



NATIONAL CAPITAL DISTRICT COMMISSION

Office of the Governor Hon. Powes Parkop LLB, LLM, MP
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Date 23rd April, 2014
Your Reference:
Our Reference:
Designation:
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Hon. Rimbink Pato MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Office of the Minister for Foreign Affairs
Parliament House
WAIGANI
National Capital District

My Dear Minister

Subject: (SOFT) HUMAN APPROACH TO ASYLUM SEEKERS

I write in respect of the above to express my grave concern about how we are dealing with this tragic human problem and our tendency to blindly or otherwise incorporate Australian treatment and attitude into our culture and our country.

From the outset, Honourable Minister, these people have not committed any criminal or civil wrongs against the State and people of Papua New Guinea and therefore should not be treated or equated to criminal in the way we are keeping them or while awaiting processing. Their only 'offence', if any, is to try to seek a better life in Australia. This is not a crime. It is human nature to seek better life for oneself and his/her family. It is therefore repugnant to the principle enshrined in the UN Convention on Refugees which we are signatory to, to hold them in detention or near prison like detention. This is also not a practice that countries all over the World practice.

This is an Australian practice which we should guard ourselves against. We are a compassionate nation and people known for our hospitality and compassion in reaching out to people in hardship, distress or seeking comfort. We are also a nation and people who proclaim to be Christian. It is therefore repugnant to our traditional and contemporary culture and to our Christian values to keep such people in near prison-like environment. I therefore call on you and the Government to review the conditions we have subjected these people to, to ensure it is as human and as normal as possible. We are also legally required by the UN Convention on Refugees to create this type of environment.

In the same vein, I also call on you and the Government to adopt another more human approach to processing these Asylum Seekers. While their destiny is Australia and our people are opposed to their settlement here, as a Government we must show leadership and raise above our people's prejudices.

I wish to propose in this respect that we screen these Asylum Seekers and if we find some to be highly qualified professionals such as Engineers, doctors, Nurses, Teachers, Accounts etc, we grant them work permits to obtain employment while waiting for the processing of their application for permanent asylum in a third or fourth country. I am sure some of these people can contribute socially and economically to our nation while awaiting the determination of the Application. Importantly, we must take as many steps as possible to not allow them to live in a prison like environment where there is no hope for normal environment in the immediate future. Such environment and condition can make normal and decent people incur mental problems, including insanity.

I understand our people are opposed to their settlement in PNG but I believe this attitude is influenced by the perception that some of these asylum seekers might be extremist or Muslim fanatics or trouble makers. While I do not wish to ignore such possibility, I believe those are result of media hysteria and or stereotype views of people of Muslim or Middle East background generally rather than facts. The fact might be that many of these people might be fleeing that type of environment too; they might be decent normal people who just want a better life. We should therefore depart from the premise that they are human beings seeking better life than trouble makers or extremist. Let us not demonize these people forever or

collectively. Let's have a more human approach that befits our culture, our moral and legal responsibility and let's not act like Australians and allow their policies and culture of detention forever to dictate our approach.

Minister, many great nations of the World are built and enriched by immigration. The USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and all of Latin America are mainly nation of migrants. Europe and South Africa has been largely influenced by and enriched socially and commercially by migrants. Chinese, Indians and Filipinos are now almost everywhere in the World through migration. Closer to home, the Indian migration to Fiji during colonial times have contributed significantly to the economic, social and political life of that country. It is therefore not a crime or offence to migrate. It is not a moral wrong to seek a better economic life in another country. When the massive famine struck the Republic of Ireland in around 16 Century, there was massive Irish migration to the United States of American. We should present and remind these historical facts to our people and help them to change their mindset so as to enable us to adopt a better, more moral, more human and more compassion approach to this delicate matter.

Of course, our priority is to our nation and our people but we have regional and international responsibility and obligation too as citizen of the worlds and as members of the family of nations and as fellow human beings.

I thank you Minister for your time and patience in reaching my submission or proposal. I am under no illusion that this is a delicate and sensitive matter but I believe we can and should adopt a more human and morally superior approach than adopting Australian policy and culture or be blinded by our people fears and prejudice.

I would be most happy to discuss these views and your response at a time convenient to you schedule

For public interest, I am releasing copy of this letter to the media.

Thank you

Yours Sincerely,

**HON. POWES PARKOP LLB LLM MP
GOVERNOR – NCD**

Cc: Hon. Peter O'Neil
Prime Minister

Cc: Ms. Deborah Stokes
High Commission of Australia of PNG

Cc: Media