



NEWSLETTER October 2021

Dear Grandmothers and Friends,

As the Covid restrictions on freedom of movement are now behind us, this edition of the Newsletter is anticipating that many of you are ready to 'get back on the streets'.

Swanston Street outside the Park Prison Hotel is the place to start. Multiple cases of Covid have been confirmed among the detained men and they need support.

The situation in Afghanistan worsens but the Morrison Government has not raised Australia's humanitarian intake beyond the initial figure of 3000.

A deal has been done to keep refugees on Nauru and abandon people in PNG, in denial of Australia's enduring duty of care.

In the meantime, the next federal election is due in a few months – but it could be called at any time. We have been getting ready.

In short, you are needed as much as ever to raise community awareness of the people being harmed by our nation's refugee policies, and to push harder for change.

So, Grandmothers and FROGS, it's time to get back out on the streets! Go safely.



Le nonne per i rifugiati
Γιαγιάδες για προσφύγες
难民的祖母
جدات للاجئين

WARNING

Readers may find this Editorial from *The Saturday Paper* (23/10/21) distressing.

Editorial Human lessons

When a person is burnt, it is not just their skin that is affected. It is not just the muscle or bones or tendons, the nerve endings that are deadened and become numb. In an immolation, the lungs are also damaged. These respiratory injuries are hugely painful. They are caused by the inhalation of heat, steam and whatever chemicals a person might have been doused with before they were set alight.

This is the condition of the lungs of at least one of the asylum seekers who has contracted Covid-19 in the Park Hotel detention facility in Melbourne. His situation is a perverse expression of the cruelty of immigration detention. He was held on Nauru

You can read the full opinion piece [here](#).



Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

Afghanistan crisis worsening as temperatures drop, warns UNHCR



© UNHCR/Tony Aseh

Displaced people receive aid at a distribution site in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Tuesday, October 12, 2021

The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is worsening and funding for emergency aid is urgently needed to help 20 million people there, the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, said on Tuesday.

A month since the UN-led \$606 million [appeal](#) for solidarity for the people of Afghanistan, the UN refugee agency said that only 25 per cent of the funds it needed to fund operations for the next two months had been received...

At the beginning of 2021, 18 million people in Afghanistan needed humanitarian assistance, half of the country's population.

UN aid officials insist that "**the window to assist is narrow**", as only five per cent of households have enough to eat every day, and more than half of all children under-five are expected to become acutely malnourished in the next year.

Severe drought and disruptions to farming have increased the risk of food insecurity as the winter approaches, said the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs ([OCHA](#)).

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Time running out on Australia's short-term rescue visas

We are learning more about the emergency evacuation visas issued by Australia following the sudden collapse of the Government in Afghanistan.

- Special category 449 visas issued to Afghans were only valid for three months.
- Issued in August, these visas are now about to expire. The Government process for extending or otherwise managing this situation remains obscure.
- People on these 449 visas are prevented from applying for any other type of visa that would give them security to stay in Australia.

Executive Director of Refugee Legal, David Manne, says the recent murders of three Afghan interpreters makes it urgent for the 449 visas to be extended. Other advocates call for them to be converted into other types of visas offering protection.

In a Government Media release (12/10/21) immigration Minister Alex Hawke announced \$6.4 million had been committed to support those evacuees on subclass 449 Temporary Humanitarian Stay visas to transition to permanent visas. "This funding will boost the capacity of specialist legal services to support evacuees to transition from these emergency, temporary visas to permanent visas."

CALL TO ACTION >>>
Crisis in Afghanistan
Refugee Sector Letter Blitz



A kit has been prepared to encourage and help refugee supporters to advocate on their behalf.

Thanks to **Ann Renkin (Flinders electorate)** who represents Grandmothers for Refugees on the ARAN Letter Writing Group which meets monthly.

Included in this kit ([click here for the full kit](#)) is the information you need to create your own letters or use the proformas.

- **Guide and Background notes** prepared by ARAN's Letter Writing Network
- 3 proforma **letters to politicians** that you can copy (and personalise) to send by post or email
- Postal Addresses for MPs and Senators
- Email addresses for MPs and Senators

- **2 sample Letters to the Editor** - Letter 1 = 237 words / Letter 2 = 149 words
- Please personalise these letters or they may not be published
- Email addresses for capital city newspapers Letters to Editor
- And a link to **resources for Twitter** on the Action for Afghanistan website - <https://www.actionforafghanistan.com.au/resources>

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

Australia ends offshore detention deal with PNG - refugees abandoned

Australia is to stop sending asylum seekers to Papua New Guinea (PNG), marking an end to its controversial detention regime in the nation.

PNG is one of two Pacific countries paid by Canberra to detain asylum seekers and refugees who attempt to reach Australia by boat. Australia said its arrangement with PNG would conclude by the end of the year.

[>>> Read this report from the BBC](#)



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

Statement on ending offshore processing in PNG

Wednesday 6 October, 2021

The Australian Human Rights Commission acknowledges the Federal Government's announcement that it will stop the offshore processing of asylum seekers on Papua New Guinea at the end of 2021.

The Commission notes that people who were transferred to PNG for processing who do not agree to be transferred to Nauru by the end of the year will have their protection claims assessed by PNG. It is possible that those who remain may be able to access a permanent settlement option through pathways to becoming PNG citizens, with access to long-term support, settlement packages and family reunification. The Commission recognises that such options may provide certainty for those whose claims are successful.

However, the Commission notes that Australia has obligations under the Refugee Convention to people who arrive in its territory seeking asylum. Those obligations remain, even if Australia transfers people to a third country for their claims to be processed.

The Commission continues to hold serious concerns that third country processing arrangements could see Australia in breach of its human rights obligations. In particular, the Commission has concerns about:

- the potential for breaches of Australia's non-refoulement obligations
- the potential that asylum seekers may be subjected to arbitrary detention
- living conditions for asylum seekers on PNG
- the lack of robust independent monitoring mechanisms
- the health and safety of people in detention on PNG.

The Commission has urged that all people who arrive in Australia and make claims for asylum should have those claims assessed here. Australia has an established system for determining refugee status and complementary protection claims. **This system should be followed in a way that respects the inherent dignity and humanity of people who come seeking asylum, and that provides durable solutions to those found to be owed protection.** ENDS

SECRECY SURROUNDS NAURU DEAL

Late last month, Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews and the President of Nauru quietly announced they had signed a **new agreement to establish an “enduring form” of offshore processing for asylum seekers** taken to the Pacific island.

The text of the new agreement has not been made public. This is unsurprising. All the publicly available information indicates Australia’s offshore processing strategy is an ongoing human rights — not to mention financial — disaster...

Read this article in full in **The Conversation**: [Multibillion-dollar strategy with no end in sight: Australia's 'enduring' offshore processing deal with Nauru \(theconversation.com\)](http://theconversation.com/multibillion-dollar-strategy-with-no-end-in-sight-australia-s-enduring-offshore-processing-deal-with-auru)

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• **Pay by EFT** to the Grandmothers’ bank account:

Name: Grandmothers for Refugees

BSB: 083170

Account Number: 83 813 3480



Totes and Tees still on sale...

Our website is the best way to place your order. Go to www.grandmothersforrefugees.org and scroll down on the Front Page. [Or click here.](#)

Grandmothers for Refugees advocates for compassionate welcome and safe settlement of all people seeking asylum. For every tee purchased, Das T-Shirt Automat will donate \$18 to Grandmothers for Refugees and \$9 for every tote.



Grandmothers For Refugees Tote
\$25



Grandmothers For Refugees Tee
\$40

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NEW FLYER AVAILABLE NOW for your letter-box walks, street and market stalls, and vigils. Email info@grandmothersforrefugees.org to request supplies.

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

NEWS AROUND ELECTORATES

All electorates are invited to send a representative to the monthly meetings of the Coordinating Committee. Electorates are encouraged to circulate to the CC a monthly report on the activities, plans and ideas.

Some electorates are well established, and some are re-energising with the coming federal election in mind. Some are very active letter writing groups while others are able to be more out and about in the electorate. Here is a snippet of news from reports received in October. Others will be covered next month.

Casey:

Activity

- Meetings are attended by about 12 members
- Letter writing groups each of about 7 members have resulted in a lot of activity and some replies
- Contact with the Deakin group and Healesville RAR has been fruitful and enhanced enthusiasm

Higgins:

Ideas brewing

- We decided to continue supporting the Biloela family but to change our focus to the visas classifications used to prevent the family from returning to Biloela and the brutal effects these visas have on the people forced to live in the shadows of our communities without a future.
- One of our members for Higgins Grandmothers has been hard at work organising a Solo Piano Recital by Alan Kogosoaski to raise money for the ASRC. Now with the end of lockdown insight, Margie Mitsikas has reserved the Uniting Church (Cnr Burke Rd & Coppin St.) for **Saturday December 11th at 6.30 for a 7pm start. Alan Kogosoaski, a world renowned Chopinist, will present a selection of music based on the theme 'Refugees'.** Please spread the word and reserve the date. **Tickets will sell prior to the event for \$50.00 p.p. or \$40.00 p.p. concession.**

Goldstein:

Summary of activity for Sept/Oct

- Two well attended Zoom meetings ... 12 active members, wider email list, wider still contact list.
- New member recruited – via GfR tote bag.
- One member has just been named Senior Victorian of the Year – waiting to hear the category.
- Regular email contact between members - keeping informed about current refugee issues and central GfR initiatives. General outrage about PNG, Nauru contract, Migration Amendment Bill and now Covid in The Park.
- Members active with phone calls/emails to Tim Wilson MP regarding the low number of visa places for Afghan refugees and the inhumane treatment of those who came by boat in the previous decade.
- Two of us very active on social media.
- Keeping watch re the Federal election. Greens candidate nominated, Goldstein Voices currently interviewing prospective candidates.
- Several members attending Goldstein Voices seminars. Pleased to see that some GV Committee members include refugee policy in their bios.
- Continued liaison with BRASA.
- Members attendance at various online events – including Kristina Keneally and David Manne seminars.
- Masks and bumper stickers being bought and used.



Meeting with Helen Haines MP (Independent for Indi)

Grandmothers for Refugees has had a very useful engagement with Helen Haines MP, brokered by our long-time member in Indi, Freida Andrews who joined Margaret Browne and Linda Sparrow from the Executive in the zoom virtual meeting room.

We wanted to thank Helen Haines for her efforts in support of a federal integrity commission and to express our shared concern for transparency and accountability, which is notably absent in Government handling of refugee and asylum issues:

- Secrecy of 'on water' matters and anything to do with detention of refugees has allowed cruel regime to proceed under the radar
- Lack of transparency around huge contracts with the likes of Broadspectrum, Serco, Paladin and Canstruct (RCOA estimates over a \$1 billion a year; \$8.3 billion 2014-2020) and these companies making huge profits
- Costs of boat turn-backs
- Largely secret arrangements with PNG and Nauru government

We were also interested to explore:

- How does she see the prospects for Voices groups and independents, particularly in marginal seats?
- Any other thoughts on how we can be most effective?
- Likelihood of a hung parliament?
- What is the prospect of independents such as her, Zali Stegall, Andrew Wilkie and Rebekah Sharkie aligning with Labor to secure a change of government?

REFUGEE POLICY AND THE COMING FEDERAL ELECTION

Grandmothers for Refugees members have now met with representatives of all political parties in line with the approach laid out by our Election Strategy Group which has been meeting for much of this year. Policies are being reviewed and assessed against the G4R five key objectives in securing our priority - a change in refugee policy.

Whilst we are NOT party political, we accept that we are engaged in what the parties have treated as a decades-long political struggle built on the deliberately cruel policy of harming vulnerable and desperate people. We have debated strategies with other grass roots refugee support groups.

Whilst we may not all agree on everything, we do agree that, after so many years of advocacy, it is time for a change in policy and for many – even most - that means a necessary change in government. (cont)

Co-chair, Margaret Browne, briefly outlines the thinking:

There is agreement on the exec, the coordinating committee, and the election strategy group, as well as across the broader refugee network, that **our priority is to get a change in refugee policy which means securing a change in government**. Refugees will not be a top order issue in the overall campaign as we know from experience that any mention of refugees is a free kick to the government to run the fear messaging. We see strength therefore in aligning ourselves with a broader emerging movement, which is coalescing around climate, women, integrity, and accountability as well as Covid mismanagement. So, **our messaging to the public is about caring and choosing change to make things we care about better**.

We trust members will appreciate that we are aiming for what has the best chance of improving the situation for refugees and people seeking asylum. It may take some of us out of our comfort zone. But we've been kept inside the zone of shame for so long. It's time for a change, yes?

With best wishes from the Exec Group,

Jean, Margaret, Jane, Linda, Gill