



Refugee Council of Australia

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MANUS DETENTION PLAN UNDERMINES INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The Australian Government will seriously undermine its own efforts to build regional cooperation on refugee protection if it proceeds with the reopening of a detention centre on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

"If the Government proceeds with this idea, it would be seen for what it is – a revision of the Pacific Solution, the reintroduction of the much discredited extra-territorial processing of asylum seekers," RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said. "Australia could not argue with any credibility that such an arrangement was part of some bilateral sharing of responsibility with PNG or a positive example of regional cooperation on refugee protection.

"All of the problems which the current Government rightly criticised in the Pacific Solution would re-emerge. Sadly, we could again expect to see people found to be in need of protection from persecution left indefinitely in remote detention while the Australian Government goes through the charade of trying to find other countries willing to take refugees who will be seen by all as Australia's responsibility.

"If other countries did resettle refugees from Manus Island, they would do so through gritted teeth. This would undermine Australia's efforts to engage refugee resettlement states in working together to share responsibility for other refugee needs in the region.

"Australia has worked hard to encourage its neighbours to take refugee protection more seriously through recent meetings of the Bali Process. This work is now under threat from the Government's own domestic political ambitions. Australia would rightly be seen in the region as a country which is preaching about a greater focus on refugee protection while very publicly attempting to shirk its own responsibilities."

Mr Power said the proposal raised many questions. Would asylum seekers on Manus Island be processed under Australian processes with access to legal advice and judicial review or would Australia expect to pass responsibility to UNHCR and IOM? Under what conditions would people be detained? Will people be detained indefinitely? Would children and families be detained? How would processing and detention arrangements be scrutinised independently? How long would people be detained after found to be in need of refugee protection? Would other countries be involved in resettlement of refugees from Manus Island? If so, which countries? What would all these arrangements cost?

"The most basic question that the government must answer is: Why? Why even look to such an inhumane and costly way of dealing with these issues? Why continue a system that punishes and demonises one group of asylum seekers when international law tells us to impose no penalties on any asylum seekers?"

"It is time that Australians started asking our politicians for the truth on these matters and demanded more from our government.

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The Refugee Council of Australia represents
non-government organisations and
individuals working with and for refugees
in Australia and around the world