



Franciscans International
A voice at the United Nations



UN Human Rights Committee review of Australia Joint Statement

16 October 2017

Thank you, Mr President,

This is a joint statement of Franciscans International and Edmund Rice International on issues related to asylum seekers and refugee. For the past 4 years Australia has refused to protect refugees coming to its shore. Australia continues to vilify those refugees in its care in the community and offshore detention centres. At this time Australia prefers to defend human right violations which are occurring in these centres rather than protecting vulnerable people who have fled dangerous homelands.

In the last couple of months there has been two suicides on Manus. Recently a man attempted an overdose in an attempted suicide. Many more men have been reported as displaying similar mental health conditions by refugees living on Manus. There are concerns for their wellbeing and safety. Refugees have been advised that mental health services are available at the East Lorengau refugee transit centre. However, men who are currently mentally unwell do not appear to be properly cared for from these services. Further the hospital at Lorengau has no specialized services to deal with mental health issues. Both services appear inadequate to care for those who are mentally unwell. The police at Lorengau do not understand the behaviours of mental illness and so arrest and jail men for a time.

Processing of refugee claims by PNG Immigration has been confusing and careless. Some asylum seekers initially received negative results only to be told that their result was changed to positive and vice a versa with those who initially received positive results.

Some men refused to take part in the Immigration process and were automatically given negative results. They have been advised that they are illegal and must voluntarily return home. Another report suggests that Australia is building a jail near Port Moresby to house men who do not take up this offer, and they face the possibility of indefinite detention.

The fact remains that these people came to Australia seeking protection. They have been taken forcibly from Australian soil to live in another country, which does not offer the stability and security that they were seeking. Recently the Australian Immigration Minister issued an ultimatum to those asylum seekers living in Australia who had been transferred from offshore detention centres for medical treatment. They have the offer of returning to their homelands or offshore detention centres. Those who do not take up this offer have been punished by having their welfare payments cut and being evicted from government supported housing. They have not been given the opportunity to apply for asylum in the United States (US).

Recommendations:

- Australia needs to immediately offer professional mental health assessments and care to the asylum seekers currently on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea.
- Australia should take immediate and concrete measure to ban the practice of processing asylum claims at sea and return to a policy of processing asylum seekers in Australia.
- Australia should transfer all asylum seekers currently detained offshore to Australia, and ensure that their rights are protected in accordance with Australia's international law obligations, in particular the 1951 Refugee Convention. An independent overseer needs to be appointed to oversee the Immigration process, particularly for those with negative results.