



**WELCOME REFUGEES  
NO PNG DUMPING**

## **MYTHS and FACTS – THE Papua New Guinea “solution”**

### **The Regional Resettlement Arrangement**

The new arrangement is called the Regional Resettlement Arrangement (RRA), and it goes further than the Pacific Solution introduced by Julia Gillard in 2012- it allows Australia to send asylum seekers to PNG for processing, and resettlement. In this way Australia is completely violating the human rights of boat arrivals, rejecting its obligations to protect to refugees reaching our shores, while simultaneously leaning on its poor neighbour PNG to accept anyone Australia sends there.

### **Is PNG a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention?**

Yes, but it has seven so-called “reservations” (including not being committed to allow: right to work, public education, housing, freedom of movement). The RRA says that PNG will “take steps to withdraw” those reservations, but how and when remains unclear.

### **Does PNG have the resources to process and resettle Australia's asylum seekers?**

There is limited capacity to hold more asylum seekers on Manus Island. By expanding the number of tents, the government can send another 200 in the short term. The Manus Island construction contractor has told The Australian that no expansion is possible before January. The Manus Island governor says it will take 2 years to build a permanent detention centre there. This means that, despite the announcement boat arrivals are likely to be kept in detention in Australia. Unsurprisingly there is already strong opposition to the deal within PNG. According to the World Bank, in PNG, over 50% live under \$2 a day, 61% without access to clean water. Australia stands second in the UN's human development index; PNG 156th.

### **How much will this “solution” cost Australia?**

The government is yet to release the cost of the PNG plan, but using the Immigration Department's own contracts, estimates of operating processing centres suggest the expansion of Manus Island from 600 detainees to 3000 would incur an initial cost of \$600 million. Operating the larger centre could be as high as \$480 million a year, according to recent departmental contracts on the costs of running offshore processing centres. And that is before the cost of resettlement, which could cost up to \$15,000 per person, and the promise to fund health facilities and a new university system. It would clearly be far cheaper to fly refugees to Australia from Indonesia and process them in the community.

### **Is it legal?**

The RRA is undoubtedly illegal under international law. Asylum seeker boats intercepted by Australia are Australia's responsibility. The fact that asylum seekers will be partially processed in Australia before they are sent to Manus Island also makes them Australia's responsibility. The Refugee Convention refers to obligations by the signatory states to provide protection and resettlement, and nowhere considers the “outsourcing” of these obligations to third countries that are far less able to provide durable solutions. It also says the asylum seekers must not be discriminated against on the basis of their method of arrival in the signatory state. There is the possibility of a legal challenge in Australia. The High Court decision that struck down Gillard's Malaysia Solution in 2011 said that a “third country” must be able to guarantee certain freedoms and rights, which PNG cannot do. A legal challenge is also being considered in PNG.

### **Why has PNG agreed to this deal?**

Australia has arrogantly used its money (Australia is promising an unspecified money for roads, naval bases, universities) and regional power to force PNG to agree to an arrangement that violates fundamental human rights.

### **Will this stop deaths at sea?**

There are more effective ways to save lives, e.g. Australia could accept as a priority 3,800 refugees a year ‘from the region’ as recommended in the Houston Report. Too often Australia does nothing about distress signals from asylum seeker boats. Better enforcing of the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention would save lives- not deterrence policies. Refugees will still board boats out of desperation to escape.

### **How can we stop this terrible policy?**

This won't be settled by the election - both main political parties are committed to off shore processing and the PNG “solution”. But a concerted campaign, up to and most importantly, beyond the election can make sure that Rudd's PNG “solution” is unworkable. In 2001, John Howard also said that no refugees from Nauru would ever set foot in Australia. But the majority of refugees from Nauru did come to Australia, because of campaigning in Nauru and Australia. This can be won again.

Get involved in the Refugee Action Collective, contact Lucy Honan 0404728104/rac-vic.or



