



OPINION PIECE

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RESETTLEMENT FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS URGENT

Much public sentiment in the last week has centred on the future of a group of 267 refugees currently here, following a High Court decision on offshore processing.

There is no doubt this is an issue that many people in our community rightly feel strongly about. It is both a highly complex and highly emotive area of public policy.

I understand the great frustration and anger fair-minded Australians feel because of the inaction of this Government in resolving the future for these refugees and asylum seekers.

I share this frustration.

While the public and the media has been focused on this group, with many people moved by their plight, we also must not forget the remaining 2063 men, women and children that this Government has left to languish on Nauru and Manus Island.

This Government has left those people without any hope for the future.

Each of these people has an equally compelling and deserving reason to be afforded a decent and safe future.

In the two and a half years I have served as the Shadow Immigration Minister, I have learnt that this policy area is complex, and requires making difficult decisions.

Putting people smugglers out of business is what drove Labor in 2013 to heed the advice of the expert panel on asylum seekers and put in place the Regional Resettlement Arrangement with Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

It was a decision that created a circuit breaker by removing the people smugglers' ability to convince vulnerable people that they should embark on the dangerous and, all too often, deadly journey that saw 1200 men, women and children die.

The issue now is to resolve the fate of the asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru and Manus Island. They deserve the dignity of resettlement in a viable, credible third country.

That is why I have been calling on the Government to re-start talks with the global refugee agency, the UNHCR and urgently secure a resettlement deal.

Labor's resolve to ensure people do not again die off our shores in pursuit of asylum should not be misjudged as Labor endorsing this Government's approach and attitude to asylum seekers.

While offshore processing plays a critical role in saving lives at sea, this does not mean that Australia can abrogate its responsibility to the refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island.

We owe them safe, dignified and humane refuge and we must urgently resolve their fate by finding a durable resettlement solution.

Those of them in Australia they must be treated sensitively on a case-by-case basis knowing that Australia retains an obligation in relation to their safety. The Turnbull Government has to swallow its pride and start talking to the UNHCR.

Without an urgent resolution this Government will be doing enormous damage to this refugee population.

And as a nation, we will have completely surrendered our responsibility to not harm these people.

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