



Newsletter March 2024

## Grandmothers sit down with Andrew Giles and Michelle Ananda-Rajah



Eleven members of Grandmothers for Refugees (Higgins and Kooyong), one from Labor for Refugees, and two from the Centre for a Compassionate Society had an animated, respectful discussion with Minister for Immigration Andrew Giles and Michelle Ananda-Rajah, Member for Higgins.

Three issues were discussed: the plight of the remaining refugees in Port Moresby, treatment of detainees released after the November High Court decision, and the new Administrative Review Tribunal and how it will process the thousands who failed the misnamed 'fast track' process.

Minister Giles spoke of Australia's contribution to the second **Global Refugee Forum in Geneva** in December. He stressed the need for Global Engagement, not just national issues, noting that Rohingya, displaced from Myanmar, are the main case of displacement in our region.

The text of Australia's pledges can be found here: *Australian Government makes 23 pledges at 2023 Global Refugee Forum.* [Read here.](#)

Minister Giles said that between 2007 and 2009, Labor failed to anticipate how quickly public opinion can change. Public understanding of 'refugee' became emotive. He spoke of 35 million refugees in the world, and 110 million forcibly displaced persons. Those seeking safety need to be recognised over those who are ambitious.

Sue Cranage, Grandmother from Higgins, spoke of the men on PNG as an 'old issue', saying we want to see the end to what is happening to them.

Giles said he was familiar with our concern. He said there are three types in the PNG cohort: those waiting for approval to move to a third country; those happy to stay in PNG with partners and children; and those whose mental and physical health is extremely affected. We need to engage through the PNG government to particularly support this most vulnerable group.

Mary Mahoney, Grandmother from Higgins spoke of people released from long term detention following the **High Court ruling** on 8 November 2023 that decided that indefinite detention was unlawful.

*(Continued page 2)*

# Arrival of desperate asylum seekers sparks hysteria and fearmongering

Grandmothers are appalled by the divisive, predictable and overblown rhetoric of opposition leader Peter Dutton and some parts of the media in response to the arrival of more than 40 people by boat in Western Australia last week.

In contrast, the community at Beagle Bay, where the men were discovered responded with compassion and genuine concern for their welfare, a lesson in humanity for those who peddle fear and division in the community. As Maryanne Barclay, coordinator of our Dunkley group says in her letter published in the Age on Wednesday 21 February:

*“Refugees are back on the front pages (‘Asylum seekers flown to Nauru’ 19/5) and the Opposition Leader is predictably accusing the Prime Minister of being ‘weak’. Perhaps, instead of returning to the same tired and misleading narrative, our politicians*

*could consider what strong leadership on this issue might look like. Instead of endless political point scoring, our elected leaders could show some courage and guide Australia towards a responsible and humane response. According to UNHCR, there are currently more than 117 million people displaced worldwide; this number is growing daily, and here we are talking about 30 people being a threat to national security. It's beyond ridiculous.”*

The following article in the *Guardian* on 19 February points to the fact that the real crisis related to boat arrivals is the harm inflicted on those who have been detained under Australia’s cruel off-shore detention regime, not the arrival of a tiny number of desperate people seeking refuge.

Read the full article [here](#).

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## Grandmothers sit down with Andrew Giles, Minister for Immigration and Michelle Ananda-Rajah, Member for Higgins *Continued from page 1*

150+ people were released following the High Court decision, noting that those who had committed offences had finished their time prior to being put in detention, and that they are subjected to humiliating surveillance measures. They had 28 days to appeal these measures.

Giles explained that a **Community Safety Board** has been set up to deal with each of these people. Only half were refugees, some can’t be deported for various reasons. **“My focus is to get people out of detention”**. The Community Safety Board is nearly at the end of the assessment process.<sup>1</sup> There is a renewed focus on those who can be repatriated.

Davina, Grandmother from Kooyong, asked when the revised Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) – 85% of whose cases relate to immigration matters – will be up and running?

Giles indicated that **The Administrative Review Tribunal (ART) legislation was introduced in December**. AAT is continuing until the new ART is up. There is no indication when the transition period will finish though **103 new Members have been appointed**.<sup>2</sup>

**The transition from TPV and SHEV to Permanent residency for the 19,000 due is incomplete** as it is a long process. This is compounded when the refugee is no longer single, when they are stateless or when their documentation in totalitarian governments (such as

Afghanistan, Myanmar, Iran) is hard to check. This affects approximately 11,000 ‘boat people’. Overall, 2,400 people previously refused a RoS visa have been reviewed and now have the right to stay.

Labor for Refugees asked, since the government followed its conviction and changed its stance on the Stage Three Tax cuts, why can’t they make a similar change and bring onshore those desperate men stuck in PNG, and also **enact ALP policy** by abolishing the Fast Track system as well as detaining asylum seekers for 90 days maximum.

### CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

**Helen Wirtz, Grandmothers from Higgins asked how can Grandmothers for Refugees advocacy be effectively focussed?**

In response Giles said, **we need to expand the social license towards refugees**. The reaction to the High Court decision has been a setback for refugee policy. In order to better manage immigration, we need to **shift community sentiment, to build compassion for refugees as part of creating broader social cohesion**.

**Grandmothers for Refugees advocacy can focus on reaching out to people who could change their attitudes.**

*Helen Wirtz, Alison Tokita and Davina Lippmann*

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1. The community safety board comprises Border Force, Immigration Department and police officers. The process for their appointment is unknown.

2. The Labor Party promised to abolish the Fast Track system at the elections in 2022 and to replace the AAT and IAA with a less prejudicial body, the ART (Administrative Review Tribunal). The legislation has been drafted and has been read three times in Parliament. It is now before the Legal and Constitutional Committee which will deliver its report by July 24.)

## Palm Sunday

At a time when the world is confronted by conflict and displacement, please join us in solidarity with people seeking asylum and refugees to walk for Peace and Justice.

The time and route have been changed this year starting at 10am in Parliament gardens for a ritual, some talks and music. This will be followed by a walk around surrounding streets, ending back at Parliament Gardens. We are encouraging people to bring paper peace doves – the template for these is [here](#). We are assured they are easy to make!! Contact Grandmothers [here](#) if you are willing to put up Palm Sunday rally posters or distribute flyers in your neighbourhood.

## The Big Walk

We're walking for 10,000 refugees who have been living in Australia for more than 10 years and are part of our community. But they are still waiting for permanent visas.

Make your steps count. Help us complete our virtual walk around Australia and show politicians that you care.

The Big Walk will culminate in Canberra with a final local walk to Parliament House on Tuesday 26 March where there will be engagement with politicians to discuss the issues and policy options to resolve this intolerable situation for the 10,000+ people living in limbo for more than 10 years.

**Walk, run, swim or cycle – you can even dance, row and skip!**

Just sign up to our Big Walk app or online [here](#) so that your distances count towards our virtual walk. Spread the word, lace up, and get moving. Every step, pedal, or lap counts.

## Our current priorities

Grandmothers for Refugees is emphasising two of our priorities for immediate attention in campaigns.

### Fair and timely refugee determination process

We call for the establishment of appropriate processes to fairly assess the claims of approximately 10,000 people still seeking protection including progression of proposed reforms to the administrative review regime and abolition of the Fast Track process.

### Evacuation of asylum seekers in PNG

We work towards the transfer of individuals seeking asylum who were sent to PNG by Australia and wish to come to Australia. (See below)

Fast Track is the process introduced after 13 August 2012 for determining refugee status. A key feature of this process was that there would be a much **more limited form of review** of the refugee decisions made by the government through the Immigration Assessment Authority (IAA), which was created especially to review these claims. Under these rules, the **IAA would no longer hear directly from people claiming asylum** and would generally be restricted to information before the Department of Immigration.

The Labor Party promised to abolish the Fast Track system at the elections in 2022 and to replace the AAT and IAA with a less prejudicial body, the ART (Administrative Review Tribunal). The new legislation has been introduced and has been read three times. It is now before the Legal and Constitutional Committee which will deliver its report by 24 July.

We urge Grandmothers to lobby cross bench MPs and senators to make sure the finalised legislation ensures that there is a fair review process for those failed under fast track.



The problems that remain in this area are:

- >> The provision of support for those still waiting to be processed or who have been refused through the Fast Track system.
- >> There was a huge backlog and there is no real course of action for those refused.
- >> The SRSS (Status Resolution Support Scheme) needs to be adjusted. It is low and not all people waiting for visa resolution are receiving support. They and their families rely on charities.

# Evacuation of asylum seekers from PNG

In the last issue of our newsletter we called for the people in PNG to be offered urgent evacuation to Australia to receive medical care and pursue permanent settlement. They have been separated from family and friends and denied their freedom. The sector more broadly has stepped up the campaign to pressure the government to resettle these people in Australia.

**We believe approximately 42 people, some with families and children, remain in Port Moresby.**

**The Richardson Review** has now been released and exposed further details of the corrupt waste of money involved in budgets for overseas detention. This corruption is what leaves the **people in Port Moresby without financial or any other support other than that provided by charities.**

**Sister Jane Keogh has been very actively campaigning for the men in PNG in Canberra staging overnight vigils, and she asks politicians for a donation for those trapped in Port Moresby as they arrive at Parliament House.**

She describes the terrible situation in PNG like this:

*"I am desperately upset. I have long known and advocated to bring the Moresby very ill guys to Australia for needed mental health treatment. But Labor supports a financial deal with the devil to leave them there forever. I know several who could have been going to Canada but were too mentally unwell to go through the application process let alone the interview. One young man, A, who was positive, caring and intelligent the twice I visited PNG, met me at the airport, organised my accommodation, looked after me. He has been unable to communicate with me for over 18 months and I heard he just sits on his bed in despair. Last year he became so unwell he ran naked through the streets and twice physically tried to get on a plane to leave. Today I had another friend visit him and now this friend is extremely upset seeing him sitting in one spot and talking gibberish. I believe there are at least two others in similar conditions. Often very dosed up on medication. Not making sense, unable to think, reason, act as human beings. This is what Australia is doing to real human innocent, vulnerable, intelligent, skilled young men. Reducing them to a state where intelligence and humanity is lost. I will never forget or forgive Labor for doing this. Every Labor politician has been given the facts, many times. When Penny Wong was last in PNG church authorities told us that she made it clear she thinks the men are OK to stay in PNG. Where is Australia's lost soul? Where is decency? Friends, every one of us must keep speaking up exposing this inhumanity. We must not give up, but rather shout more loudly whether our voices fall on deaf ears or not."*



If you are on Facebook you can listen to Sister Jane's desperate plea [here](#).

**TAKE  
ACTION  
NOW**

**Write to Minister Clare O'Neil, Senator Penny Wong, Minister Andrew Giles, your local MP and Senators.**

For example: Susan Cranage (Higgins) sent this letter to Minister Clare O'Neil.

*"The refugees who have been abandoned by Australia in PNG have been reliant on charity from individual Australian citizens since November last year. No other funds, be they from PNG or Australia, have been provided.*

*We do not understand how the Labor Government can claim that Australia is no longer responsible for the people left abandoned there. A secret deal made between Morrison and the PNG government is not a reason.*

*International law is clear that Australia's obligations do not end by transferring refugees to another country, in this case PNG and Nauru.*

*The fact that Australia forcefully transferred people against their will to Nauru and Manus, established detention centers and provided funding and services makes Australia accountable for any human-rights violations that occurred in Manus and Nauru and for any that continue to occur. Our greatest shame is that PNG, a struggling and developing country, found the detention of innocent people so abhorrent that they could no longer accept the incarceration of the refugees on Manus. Is PNG now also being punished for exposing our shame to the world?*

*The ill people would have been brought to Australia under the second Medevac Bill that Labor supported, but that was scuttled at the last minute by Jacqui Lambie. What has changed? Why can't they be Medevac'd here immediately? You are in Government now and you have a moral duty to act.*

*It becomes more urgent every day that these people are relieved from their suffering before it is too late."*

## SOME QUICK UPDATES

### 1 Permanent visas

On 14 February 2023, the **Australian Government announced a new pathway to permanent visas for temporary protection visa holders**, with some people able to apply for or be granted a permanent (Resolution of Status or RoS) visa. This means that those who already have a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) will be able to apply for a permanent **Resolution of Status (RoS) Visa**.

Current applications to renew expired TPVs or SHEVs will automatically be converted to ROS visa applications. So far 12,937 have been granted (Dec 23 RCOA). Those still waiting for a decision will be granted a RoS Visa once their need for refugee protection is determined. [Read here.](#)

**We have welcomed these changes because the new RoS visa allows people to sponsor family, attend further education and apply for benefits; in short to enjoy the rights of citizenship as the UN Convention says they should.**

### 2 Ned Kelly Emeralds

Ned Kelly Emeralds was released as a result of the High Court Decision. He was initially required to wear an ankle bracelet and obey a curfew, but a successful appeal removed those obligations. Thankfully, he has also returned to fluent speech. Another lesson on the damaging effects of indefinite detention.

### 3 High Court decision

The High Court decision that ruled that indefinite detention is unlawful has received constant attention in the media (not always in a fair and balanced way). The Home Affairs department seemed to flounder in response to Dutton's attacks, attempting to introduce another harsh set of regulations.

### 4 Daily News update

The Daily News Update on the Grandmother's webpage is a neat and easy way to catch up with current events. [Read here.](#)

### 5 Call for a Royal Commission into Immigration Detention

The campaign launch for a Royal Commission into Immigration Detention at Parliament House, Canberra on 28 November 2023 was attended by MPs, activists, and refugees, including Behrouz Boochani and Farhad Bandesh.

MPs who attended the launch and the press conference afterwards were Kylea Tink, (who hosted the launch), Senator Nick McKim, Andrew Wilkie, Zali Steggall and Zoe Daniel.

Dr Julie Macken, a facilitator of the campaign, understands that there are **at least 24 MPs, both Lower and Upper House, who support the campaign**, together with numerous individuals and organizations, including Grandmothers for Refugees.

The campaign has been buoyed by the widespread condemnation that has blighted our national consciousness for over thirty years.

Several delegations will be organised to Canberra to meet with MPs who support the campaign and with those who currently don't.

**To keep informed about the campaign and any actions, you can undertake, please visit [here](#).**



*Refugees bring skills and ideas. They just need a fair go.*

## OUT AND ABOUT WITH GRANDMOTHERS

We encourage all members to consider what action is most effective and suitable for their group and situation. We can glean some excellent suggestions from this month's electorate group reports. Many grandmothers have already been very active.



### Community education and engagement

**Janet Joss** (*Grandmothers Executive member, second from right*) recently spoke at a gathering hosted by the Climate Action Network and Higgins Grandmothers in Malvern.

The focus of her talk was on the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, shedding light on the advocacy efforts undertaken by the Grandmothers for Refugees. Janet's presentation was well received, prompting an engaging discussion during the Q&A session.

### Refugees and Australia's policy

**Ann Butler** met with a small group of teenage students who are being home-schooled to discuss refugees and Australia's policy in the light of a general investigation into social justice.

### Attendance at local fairs and markets

Higgins in collaboration with Kooyong (*pictured below*) held a stall at the Ashburton Community Festival on Sunday 25 February.



### Kooyong stall to be held on Sunday 3 March

Kooyong are also having a stall at the Glenferrie Road Festival from 10am to 4pm in Glenferrie Road, Hawthorn. Consider volunteering to help with distributing the new flyer while promenading the street.

Email Ruth [here](#).

**Email [here](#) if you would like a speaker for a community education session in your neighbourhood.**