

MEDIA RELEASE

Asylum seeker policy shifts risk harming effective refugee settlement

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) has expressed concern that the latest policy announcements from both the federal government and the Opposition risk shifting asylum seeker policy back to the days of the Pacific Solution, where prolonged detention inflicted enormous, unnecessary trauma on many genuine refugees.

MDA CEO Kerrin Benson said, "There is still a lot of detail to come about how the proposed 'regional processing center' in East Timor would work. MDA's concern is that any process used to target people smugglers does not disadvantage refugees".

"As a refugee settlement agency, MDA supported many of the refugees who eventually settled here from Nauru. We see how much harder it is for refugees to quickly settle in our community when they also have to deal with the trauma of prolonged detention and uncertainty.

"Impairing the settlement efforts of refugees is against the interests of our entire community, as well as the refugees and their families, as is public rhetoric which demonises or disparages refugees."

"MDA welcomes the Prime Minister's comments aimed at debunking some of the myths about asylum seekers and the level of support they receive. We strongly urge her to continue to expose and counter these myths."

MDA believes it is also very important for public leaders to emphasise the very positive contribution which refugees make to the Australian community.

"In all the years that MDA has been operating as a settlement provider, we have not encountered a single instance where any refugees have refused to learn about Australian life and its culture.

"Refugee communities such as the Afghan Hazara community in Brisbane has many young people currently studying at university and are active contributors to social life.

"Many refugees who have arrived in Australia have significant language and cultural barriers as well as complex settlement needs, but they are very committed to Australia and take up citizenship as soon as they can".

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