

MEDIA RELEASE

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Asylum policy changes: Government threatens the dignity and rights of refugees

Jesuit Social Services has condemned the Australian Government's cruel and costly changes to onshore asylum seeker policy.

Responding to yesterday's announcement by Immigration Minister Chris Bowen that refugees processed onshore would remain on bridging visas, Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards said, "The government's shameful decision to punish genuine refugees is another step that erodes what was Australia's once proud record as a place that welcomed people fleeing persecution."

"For generations, refugees have been given the opportunity to begin a new life in Australia and, in turn, they have contributed to making Australia a prosperous and vibrant society. Yesterday's decision shows that this is no longer the case and in the end we will all be worse off because of it."

Reflecting on Jesuit Social Services' experience work with asylum seekers and refugees over many years in a number of capacities, Ms Edwards said, "These people need to be treated with respect, and as human beings who are in need, in order to allow them to become active members of our community. We have seen firsthand the profound impact of the uncertainty and disadvantage to which they are subjected. With this recent announcement, the Australian government has decided to continue their marginalisation which serves to exacerbate the trauma of the refugee experience."

"The already significant financial costs of the Pacific Solution Mark II are now accompanied by the substantial human costs resulting from the uncertainty, deprivation, and long-term unemployment that refugees on bridging visas will face."

Ms Edwards called for the government to reconsider its decision, "Clearly the government faces difficult choices in trying to stem the flow of dangerous boat journeys by asylum seekers. However, addressing a failed deterrence policy by punishing genuine refugees is an inhumane response which should be a cause of shame for all Australians".

Jesuit Social Services is a not-for-profit organisation which works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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