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MEDIA RELEASE

Big opportunities for Home Affairs Minister

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society has welcomed the appointment of Karen Andrews to the Home Affairs portfolio, calling on her to release the Sri Lankan family from detention on Christmas Island as a matter of urgency.

Speaking shortly after the announcement of the Morrison Government's ministerial reshuffle, National President, Claire Victory said Ms Andrews' strident stance in recent days regarding the mistreatment of women in the Federal Parliament is a welcome sign that she will act on her convictions.

'I encourage the Minister to release the Sri Lankan family from Christmas Island where they have been detained for three years. They must be allowed to return to the Biloela community in Queensland, which has fought for their return. Detention is no place for two little girls,' Ms Victory said.

'I also encourage the Minister to revisit New Zealand's offer to re-settle refugees from Manus and Nauru and to immediately release those still in Australian detention.

'I stand with Australian women, to support the Minister in the early days of her new role to make these compassionate and sensible decisions.

'Apart from anything else, these three decisions would save the Australian tax payer hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

'And there are other pressing issues the Minister might visit in her early days in the portfolio, including streamlining a pathway to permanent residency for the many people currently existing on Temporary Protection Visas, and encouraging asylum seekers and refugees to work and settle in regional areas where there is a labour shortage due to the pandemic.

'I also encourage the Minister to look behind the veneer of labour hire arrangements where vulnerable workers have been exploited for years.

'Finally, we understand that 14 men currently held in detention in Papua New Guinea have Coronavirus. PNG's Coronavirus cases have tripled in the last month. Their health system is on the brink of collapse. We need to help our neighbours by providing more vaccines and medical staff, as a matter of urgency.

'I will write to the Minister and look forward to meeting with her to discuss these issues further,' Ms Victory said.

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.

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