



# CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

of

Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands  
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19 July 2021

The Hon. Scott Ryan  
President of the Senate  
Canberra

The Hon. Tony Smith MP  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Canberra

Dear Hon. Senator Ryan and Hon. Mr. Smith,

## **RE: OPEN LETTER ON ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES WITH NO RESETTLEMENT OPTIONS**

Today is eight years since the Australian parliament has legislated on the mandatory offshore detention for asylum seekers arriving by boat after 19 July 2013 and the prohibition on them of ever settling in Australia.

The people transferred in 2013 - 14 to Manus and Nauru, and some detained offshore or onshore till now, have served a crucial Australian interest. Their detention has effectively achieved the purpose of stopping the boats, thus allowing Australia to cordon off its maritime borders.

In truth, the Australian policy of indefinite detention of asylum seekers and refugees (or anybody else not convicted by the courts) sounds totally unjustifiable and unacceptable to us.

In any case, we firmly believe it should not apply to those who have served a paramount Australian national interest at the price of great personal sacrifice.

**It is on this basis that, on this 19<sup>th</sup> of July 2021, we strongly urge the Australian parliament to legislate for the freedom and a home in Australia at least for those who have been detained in Manus and Nauru at any stage after 19 July 2013 and have no way, now and in the future, to be resettled to a third country.**

We know that the remaining asylum seekers and refugees still in Papua New Guinea (127 of them according to the UNHCR) enjoy better freedom of movement than those transferred to detention facilities and "alternative places of detention" in Australia.

**But you cannot think of keeping any of them here forever.**

Under the current legislation, they have no right to be resettled in Australia. But they have no duty to live in Papua New Guinea either, unless that is their free choice. Australia forcing them to stay indefinitely on PNG soil against the wish of anybody here, contradicts the spirit of PNG self-determination. We believe it is time for Australia to erase any trace of past colonial demand and fully implement a new style of compassionate and participative leadership in the Pacific.

I can assure you that here in Port Moresby, not only us, but all those more involved in assisting the men affected by the current policy (particularly the PNG Immigration and the Australian High Commission) are all exhausted by the prolonged effort.

Please, close the Manus and Nauru chapter as soon as possible by allowing people who have sacrificed so much for your country, and whose acute suffering we see every day, to access a reasonable and acceptable level of freedom and dignity in Australia; specifically, those who have been in Manus and Nauru after 19 July 2013 and have no option for a third country of resettlement and, as we all well know, can't return to their home country.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Cordially:



**REV. FR. GIORGIO LICINI, PIME**

General Secretary, Catholic Bishops Conference of PNG & SI