



# Foundation House

The Victorian Foundation  
for Survivors of Torture Inc.

## **Statement regarding people transferred by Australia to the refugee processing centres of Papua New Guinea and Nauru**

The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) urges the Australian Government to take action now to relieve the plight of asylum seekers who have been transferred to Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

The great majority of people who were transferred have been recognised as refugees but there is no plan to enable them to rebuild their lives in safety and with dignity.

Foundation House is deeply concerned about the deteriorating wellbeing of these people, who have lived with relentless uncertainty in difficult circumstances for years. Our extensive experience working with refugees indicates strongly that the primary cause of their decline is the pervasive sense of hopelessness about any prospect of a decent future for themselves and their families. Under the current circumstances the pace of deterioration is likely to accelerate, posing an even greater risk of serious long term mental health problems.

If the governments involved don't take swift action to restore hope, we believe it is highly likely that many more men and women will express their despair by attempting to harm and kill themselves. We also hold grave concerns that children and young people in Nauru will respond in the same ways.

Improving conditions and services in PNG and Nauru will not prevent this.

An effective and sustainable response must involve the option of resettlement in countries - including Australia - which offer the opportunity for refugees to become integral members of society, to live in security and to participate in the economic, social and cultural life of their new homes.

Foundation House appreciates the concerns of the Australian Government and Opposition about the revival of people smuggling. We also appreciate that if the desperation of people seeking protection in Australia was once again to be exploited by people smugglers, many children, women and men will die.

This need not occur.

Australia, Indonesia and other nations have increased their capacity to respond to irregular migration.

To ensure this can be sustainable we must also build a regional system based on established human rights principles, which aims to ensure that asylum seekers are protected properly in countries of first asylum or transit, are processed fairly, and, for those found to be refugees, are afforded timely settlement outcomes.

The immediate imperative is that Australia acts swiftly to change the present policy settings that are inflicting serious harm.

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4 Gardiner Street, Brunswick, VIC 3056, Australia | t: (03) 9388 0022 | f: (03) 9277 7871 | e: info@foundationhouse.org.au | www.foundationhouse.org.au

**PATRON IN CHIEF:** Her Excellency the Honourable Linda Dessau AM, Governor of Victoria

**PATRONS:** Prof. Hilary Charlesworth AM, Ms Dur-é Dara OAM, Prof. David de Kretser AC, Mrs Jan de Kretser, Mr Andrew Demetriou, Mr Petro Georgiou AO, The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG  
ABN: 52 783 974 656 | INCORPORATION REGISTRATION #: A0016163P