

## **“Floating gaol” no place for protecting refugees**

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The Jesuit Refugee Service Australia calls on the Australian government to uphold the right of the 83 men intercepted near Christmas Island three days ago, to seek Australia’s protection under the terms of the 1951 Refugees Convention. The possibility of receiving a fair and timely hearing of their claims to protection under the Convention will be defeated if the men, who have claimed Sri Lankan nationality, are sent to Nauru under Australia’s “Pacific Solution”.

“The so-called “Pacific Solution” can leave refugees stranded for years in what are effectively floating gaols. They are stuck in limbo – unable to enter Australia and unwilling to return to the persecution from which they have fled. These are the proven results of abandoning refugees in isolated offshore islands. Whatever the nationality or status of the 85 men picked up by the HMAS Success off Christmas Island three days ago, their right to claim asylum should they choose to do so, and to be treated with dignity while their claims are being processed, must be protected,” asserted Fr David Holdcroft, the Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service Australia.

There are currently eight Rohingya Burmese asylum seekers detained on Nauru. They were told this month that they will not be resettled in Australia, even if their claims for refugee status are successful, leaving them with the prospect of indefinite detention on Nauru.

“The position taken by the Australian government means that refugees who arrive on Australia’s borders and attempt entry will be rejected, regardless of how serious and genuine their fear of persecution may be,” stated Fr David Holdcroft, the Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service Australia. “This is not acceptable and makes a mockery of Australia’s commitment to honour the terms and spirit of the 1951 Refugees Convention.”

“Currently Sri Lanka is in a state of crisis. UNHCR has unequivocally stated that it is not safe to return people to Sri Lanka at present. Sending the Sri Lankan men held on Christmas Island to Nauru will condemn them to a state of indefinite detention,” said Fr Holdcroft.

“Australia must take responsibility for the refugees it lands on its own shores, which includes territory it has excised through legislation. They must be assessed according to Australian law and settled or returned promptly,” Fr Holdcroft concluded.

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*The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic organisation that works in over 50 countries, providing assistance to refugees in refugee camps, to people displaced within their own country, to asylum seekers in cities and those held in detention.*

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