

PRIME MINISTER

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Subjects: Regional Resettlement Arrangement

PM RUDD: First of all, Prime Minister, thank you so much for travelling to Brisbane from Moresby. Brisbane we see as the northern capital of Australia and it's good to have you here.

To your ministerial colleagues, including of course the Foreign Minister of Papua New Guinea and the Attorney-General of Papua New Guinea, and my parliamentary and ministerial colleagues as well and I believe we have a member from West Britain, good to see you as well.

Today the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea and I are announcing a major initiative to combat the scourge of people smuggling.

Today we're announcing a new resettlement arrangement between Australia and Papua New Guinea.

From now on, any asylum seeker who arrives in Australia by boat will have no chance of being settled in Australia as refugees.

Asylum seekers taken to Christmas Island will be sent to Manus and elsewhere in Papua New Guinea for assessment of their refugee status.

If they are found to be genuine refugees they will be resettled in Papua New Guinea, an emerging economy with a strong future; a robust democracy which is also a signatory to the United Nations Refugees Convention.

If they found not to be genuine refugees they may be repatriated to their country of origin or be sent to a safe third country other than Australia.

These arrangements are contained within the Regional Resettlement Arrangement signed by myself and the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea just now.

Under this RRA, the arrangement between Australia and PNG will apply for the next 12 month period and be subject to annual review by the joint Australia Papua New Guinea Ministerial Forum.

Critically, this RRA does not specify an absolute limit to the number of asylum seekers who can be transferred or genuine refugees who can be resettled.

Our expectation and the expectation of our officials is as this Regional Resettlement Arrangement is implemented and the message is sent loud and clear back up the pipeline that the number of boats will decline over time as asylum seekers then make recourse to other more normal UNHCR processes to have their claims assessed.

In the period ahead our Governments intend to make sure that the message is delivered loud and clear to people smuggling networks around the world, and those criminal elements within Australia who may be supporting them that the hopes that they offer their customers for the future are nothing but false hopes.

Australia will continue its cooperative arrangements on people smuggling with the Republic of Nauru and looks forward to furthering those arrangements in the future.

I understand that this is a very hard-line decision.

I understand that different groups in Australia and around the world will see this decision in different ways.

But our responsibility as a government is to ensure that we have a robust system of border security and orderly migration on the one hand as well as fulfilling our legal and compassionate obligations under the Refugee Convention on the other.

Therefore, it's important for me to make clear to all concerned how the Government, after lengthy internal deliberation with all relevant ministers and agencies and with our PNG counterparts, have sought to get in balance right.

Number one, this decision today is part of the Government's framework for a multilayered approach to dealing with the scourge of people smuggling, and doing so within, not outside, the legal framework of the Convention.

Critically, the Convention requires us not to send genuine refugees back to the countries they have fled from, and in this arrangement we honour that undertaking.

The Convention requires us to provide proper humane treatment of people; under this arrangement we will do so.

And also under this arrangement, asylum seekers who are determined to be genuine refugees will have therefore a country of settlement, namely Papua New Guinea.

Number two, at a global level, this morning I also spoke with the United Nations Secretary-General.

I indicated that Australia will be convening an international conference of relevant transit countries and destination countries within the framework of the Refugee Convention to deliberate on how to improve current global international arrangements in two respects.

Firstly, the adequacy of processing systems and centres around the world, and as well as that, how do we best have a better arrangement for Australia, Canada, the US and other countries to deal with the resettlement burden around the world.

Number three, Australia sees this as a Regional Resettlement Arrangement between Australia and Papua New Guinea, and therefore is part of our broader approach on regional cooperative arrangements in South East Asia, and the South Pacific, on people smuggling.

In this regard, we will seek to develop further regional arrangements within this framework over time through the mechanism already agreed between Australia Indonesia for a ministerial conference of Immigration Ministers and Foreign Ministers to be held next month in Indonesia.

Number four, as also discussed in Indonesia, we will also be working with regional partners on visa arrangements for certain countries around the world that have become source countries for the outflow of irregular people movements.

In this area, I have noted reports from Jakarta today on forthcoming arrangements from the Indonesian Government on visa arrangements for Iranians.

Number five, Australia's also reviewing its own national assessment procedures for dealing with refugee determination arrangements within Australia; whether those are appropriately benchmarked with other national jurisdictions around the world, and whether these need to be changed.

Australians are people with hard heads but also with a kind and compassionate heart.

I wish to emphasise that Australia will continue to take large numbers of genuine refugees through our existing global humanitarian program.

Recently the Government increased our intake from 13,000 to 20,000 per annum.

These refugees are people who have languished in UN camps around the world for years and in some cases for more than a decade.

These refugees Australia will continue to help as part of our humanitarian responsibilities to the international community.

Should the international I referred to earlier in the week on global resettlement practices be successful, and if we also see the successful implementation of the RRA announced today, Australia stands ready to consider progressively increasing the number of places in the humanitarian program as recommended by the Houston Panel.

Many Australians will also be concerned about the proper and humane treatment of both asylum seekers and genuine refugees under the RRA.

The Government is fully mindful of its obligations under international and domestic law; this is no trivial matter.

The Minister for Immigration will be releasing a subsequent statement on the proper treatment of asylum seekers and refugees under this arrangement, in particular the proper protection of unaccompanied minors and families with children.

The Government is fully mindful of the UNHCR report on Manus, and as I said earlier this week in Moresby, as the Manus facility is developed further over time we intend to ensure that all proper requirements are met and this will take time.

Furthermore on the question of the settlement of genuine refugees with their status having been determined in Papua New Guinea, the Australian Government, in support of the PNG Government, will provide comprehensive settlement services to ensure that these refugees can live safely and with security and in time, prosperity, within PNG.

I want to be clear with everyone both within in Australia and Papua New Guinea that Prime Minister Peter O'Neill has decided to help Australia with a problem we face, the problem of people smuggling, and Peter I thank you for that.

I thank you as a friend; I thank you as a fellow Prime Minister and as a neighbour.

I also thank the Prime Minister for having raised his willingness to do more in cooperation on people smuggling when we met in Brisbane only a couple of weeks ago, and our conversations since then have been based on that initial encounter.

I want to be equally clear with people in Australia and PNG that our Government is also helping Papua New Guinea deal with the problems that they face.

That's what friends are for and that's what friends do for each other, and we make no apology for that.

Australia has been PNG's strongest development partner for decades.

Earlier this week in Moresby I agreed with the Prime Minister that we would help PNG in a number of important areas.

The Prime Minister and I have also discussed the important work we can do in the area of health and hospitals.

We've agreed that Australia will now help with the redevelopment of the major referral hospital in Lae and its long term management needs.

We've agreed to fund 50:50 the reform of the Papua New Guinea university sector including next year by implementing the recommendations of the Australia-PNG education review.

We've also agreed to help PNG with the support they have sought in professional management teams in the health, education and law and order portfolios.

And Australia, Prime Minister, stands ready to assist PNG further with other development needs in the future.

The RRA that Papua New Guinea and Australia are announcing today represents one part of a comprehensive response to the challenge of people smuggling.

Some will say it's too hard-line; others will say it's inadequate and we should simply jettison the Refugee Convention. There will be criticism both from the left and from the right.

What the Government has sought to do is provide a robust, balanced response to a problem for all of us.

I want to be frank with everyone around the nation that the implementation of this Regional Resettlement Arrangement will not be smooth. We are bound to run into many unanticipated problems. We will tackle them one by one.

I also want to be frank with everybody by saying the implementation of this arrangement will not be inexpensive; acting on such a sustained challenge to border security does cost.

There will be those both in PNG and Australia who will seek to attack this arrangement through the courts, which is why we have been as careful as we can in constructing an arrangement which is mindful of the earlier deliberations of the courts.

And above all, I want to level with the nation by saying that the boats are not going to stop coming tomorrow, in fact it is more probable that the people smugglers will try and test our resolve for the period ahead.

It's important, however, to look how measures such as this work over the months and years ahead.

We are prepared to do more. I want to be absolutely clear with the Australian people as to why we're doing this. Finally, it's for three reasons.

The first is that our intelligence agencies indicate the numbers of people seeking to come to Australia by boat will continue to increase in the future as the people smuggling industry becomes more professional and entrenched around the world.

Other countries are finding it the same.

Second, with each vessel that comes, there is a continued risk of drownings, and we've seen too much of this already.

There is also a third reason. People smugglers try to drum up business when there is human tragedy around the world.

We know this from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, but the international community now faces a massive new outflow from Syria.

That is why the international community needs to deal with each of these new challenges in a sustainable fashion.

That is why we need a comprehensive network of processing centres around the world, and better and more equitable resettlement obligations around the world rather than every country simply playing pass-the parcel.

Therefore the decision announced today represents one practical step forward, among many that will need to be taken for future.

This is not a three-word slogan. This is a piece of hard public policy which we are working through cooperatively within our region and which must now be implemented.

And we must do so calmly, rationally and with resolve. Today represents one major step forward. Many other steps lie ahead, and I thank the Prime Minister for his cooperation.

PM O'NEILL: Thank you, Prime Minister Rudd. And I thank you once again for inviting myself and my colleague Ministers from Papua New Guinea to join you on this very important regional announcement.

This is a regional initiative that we think that the region continues to face as Pacific communities, like Papua New Guinea, and the other small island states continue to have challenges maintaining their borders.

And as a result of that, we continue to have illegal immigrants ourselves, into those nations and countries.

Papua New Guinea was asked, by the then government in 2006, to establish a processing centre in Manus.

In 2011 of course, the then government, the Gillard Government, asked us to reopen that facility.

We have insisted since we came into government that we wanted to establish a permanent regional processing centre.

Today's regional resettlement program is one that we believe will resolve many of those issues we have brought forward to the Australian Government.

That is why I want to thank the Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd and of course the government for their initiative to try to accommodate our wishes to establish a regional processing centre and a regional resettlement scheme that has now been announced today.

Papua New Guinea as a country, it might not be widely reported, but we also have our own refugee issues. For many years, over tens of thousands of refugees in our country.

I believe that the processing centre and the resettlement arrangement, that we're now forging, will enable us to have an orderly process in those people who are seeking genuine citizenship of other countries in the region.

And that is why we agreed to a resettlement program where we believe strongly that genuine refugees can be resettled in our country and within the region in the years to come.

I also want to say this: an annual review will take place in these arrangements.

So as Prime Minister Rudd has stated earlier, it is not going to be easy.

But of course Papua New Guinea is blessed with lots of land mass and a very small population.

There is enough assistance that we can give to the Australian Government in handling this issue of the refugees that the Australian Government is facing.

So once again, thank you very much for asking us to join you in this major announcement.

We look forward to working with the Australian government in the Australian government in the near future and making sure this resettlement program works for our community in the Pacific region.

MINISTER BURKE: Thank you, Prime Minister and Prime Minister O'Neill and Ministers.

We've had one vessel that has been intercepted, at least one immediately before this announcement.

It will be vessels from now on intercepted or on reaching Australia that will have the new rules applied to them.

To send people to Manus Island, the health checks themselves take up to two weeks.

So there will be a delay from the first boats arriving before people begin to be transferred to Manus Island.

In the last couple of weeks, I've removed children and a number of family groups from Manus Island because the facilities, as they are right now, are not appropriate for some of those different groups.

The intention here though, is that we will now bring the quality of those places back up to standard for the processing centre.

So that, where at the moment, we will not be transferring women and children immediately across to Manus Island, the intention is that as the temporary facility moves to a permanent facility, anybody who arrives from now on will be subject to the new rules.

People who are currently within the detention network, within Australia on Manus or on Nauru do not have these rules applied to them.

But from now on, vessels that are intercepted will have the new rules apply to them.

And it will be a couple of weeks because of the health checks circumstance before the first transfers take place.

AG: Thank you Prime Minister. Just to reiterate that, although the Prime Minister has already said these things, this arrangement will be in entirely in accordance with Australia's international and domestic law obligations.

Papua New Guinea is of course a signatory to the Refugees Convention and, as has been indicated by both Prime Ministers, Papua New Guinea is going to withdraw the reservations that it had to the Refugees Convention in respect of people who are to be transferred from Australia.

What that means is that all people transferred to Papua New Guinea will have the full benefit of the rights that come to them under the Refugees Convention.

Papua New Guinea will be conducting the processing and, of course, as is appropriate under the Refugees Convention, it will carry with it for all those who are assessed as being genuine refugees, the right to potentially resettlement in Papua New Guinea.

JOURNALIST: Mr Rudd, the obvious question is how much is this going to cost? And secondly, is the government confident it will withstand the obvious legal challenges that are going to come?

PM RUDD: A full statement of costs will be put forward by the Finance Minister in due course.

We've gone through that quite extensively.

Of course, some of the matters that I've referred to in terms of development cooperation would occur within the framework of the development assistance budget.

Others will, of course, need to be dealt with in a different way.

On the question of the overall impact on the budget of asylum seekers in general, at present, because the numbers are going up and up and up, this is a huge burden to budget.

What we're on about here is a new arrangement which actually will send a very clear message to people smugglers with the objective of reducing the number over time and therefore, with less call on the budget.

So for us, those budgetary arrangements are important.

On the second question you raised, I would simply refer to the statements by the Attorney and myself earlier on.

And that is, we are operating here within the legal framework of UN convention and Australian domestic law.

We've been entirely mindful of early determinations by the Australian High Court.

JOURNALIST: Mr Rudd, you said you'll review this within twelve months, how will you measure whether it's been successful? How much of the boats need to stop or how many boats need to stop before you can decide?

PM RUDD: I think the real evaluation here lies in what the intelligence and security agencies inform us about the likely impact of these arrangements over time in bringing numbers down over time.

It would be wrong and misleading for me to even begin to suggest a number to you today. I don't intend to do that. I believe in being straight with the people of Australia.

And therefore, what we're seeking to do through these arrangements is send a clear and undiluted message to every people smuggler in the world that your business model is basically undermined.

Your business model, which says if you jump on a boat, you're going to end up in Australia, that doesn't apply any more.

We'll see how long it takes to have an effect.

But we want to be upfront about the fact that will not be overnight.

As I said, people smugglers may well seek to test the resolve early on.

It will be bumpy and rocky for a while but this is a clear change in strategic direction and dealing with the core element of the business case of people smugglers, which says that if you jump on a boat, you've got a free ticket to Australia and there to stay.

JOURNALIST: Has this been approved by Cabinet?

PM RUDD: Yes, we've had extensive discussions through full Cabinet and the National Security Committee of the Cabinet over the last several weeks.

As I said, this conversation about this arose because my good friend Peter O'Neill, when he was last in Brisbane a few weeks ago, over a bite to lunch on the verandah at Norman Park, said 'what can we do more to cooperate with people smuggling' so we've worked from there and all our agencies have been engaged since that time.

JOURNALIST: Why won't you tell us what the cost is now and how you will pay for it?

PM RUDD: Can I say we will undertake this with an absolute application to discipline, that this will be budget neutral.

That is the commitment the Australian people want me to give to them.

That's the commitment I am giving to them.

In terms of the finalisation of those arrangements which fall currently within or outside the aid budget, then we'll make a full statement in due course and the Finance Minister will do so.

JOURNALIST: One more question. In the next 12 months, how many asylum seekers is PNG willing to take?

PM O'NEILL: The details are in the agreement there. We will take as much as we can on the capacities that we have on the ground.

And as you know, we are building more capacity to take more refugees and asylum seekers.

JOURNALIST: Can you give us an indication of the number? You must have a number in your mind, surely?

PM O'NEILL: You can't just simply estimate a number.

You don't know how many people are seeking such a refugee status in the boats that arrive.

So we hope that the boat will stop and there will be nobody coming to Manus and that is the objective of these arrangements.

PM RUDD: The other point to add to what the Prime Minister has just said is that every people smuggler in the world would want us to give you a number.

We're not for obvious national interest reasons.

That is why in agreement is framed in the way it's framing so we don't allow people smugglers to gain the system.

That's just completely wrong. I said before our international convention for visits is four.

I appreciate the lateness of the day and I'm sorry for those who have been inconvenienced by that but the PM has just arrived from PNG. Thank you for your time.

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