken out of the existing refugee quota of just 13,750 each year.

In 2014 the Australian government banned resettlement in Australia of any refugees who come via Indonesia. Since then, over 14,000 UNHCR recognized refugees have been stuck in limbo in Indonesia. They have no rights, so cannot establish bank accounts, work legally or get health care, and often their children cannot go to school. Around half of these refugees are from Afghanistan.

Refugees should be granted Permanent Visas

Thousands of refugees have been living and working in our community for more than 8 years - by now they should be Australian citizens. Instead, they are still living on Temporary Protection Visas (3 years) or 5-year Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) with no possibility of settling permanently in Australia. They are not allowed to apply for family reunion. They remain permanently separated from loved ones, who are often in places of danger.

Bridging Visas (BVEs) are short term visas. People on these visas need to reapply and have no certainty that they will be granted another visa. Most people on BVEs have no access to welfare, and sometimes do not have the right to work or study. Thousands of people have lived for over 9 years in constant uncertainty - usually because the government has not completed their refugee assessments, or because of the unfair fast track system. Some people are on BVEs despite having refugee status, this includes released Medevac refugees and children and families brought from Nauru.

These policies are cruel and costly, we can instead welcome refugees

We call for enlightened and humane policies to replace the cruel and shameful policies that have been in place for far too long.

We can fully Welcome Refugees