



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & IMMIGRATION OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



MEDIA RELEASE

BY

**HON. RIMBINK PATO, OBE, LLB, MP
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS & IMMIGRATION**

“PNG TAKES ACTION ON REFUGEES”

The Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration, Hon. Rimbink Pato, OBE, LLB, MP announced today that the National Executive Council (NEC) had approved action to address the situation of West Papuan refugees living in PNG and asylum seekers at the Regional Processing Centre for in Manus Province.

“PNG is rightly proud of our humanitarian tradition of helping those in need”, Minister Pato said. “For decades we have hosted Melanesian refugees from Indonesia’s Papua Province. Some have lived their whole lives here and make strong and important contributions to our community”, the Minister said.

The Minister explained that West Papuan refugees had been hampered by having no official status in PNG, no identity documentation and no work rights. “The NEC’s decision will move people out of this limbo and enable them to obtain all of the rights and responsibilities of Papua New Guinean citizenship”.

“Most West Papuan refugees already meet the requirements for citizenship, including 8 years residence, knowledge of PNG languages and respect for our culture” the Minister said. “The Government has removed the citizenship application fees for refugees, which was previously unaffordable for most.”

Minister Pato explained that over the next 12 months the Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority will register West Papuan refugees and assist them to apply for citizenship by naturalisation. This process will be supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Those who do not meet the requirements for PNG citizenship will have their refugee status determined and, if eligible, assisted to apply for a refugee visa. All West Papuan refugees will be issued a PNG passport or Certificate of Identity.

The Minister stated that the NEC had also approved for him to start making final decisions on the refugee status of asylum seekers at the Manus Regional Processing Centre.

“These people will not yet be permanently settled” the Minister said. “The Prime Minister, Hon. Peter O’Neill, CMG, MP announced on 19 October that we will conduct a comprehensive program of public awareness raising and consultation about refugee settlement before developing a new National Refugee Settlement Policy for Cabinet’s endorsement”.

While this policy is being re-developed genuine refugees will be given visas and moved from the Manus Regional Processing Centre to a new, purpose-built facility in East Lorengau. These refugees will be given training in English, *Tok Pisin* and PNG culture.

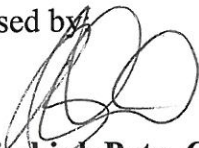
This new facility will be run by ICSA and staffed by Papua New Guineans. This will bring further employment opportunities to Manus Province.

The Minister explained that many refugees have skills that are greatly needed throughout PNG. “We have accountants, architects, engineers, teachers and many other skilled people. Internationally I have seen that refugees are dedicated people who truly commit themselves to their new country and employment. Businesses are crying out for these kinds of workers. If provinces outside of Manus tell us that they need skilled workers to help boost their local economies, then we will support refugees to fill those jobs while we are awaiting the policy”.

“All non-refugees will be required to leave PNG – either voluntarily or through deportation”, Minister Pato said.

“It is right that we are working to resolve the situations of all refugees in PNG – both Melanesians and those transferred here under regional arrangements” Minister Pato said. “PNG is truly leading the Pacific in providing humanitarian protection to these vulnerable people who have fled persecution”.

Authorised by



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