MEDIA RELEASE
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Australia and Papua New Guinea regional settlement arrangement

Joint media release with Kevin Rudd - Prime Minister, Mark Dreyfus - Attorney General and The Hon Tony Burke MP - Australian Minister for Immigration, Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship

As of today asylum seekers who come here by boat without a visa will never be settled in Australia.

Under the new arrangement signed with Papua New Guinea today – the Regional Settlement Arrangement – unauthorised arrivals will be sent to Papua New Guinea for assessment and if found to be a refugee will be settled there.

Arriving in Australia by boat will no longer mean settlement in Australia.

Australians have had enough of seeing people drowning in the waters to our north.

Our country has had enough of people smugglers exploiting asylum seekers and seeing them drown on the high seas.

We are sick of watching our servicemen and women risking their lives in rescues in dangerous conditions on the high seas.

Regional processing arrangements in Papua New Guinea will be significantly expanded and people will be sent to Manus Island as soon as health checks are complete and appropriate accommodation is identified.

PNG officials will assess their claims on Manus Island.

Our governments will expand existing facilities on Manus Island, as well as establishing further facilities in Papua New Guinea.

There is no cap on the number of people who can be transferred to Papua New Guinea.

The Australian Government, in partnership with the PNG Government, will support settlement services for those with refugee status, as safe and appropriate accommodation and services are identified.

We are a compassionate nation and we will continue to deliver a strong humanitarian program.

If the measure announced today and the international meeting on the Convention that has been flagged lead to a significant change in the number of people arriving by boat, then the government stands ready to consider progressively increasing our humanitarian intake towards 27 000 as recommended by the Houston Panel.

There is nothing compassionate about criminal operations which see children and families drowning at sea.

Access to our humanitarian program must be through the international organisations which resettle people around the world, not through criminal operators who have pushed people onto unseaworthy vessels with tragic consequences.

The new arrangements will allow Australia to help more people who are genuinely in need and help prevent people smugglers from abusing our system.

The people smugglers themselves are constantly changing the way they operate and we need to be flexible enough to anticipate and match their actions to avoid the terrible consequences of this trade.

No doubt there will be some people smugglers who now encourage asylum seekers to test our resolve.

Be in no doubt. If people are paying thousands and thousands of dollars to a people smuggler they are buying a ticket to a country other than Australia.