



4 May 2016

Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

I write on behalf of Australian Quakers to urge a fresh look at the Government's policy on refugees and asylum seekers. This request comes in the wake of the ongoing reports of mistreatment of asylum seekers offshore, and the Papua New Guinea Supreme Court decision to declare the Manus Island detention centre illegal and unconstitutional.

The boats carrying asylum seekers are no longer arriving on our shores, thereby reducing the danger to people on the high seas. This gives you and the Government an opportunity to move to a new position that will put in place a more permanent approach. This would involve the following steps:

1. Close the detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru, thereby saving considerable human and financial cost. This would mean acknowledging that offshore detention has had unexpected negative effects which are inconsistent with Australia's intention to achieve a fair outcome for people forced to flee persecution and seek protection.
2. Bring to Australia for permanent resettlement those who have been assessed as eligible for refugee status, and ensure that they are supported to contribute fully to Australian society.
3. Accept the offer by New Zealand to resettle some of these refugees.
4. Abandon the expensive and ineffective resettlement arrangement with Cambodia.
5. Enter into long-term agreements with Indonesia and Malaysia (and any other countries of first call in our region) for an orderly process of assessment and resettlement, in line with the Refugee Convention and with the assistance of UNHCR.

We believe that such moves would indicate clearly that Australia is seeking a lasting and just solution to the global challenge of displaced people, and is willing to play its part within our region.

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It would also be an appropriate follow-up to the offer to take in more people who are victims of the Syrian conflict.

Our members continue to be active throughout Australia in supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and are willing to cooperate with official resettlement arrangements.

I am writing to the Leader of the Opposition in similar terms, in the hope that a new approach can be reached that goes beyond party differences.

In peace,

Julian Robertson

Presiding Clerk