



# Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

## Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



6 November 2017

### Media Release

#### Closure of Manus Island Regional Processing Centre

By Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv

Bishop Delegate for Migrants and Refugees

The safety and wellbeing of more than 600 asylum seekers on Manus Island are at risk following the closure of the regional processing centre. These men, most of whom are proven refugees were held in mandatory and indefinite detention under an agreement between the Australian and PNG Governments. Now after more than 4 years, this agreement has not worked. It has failed to provide welfare and safety to the detainees. Furthermore, very few have been resettled elsewhere.

Australia, which authorised the detention of these asylum seekers in the first place, cannot abrogate its responsibility. The situation on Manus Island is turning into a humanitarian disaster and it is a direct result of our governments' failed policy. As a nation that prides itself on its respect for the rule of law and its globally responsible citizenship, we must find a workable and principled solution.

It is time for us to deal with the issue of asylum seekers and refugees according to this nation's proud tradition and the best nature of its citizens. We can do a whole lot better, just as we did welcome "those who've come across the seas" after the wars in Europe and in Southeast Asia. The concern for maritime border security does not have to make us into a mean-spirited people. This is not who our First Peoples are, nor should it be the characterisation of all Australians today.

The policy of offshore detention has cost Australia dearly. But it has cost the detainees and their families even more. I appeal to the government and political leaders to act in accordance with our honourable tradition. It is time to find an alternative and conscionable solution, including accepting New Zealand's offer of resettlement and bringing the remaining detainees on Manus Island to Australia. Those who are not refugees can be held here in secure detention until they are returned home. Those refugees accepted for entry to the US can migrate when their vetting processes are complete. The other refugees need to be able get on with their lives here in safety.

People seeking asylum are some of the most vulnerable members of our global community. It is imperative that they are treated humanely and with dignity. I urge the Australian Government to honour its international obligations, and continue its work within the region and with non-government organisations to ensure the safety of those seeking asylum.

**Summary for Parish Bulletin:** Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFMConv, Bishop Delegate for Migrants and Refugees has issued a statement on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, following the closure of the Manus Island Centre. He states: "The policy of offshore detention has failed and it is time for us to deal with the issue of asylum seekers and refugees according to this nation's proud tradition and the best nature of its citizens. We can do a whole lot better, just as we did welcome "those who've come across the seas" after the wars in Europe and in Southeast Asia. The concern for maritime border security does not have to make us into a mean-spirited people. The policy of offshore detention has cost Australia dearly. But it has cost the detainees and their families even more. I appeal to the government and political leaders to act in accordance with our honourable tradition. It is time to find an alternative and conscionable solution, including accepting New Zealand's offer of resettlement and bringing the remaining detainees on Manus Island to Australia for further processing."