



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service

It's time to get Australia's offshore detainees to safety

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Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv has expressed deep concern over the repeal of legislation that gave doctors decision-making power in the transfer of refugees and asylum-seekers requiring medical treatment from offshore detention facilities to Australia.

“These arrangements were essential in ensuring sick people received the medical care they desperately needed. The ‘Medevac’ legislation put an end to needless deaths – 12 occurring prior to the legislation. It operated without a massive influx of asylum-seekers and without undermining the Government’s control of Australian borders.

“The lives of a very vulnerable group of people are now placed at risk once more,” said Bishop Long, the chair of the Australian Catholic Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service.

Bishop Long was part of a recent Australian Catholic delegation to Papua New Guinea to express solidarity with refugees and asylum-seekers who have been detained indefinitely in inhumane conditions in places such as the Bomana Immigration Detention Facility. The Catholic Church, through its agencies like Caritas, is rendering assistance and support to those men.

“What we witnessed and heard confirms an alarming destruction of the physical and mental health of people already harmed by the offshore detention system,” he said. “It is the result of systematic cruelty. Detainees are malnourished and not getting basic food, medical treatment and other support. Some have been in detention for up to seven years.

“With the repeal of Medevac, the onus is on Minister Dutton and Prime Minister Morrison to explain how they will ensure that these people will have their human right to medical treatment respected.

“Australians do not want this kind of treatment meted out to sick and vulnerable people in our name.

“I join with a growing number of Australians who are calling on the Government to reconsider New Zealand’s offer to receive 150 refugees. For the sake of the God-given dignity of more than 500 men, women and children detained offshore, the Catholic Church calls for the Government to ensure timely and durable resettlement options in Australia and other secure countries,” Bishop Long concluded.

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