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MEDIA RELEASE

REFUGEE WEEK 2023

St Vincent de Paul Society is marking Refugee Week by calling on the Albanese Government to end Australia's cruel offshore detention system and to treat asylum seekers in the community with dignity.

'Refugee Week is an important opportunity to highlight community concerns about the Australian Government's cruel and harmful refugee and asylum seeker policies,' National President Mark Gaetani said.

'This year's theme of *finding freedom* is an opportunity to stand in solidarity with refugees and to reflect on what freedom means and how Australians can help refugees achieve it,' Mr Gaetani said.

'We will shortly mark the tenth anniversary of Prime Minister Rudd's 19 July 2013 announcement that people arriving by boat would be sent to Papua New Guinea and never re-settled in Australia.

'The past decade has seen thousands of people who arrived in Australia by boat seeking asylum treated with cruelty and neglect despite being entitled to seek protection under international law.

'More than **3,000 people have been sent to PNG and Nauru**. They have been forced to live in substandard conditions and experience immeasurable suffering and neglect.

'Surely the time has come for Australia to show compassion and care towards people seeking a better life in this country,' Mr Gaetani said.

The Society, on behalf of our Vincentian Refugee Network and our 45,000 members, has long argued for offshore processing to be abolished and for asylum seekers and refugees on PNG and Nauru to be resettled in Australia, except where there are national security considerations. Mr Gaetani repeated the Society's demand for the Albanese Government to implement the ALP National Platform to increase the humanitarian intake, particularly for Afghan places.

'**Afghans who worked for the Australian Government** in very high-risk occupations and have close links to Australia are not being prioritised,' Mr Gaetani said. 'An implementation plan towards an annual Humanitarian Program of 27,000 places, with 5,000 additional places for community sponsored refugees, by 2025-26, is essential.

'The Government must also urgently provide recognition of the ongoing need to offer additional places above the annual humanitarian intake in response to crises as they arise,' Mr Gaetani said.

The Society urges the Government to work with Indonesia to assess asylum seekers there and consider accepting those found to be refugees within Australia's increased humanitarian intake.

'This should begin in 2023-24 and the same approach should be extended to refugees in similar circumstances in other countries including Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan, and India,' Mr Gaetani said.

The Society also calls for the Government to urgently increase funding to the **Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS)**.

'SRSS needs to be restored to its previous levels and greater assistance must be provided to help people navigate Australia's complex social services system, including access to Special Benefit,' Mr Gaetani said.

'For more information on the St Vincent de Paul advocacy position on refugees and asylum seekers, visit www.vinnies.org.au/ To commemorate Refugee Week (18 to 24 June), the Australian Catholic Migrant & Refugee Office (ACMRO) will host an online prayer service at 7pm AEST on 20 June. To register please click [here](#)

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has more than 45,000 members and volunteers, who work hard to assist people in need and combat social injustice across Australia. Internationally, the Society operates in 153 countries and has over 800,000 members.

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Resources

Catholics for Refugees are offering a new prayer for Refugee Week to be used in parish bulletins, or in prayers for the faithful on Sunday 18 June. The prayer is for people who have sought Australia's protection but were placed into detention or are living in poverty within our communities.

Lord,

No one is a stranger to you, and no one is ever far from your loving care.

In your kindness watch over refugees and asylum seekers, those separated from their loved ones, those who are lost, those who have been made destitute and those who have been exiled.

Bring them safely to the place where they long to be and help us always to show your kindness to strangers and those in need.

The Canadian film, Finding Freedom, by writer and director Alan Goldman, tells the stories of four asylum seekers detained for years by the Australian government. More information about the documentary can be found [here](#)