



7 February 2008

UNHCR welcomes end of 'Pacific Solution'

The UN Refugee Agency today welcomed the end of Australia's Pacific Solution which will come to a close tomorrow (Friday 8 Feb), with the departure of the last remaining 21 refugees from Nauru to Australia.

Regional Representative Mr Richard Towle said the departure of the final cases signalled the close of difficult chapter in Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

UNHCR has been troubled by the 'deterrence' policy which diverted more than 1,600 asylum seekers to third countries (Nauru and PNG), denying them access to Australian territory to lodge asylum claims.

"Many *bona fide* refugees caught by the policy spent long periods of isolation, mental hardship and uncertainty -- and prolonged separation from their families," said Towle.

"The prompt decision taken by the new Government to end the Pacific Solution and bring refugees to Australia goes a long way to show Australia as a humane society and in keeping with its international obligations."

UNHCR hopes that any continuation of offshore processing on Christmas Island is developed within the letter and the spirit of the Refugee Convention.

This would include ensuring the protection needs of refugees are addressed and timely solutions found in a way that fully respects people's rights and freedoms, and takes into account what they've already suffered, avoiding any further penalisation.

"We hope procedures on Christmas Island will mirror those applying to asylum-seekers who have access to Australia's onshore protection system," said Towle.

The remaining 21 refugees will leave Nauru for Brisbane on Friday morning, and will be transferred on flights to Sydney, Perth, Adelaide, Cairns and Melbourne that evening.

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