

Index: ASA 05/8971/2018

30 August 2018

## **JOINT OPEN LETTER TO THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM LEADERS AND OBSERVERS IN THE CONTEXT OF AUSTRALIA'S ABUSIVE OFFSHORE REFUGEE PROCESSING POLICY**

We are writing to urge that Australia's cruel treatment of refugees in the Pacific countries of Papua New Guinea and Nauru is considered at the top of the agenda at the 49<sup>th</sup> Pacific Islands Forum Meeting.

While it is hard to call out close neighbours and allies, the Pacific Leaders Forum is the correct space for this urgent discussion. It is important that Pacific Island countries hold Australia and each other accountable to human rights obligations for all refugees and people seeking asylum.

Pacific Islanders remain the most vulnerable and impacted by climate change, and also are global leaders on climate and disaster response. As worsening ecological conditions continue to escalate a global refugee crisis, a global human rights benchmark needs to be established, with Pacific leaders at forefront of this change.

As you will be aware, since 2013, the Australian government has been unlawfully sending asylum seekers arriving in its territory by boat to the Pacific Island nations of Papua New Guinea (to the remote province of Manus) and to Nauru.

These refugees and people seeking asylum have been subject to cruel and degrading conditions over the past five years, with widespread reports of violence against refugees in Papua New Guinea and violence and sexual harassment of women and children on Nauru. The worsening plight of refugees and asylum seekers on Manus and Nauru has been well documented by the UN Refugee agency UNHCR and by human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Human Rights Law Centre; by refugee support agencies and faith-based justice groups globally, and in national, regional and global media.

Papua New Guinea and Nauru cannot and will not be able to provide just, safe or durable solutions for the protection of this group of refugees, and the Australian government continues to shirk its responsibility for the over two thousand people it has forcibly sent there. This is while Australia has just successfully lobbied for UN membership of the Human Rights Council from 2018.

The UNHCR has condemned Australia's cruel policies, and noted that these refugees and asylum seekers have amongst the highest rates of mental illness for any refugee population worldwide. It is amid this climate that the Australian government has begun winding back health and other support to refugees, including removal of psycho-social support and access to translators in the last year.

In late 2016, the Australian and USA governments announced an arrangement for the USA to take up to 1250 refugees from Manus and Nauru. This agreement has resulted in a total of 493 refugees going through a US assessment process, with 372 refugees accepted for relocation; most of whom have been transferred to the US already. However, a further 121 people including

some with refugee status, have been rejected by the US with a large portion being of Iranian nationality. Around 1650 people currently remain in Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

Even if the US accepts the 1250 refugees it has agreed to settle, between 600 and 800 people will remain indefinitely on Manus and Nauru, with no solution in sight. This number is likely to be more if Iranians continue to be largely excluded or rejected from the US/Australia agreement. The Australian government has not made clear plans for these people, but has repeatedly stated they will never be brought to Australia. Growing civil society and people's movements in Australia continue to advocate to 'Bring them here' as general living and medical conditions deteriorate and self-harm, suicide and deaths increase.

The Australian government has blocked an offer by the Aotearoa/New Zealand government to settle up to 150 refugees from Manus and Nauru per year.

We call on the Australian government to immediately end offshore processing. We further call on Australia to immediately transfer people it sent to Manus and Nauru back to Australia or to another safe third country, where they will enjoy the full legal rights and protection of that country.

We sincerely urge Pacific Island Forum leaders to make these same calls, in consideration of the human rights and justice for the people on Manus and Nauru. We sincerely urge Pacific Island Forum leaders to also ensure the human rights of refugees in their territories are protected.

Sincerely,

#### Signatories

1. Amnesty International
2. Amnesty International Australia
3. Amnesty International New Zealand
4. Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA)
5. The Pacific Conference of Churches
6. Vanuatu Human Rights Coalition
7. Oxfam in the Pacific
8. Fiji NGO Coalition on Human Rights (NGOCHR)
9. Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
10. The Fiji Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission
11. Voice for Change, Jiwaka Province, PNG
12. Bune United Sister from Tombil Village, Minj, Jiwaka Province, PNG
13. Mubalu Sisters of Hope Federation of Western Highlands Province, PNG
14. The Catholic Women Federation of Jiwaka Province, PNG
15. Solomon Islands Young Women's Parliamentary Group
16. The Solomon Islands Women's Rights Action Movement (WRAM)
17. Forum Solomon Islands International (FSII)
18. FemLINKpacific
19. Oceania Pride, Fiji
20. Palau Chamber of Commerce
21. 350 Pacific and the Pacific Climate Warriors

22. Citizens' Constitutional Forum (CCF), Fiji
23. Strumphet Alliance Network, Fiji
24. Vanuatu Young Women For Change (VYW4C)
25. Vatu Mauri Consortium
26. Anne's Christian Community Health School and Nursing Services
27. The Secretariat of the Alliance for Future Generations (AFG), Fiji
28. Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS)
29. Aspire Network, Fiji
30. Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM)
31. Survival Advocacy Network (SAN)
32. Rainbow Pride Foundation (RPF), Fiji
33. Tonga Leitis Association (TLA)
34. Haus of Khameleon, Fiji
35. Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network (PSGDN)
36. Pacific Partnerships on Gender, Climate Change and Sustainable Development (PPGCCSD)
37. Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women
38. Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) Pacific Regional Secretariat
39. World Vision New Zealand
40. World Vision Australia
41. Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)
42. Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)
43. Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN)
44. Women's Major Group (WMG) on Sustainable Development, Pacific Small Island Developing (PSIDS)
45. Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod
46. Communify Qld, Australia
47. Asylum Circle, Australia
48. Oxfam Australia
49. ActionStation Aotearoa
50. The Weaving House, New Zealand
51. First Home Project, Perth, West Australia
52. Cornerstone Church, Perth, West Australia
53. Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APTAN)
54. ActionAid Australia
55. Love Makes a Way, Australia
56. Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC), Australia
57. International Women's Development Agency (IWDA), Australia
58. Teacher for Refugees and People Seeking Asylum (TRAPSA), QLD
59. Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)
60. International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP)
61. Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights Asia and Pacific (UAF A&P)
62. Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)
63. We Rise Coalition
64. Loreto Sisters Australia & South East Asia
65. Reacción Climática (RC), Bolivia
66. Centre for Indigenous Cultures of Peru (Chirapaq), Peru
67. Fundación Arcoiris, México
68. Red De Educacion Popular entre Mujeres de América Latina y el Caribe (REPEM)
69. Cornerstone Church Joondalup, Western Australia
70. Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), Europe

71. Child Adolescent and Family Survival Organization Women's Rights Action Group (CAFSSO-WRAG), Nigeria
72. Civil Society Coalition on Sustainable Development (CSCSD), Nigeria
73. Civil Society Coalition on Migration and Diaspora, Nigeria
74. Women and Media Collective (WMC), Sri Lanka
75. Africa Development Interchange Network (ADIN), Cameroon
76. Commonwealth Civil Society Advisory Committee (CSAC), Cameroon
77. Global Social Economy Group (GSEG), Cameroon
78. Mexican Foundation for Family Planning (MEXFAM), Mexico
79. Réseau Genre et Droits de la Femme (GEDROFE), Democratic Republic of Congo
80. Passionists International, USA
81. Association For Promotion of Sustainable Development (APSD HISAR), India
82. Feminist Task Force (FTF), USA
83. Equality Bahamas
84. Realizing Sexual and Reproductive Justice (RESURJ), Global

**Endorsements post-31 August 2018**

85. Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency, PNG
86. Queensland Regional Meeting of Quakers
87. Council for International Development (CID NZ)
88. All Win Network Foundation
89. Institute for Planetary Synthesis
90. Central Province Pressure Group (CPPG) PNG
91. Kairuku Community Development Association, PNG
92. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
93. Redlands for Refugees
94. Bismarck Rama Group, PNG
95. Central Province Pressure Group (CPPG), PNG
96. Kairuku Community Development Association, PNG