



Refugee Council of Australia

23 May 2022

Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Albanese,

On behalf of the Refugee Council of Australia, I would like to congratulate you on the Labor Party's election victory on Saturday and your appointment today as Prime Minister. Your pledge on election night to work towards building a nation in which no one is left behind and no one is held back gives greater hope to many Australians that we can collectively work towards building a fairer and more compassionate society.

The past decade has been a tough time for many people who have sought refugee protection in Australia. This is particularly so for the 1,380 people still struggling under Australia's offshore processing policy, the 19,000 refugees subject to temporary protection, the 30,000 people left with no safety net while they wait interminably for an initial decision on their application for onshore protection and the countless Australians of refugee background who remain separated from close family members, including partners and children.

We particularly look forward to your government implementing its pledge to abolish **temporary protection** as quickly as possible, to enable the 19,000 refugees affected by this policy to fully embrace the opportunity to make a life-long contribution to Australia. This policy has been particularly unjust, needlessly punishing hard-working people by denying them the certainty of permanent protection from persecution in their home country and preventing them from reuniting with separated family members.

While we strongly disagree with Labor's **offshore processing** policy, we will work as hard as possible – as we have done with the previous government – to support practical solutions for the 1,380 people still suffering under this policy after nine years. While we applaud the Morrison Government's long-delayed signing of the resettlement deal with New Zealand and the resettlement arrangement with the United States, we remain concerned that more than 500 people will be left behind when all resettlement options currently available are exhausted. For our part, we have worked since 2019 with organisations in Canada to raise \$4.3 million to support sponsorship applications for 172 refugees and 144 separated family members, providing a pathway for refugees in offshore processing excluded from the US process. Finding answers for all people affected by this damaging policy will take a great deal of effort and considerable flexibility.

We also look forward to your government implementing the Labor Party's platform to expand the **Refugee and Humanitarian Program** progressively to 27,000 places per year and build a community sponsorship program of 5,000 places. The recent cuts to the Humanitarian Program and the failure to restore 13,400 visas not issued over the previous two financial years have come at a time when resettlement as a solution for refugees is more needed than ever before. We applauded the Morrison Government's decisions in March to offer 16,500 additional places over four years for refugees from Afghanistan and to enable Ukrainian citizens to access three years of humanitarian protection in Australia while they wait to see whether safe return will be possible in the near future. These changes were welcome but we know that Australia is well placed to make a more significant contribution to solutions for refugees through resettlement. Over the past 75 years, we have also seen how our important humanitarian contribution

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Phone: +61 (02) 9211-9333 • admin@refugeecouncil.org.au
Web: www.refugeecouncil.org.au • Twitter: @OzRefugeeCouncil
Incorporated in ACT • ABN 87 956 673 083

The Refugee Council of Australia
is the national umbrella body
for refugees, people seeking asylum
and the organisations and individuals
who support them • Founded 1981

through refugee resettlement has benefited our nation in the long term, through the life-long contributions of the 900,000 refugees given new opportunities in Australia.

Our work in refugee resettlement must be backed up by much more effective engagement in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond in efforts to improve the protection of refugees in countries where they first seek protection. The Gillard Government began to expand aspects of this important foreign policy work in response to recommendations of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers in 2012 and the lobbying of our organisation and others. Unfortunately, most of this work ceased with the change of government in 2013. The need now is even more pressing to support the work of UNHCR and to engage governments in the region on achievable and incremental steps to enable refugees to live, work and study legally. These basic protection options are essential to providing alternatives to refugees otherwise forced to seek safety through risky and irregular journeys. Our organisation's close working relationships with NGOs and refugee-led organisations across Asia-Pacific will enable us to do much to assist government efforts to improve constructive regional engagement.

Attention must also be paid to lengthy delays in Australia's onshore protection process – both the initial decisions by the Department of Home Affairs and review by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal – and the destitution experienced by many people waiting for outcomes as a result of massive cuts to assistance through the Status Resolution Support Services program. Australia's immigration detention system also needs urgent review. Since Labor was last in office, the average time spent in detention has blown out, from less than 100 days in mid-2013 to 687 days as at January 2022.

The Refugee Council of Australia and our many members and supporters look forward to working with you and members of your team on these and other issues. There is much to be done but the vision you have outlined gives us hope that much can be achieved so that people seeking safety in Australia are not left behind or held back.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Power". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul Power
Chief Executive Officer