

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS**

21 December 2020

Hon. Alex Hawke MP  
Minister for Immigration, Citizenship,  
Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

Street address:  
79 Myrtle Street  
Chippendale  
NSW 2008  
T: (02) 83967618  
E: [exec.admin@amnesty.org.au](mailto:exec.admin@amnesty.org.au)

ABN 64 002 806 233

Postal address:  
Locked bag 23  
Broadway  
NSW 2007  
F: (02) 83967677  
W: [www.amnesty.org.au](http://www.amnesty.org.au)

## **RE: REQUEST FOR MEETING TO DISCUSS SOLUTIONS FOR REFUGEES/ASYLUM SEEKERS**

Dear Minister Hawke

I would like to warmly congratulate you on your appointment as the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, and wish you success in your new role.

I write to you today to request a meeting with you in the new year to discuss urgent solutions for people seeking protection in Australia, in particular, those who have been detained under Australia's offshore processing policy over the last eight years. It is an issue that is deeply concerning to many in the Australian community.

Amnesty International works to support refugees and asylum seekers, including advocating for the Australian Government to end offshore detention and implement solutions that help people fleeing conflict or persecution find a safe place to live. Australia can and must do more to address the global refugee crisis. I outline below the two critical areas for your active consideration.

### **Bringing refugees in offshore detention to safety**

Not only does the government's offshore detention policy cause enormous harm to the wellbeing of the most vulnerable seeking refuge in Australia, it also costs the Government more than \$1 billion per year.

After eight years, nearly 300 refugees and asylum seekers remain trapped in PNG and Nauru. Around 1500 people are in detention facilities in Australia - immigration detention centres, immigration transit accommodation and alternative places of detention (APODs). Additionally, about 500 people are in community detention.

While 260 refugees have been conditionally approved for resettlement as part of the US deal, many more continue to live in limbo. They suffer trauma and illness as a result of their prolonged detention. These people are doctors, musicians, marketing executives, social workers and even athletes. They have fled some of the most dangerous places on earth. Most are recognised refugees who have proven that their lives would be in danger if returned to their countries of origin.

Despite Australia entering its first recession in 30 years, the Government has allocated \$1.19 billion in spending to offshore detention in 2021. The humanitarian and economic cost of this crisis is too high. We have a solution at hand. Since 2013, the New Zealand Government has offered to resettle 150 refugees a year, totalling 1050 refugees. If the Australian Government had accepted this offer, it would have saved a thousand lives and millions of dollars.

Over the past year, Australians have come together to call “Game Over” and bring those detained to safety. In October, Amnesty delivered our Game Over petition with over 65000 signatures to Members of Parliament. On the day of our petition delivery, we were pleased to hear from Minister for Home Affairs Peter Dutton on the floor of the House that the New Zealand offer is not ruled out.

We call on your Government to accept New Zealand’s long standing offer to resettle the refugees, sooner rather than later.

### **Better refugee sponsorship program in Australia**

Since 2018 we have travelled to every state and territory for a national outreach campaign to build support for a fair and accessible model of community sponsorship for refugees. Our work has revealed the enormous goodwill in neighbourhoods across the country to welcome and support refugees to build better, safer lives.

Nearly 30,000 Australians have since signed our petition calling on the Government to expand and improve the Community Support Program. A range of community groups from refugee diaspora communities to church groups and from sports clubs to local councils have pledged their support.

We welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the Government’s ongoing review into the community sponsorship program and hope it will lead to a favourable outcome, that would benefit both refugees and the Australian communities.

We would like to meet with you in early 2021 so we can deliver our petition and discuss the key recommendations we have to make the program fair and just. These include but are not limited to reducing the cost of sponsorship and ensuring the community sponsorship places are additional to Australia’s existing humanitarian intake. The latter is vital particularly in the wake of this year’s Federal Budget, which cuts 5000 positions from the annual humanitarian intake over the next four years.

To organise a meeting, please contact Kyinzom Dhongdue at [kyinzom.dhongdue@amnesty.org.au](mailto:kyinzom.dhongdue@amnesty.org.au) or 0416 695 590.

Yours sincerely,

Tim O’Connor  
Impact Manager  
Amnesty International Australia