



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 7 April 2022

Closure of Park Hotel detention welcome but more refugees need freedom

Today's release of 23 refugees – eight from Melbourne's Park Hotel and 15 from other detention centres – is a small but important step towards ending Australia's cruel punishment of people who sought protection from persecution, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

RCOA understands that 22 of the people released today were granted Final Departure Bridging Visas and one was moved from locked detention to community detention. Their release comes more than two years after they were medically transferred to Australia and nearly nine years after they were first detained in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

"This is wonderful news for the 23 people tasting freedom today for the first time in years but it is essential that the release of the final nine people transferred from PNG and Nauru happens as soon as possible," RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said.

"We and many others have been appealing regularly to Karen Andrews since her appointment as Minister for Home Affairs a year ago, pleading for her to act quickly to end the unjustified detention of people affected by the offshore processing policy.

"When Ms Andrews was appointed to the Home Affairs portfolio, there were 145 people in detention under the offshore processing policy. The releases have come since then in small groups at a painfully slow pace, most painful of all to the people who remained detained for no reason at all.

"Every person transferred to Australia was cleared by the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation prior to their travel and most of those transferred had already been granted refugee status. Their detention was never justified and clearly in breach of Australia's treaty obligations on arbitrary detention and the treatment of refugees.

"It has seriously damaged the individuals' mental and physical health, cost the Australian taxpayers a fortune and done much damage to Australia's international reputation.

"Much of that negative international attention came when tennis player Novak Djokovic was also detained at the Park Hotel. For many around the globe, it was the first time they became aware of the cruelty of the Australian detention regime, realising the infamous hotel had been used as a detention centre for dozens of refugees for a long time.

"Along with addressing the ongoing detention of the nine people not yet released, the Australian Government has much work to do to find solutions for the 1,384 people still living under Australia's offshore processing regime. Even if all current applications for resettlement to the United States and private sponsorship to Canada are approved, and the 450 places now available over three years to New Zealand are approved, at least 505 people will be left with nowhere to go. This must be an urgent priority to whoever is elected to government next month."

For further comment or to arrange an interview, please contact our media team on 0488 035 535 or media@refugeecouncil.org.au.