

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **JRS Australia Slams Refugee 'Swap' Deal**

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JRS Australia has criticised a scheme to trade refugees between the US and Australia as “undignified, potentially damaging and wholly unnecessary”.

The Australian Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews announced on the 18<sup>th</sup> April that in a deal brokered with the United States Australia would “swap” up to 200 refugees every year. Under the scheme, asylum seekers presently on Nauru will be considered for resettlement in the United States, if found to be refugees. At the same time Cubans and Haitian refugees currently held in Guantanamo Bay will be settled in Australia.

Under Australia's Pacific solution, asylum seekers who travel by sea but do not reach the Australian mainland are processed in offshore centres on Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island, without access to the Australian legal system. While the Australian Government has repeatedly stated that this group would not be permitted access to Australia, approximately 96% of refugees processed through this scheme have ended up in Australia or New Zealand.

The United States is the first government to undertake to resettle a significant number of refugees from Nauru.

Mr Andrews painted the move as a deterrent: “Potential resettlement in the US will be a disincentive to those who seek to come to Australia illegally because they have friends here.”

“It is hard to understand the logic of this move from any point of view. The prime driver of refugee policy seems to be border control rather than any concern for the protection of undocumented arrivals. If this is at the cost of due process and human rights it will be ultimately self-defeating”, stated JRS Australia Director David Holdcroft SJ.

“The refugee protection system can, and must, accommodate unregulated movement of people across borders seeking asylum. To take such extraordinary measures in response to a small group of asylum seekers is undignified, potentially damaging and wholly unnecessary”, said Fr Holdcroft.