



**MINISTRY OF IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY**  
**OFFICE OF THE MINISTER**

**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**BY**

**MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY**

**HON. PETRUS THOMAS, MP**

**ON THE**

**CLOSURE OF THE MANUS REGIONAL PROCESSING CENTRE**

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The Minister for Immigration and Border Security Hon. Petrus Thomas, MP made a formal statement today on the position of the PNG Government on issues that needs to be considered by Australia as the Manus Regional Processing Centre (MRPC) closes next Tuesday.

“Whilst the Governments of PNG and Australia have agreed to close the MRPC at the end of the month, there remains a number of important issues that needs to be addressed in a revised Regional Resettlement Agreement (RRA) going forward in dealing with the residual cases that will continue to remain in Manus and other parts of PNG for those who have opted resettle in PNG until a durable solution is found by Australia,” said Minister Thomas.

“Minister Thomas said that PNG as a good friend and neighbour has offered a helping hand to Australia in July 2013 to deal with the regional problem of people smuggling by agreeing to the transfer, processing and resettlement of refugees in PNG. It is PNG’s position that as long as there is one individual from this arrangement that remains in PNG, Australia will continue to provide financial and other support to PNG to manage the persons transferred under the arrangement until the last person leaves or is independently resettled in PNG”.

“Minister Thomas said that of the 1,550 asylum seekers transferred to PNG, 610 have been assessed and determined to be refugees and 201 are non-refugees. 598 of those

transferred have returned voluntarily and 7 non-refugees have been deported. So far 5 have died whilst in PNG”.

“PNG had done its best as a friend to support Australia in its time of need and it is important that Australia continues to consult and support PNG,” said Minister Thomas.

“Minister Thomas said that the current arrangement between Australia and PNG covers the transfer, processing and resettlement of refugees that wish to settle in PNG. Prime Minister O’Neill in March this year said that PNG has offered refugees the option of resettlement but will not force refugees who do not wish to settle in the country”.

“Minster Thomas said that as PNG has completed its obligation under the arrangement on processing of asylum seekers and providing refugees the option of resettlement, there are now two groups of individuals that have come about as a result of processing, and these are the non-refugees that have to return home as they have no legal basis to remain in the country and refugees that do not want to settle in the country. PNG has no obligation under the current arrangement to deal with these two cohorts and they remain the responsibility of Australia to pursue third country options and liaise with respective governments of the non-refugees for their voluntary or involuntary return”.

“PNG’s concern is about the residual caseload of refugees not willing to resettle and non-refugees who will continue to remain in the country after the closure of the MRPC at Lombrum”, said Minister Thomas.

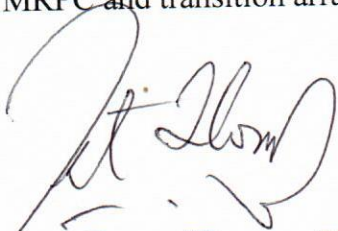
“There has to be a clear understanding of what Australia will continue to do and support PNG in the next few months to deal with the remaining caseload. PNG currently has no obligation under the current arrangement and Australia will continue to be responsible. There must be a review of the arrangement to clarify these international obligations and officials will be discussing the details of revised agreement in the next few days”.

“I am also concerned about human rights issues highlighted by the United Nations and international organisations on the reduction of health services on Manus for refugees and non-refugees. The reduction of services will also impact on the Lorengau Hospital and I call on Australia to maintain the necessary health and mental health services preferably by a local health service provider or maintain the current arrangement between International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) and Pacific International Hospital”, said Minister Thomas.



“Minister Thomas said that the PNG Government has expressed that the new arrangements going forward must continue to reflect national content in the contracts where local companies must continue to benefit directly or by retaining employment of locals who have had the necessary training and experience in the last four years in provision of garrison and security services. The government will not support the recruitment of large number of foreign workers particularly for positions that are reserved for nationals and jobs that can be undertaken by locals”.

“The provincial leaders and local sub-contractors have raised their concerns on the loss of business and employment opportunities and the PNG Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority has conveyed the government position to Australian officials and the new contractors Paladin Solutions and NWK Group. I urge Australia to respect PNG Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority as the implementing agency and work in consultation with them to progress the closure of the MRPC and address landowner and local political sensitivities to see a successful closure of the MRPC and transition arrangements, said Minister Thomas”.



**Hon. Petrus Thomas, MP**

**Minister for Immigration and Border Security**

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**APPROVED FOR RELEASE**