



PEOPLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & RACIAL EQUALITY INC

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MEDIA RELEASE

Close the detention centre in Nauru and resolve the claims of the detainees there to demonstrate the new Government's commitment to international conventions on the treatment of asylum seekers, says a Sri Lankan expatriate group in Melbourne.

People for Human Rights & Racial Equality (PHRRE) has specifically called for the settlement in Australia of 72 Sri Lankan asylum seekers in Nauru whose claims for refugee status were accepted by the Immigration Department in September this year but were refused settlement in Australia by the previous administration.

"As stated in your party's immigration policy, we hope that one of your first acts will be to bring to a close the notorious "Nauru option" and afford the unfortunates incarcerated there the right to a fair hearing of their asylum claims" the group said in a letter to the newly appointment Minister of Immigration, Senator Chris Evans.

The 72 Sri Lankans, young Tamils from the North and East of Sri Lanka , were among 83 asylum seekers who were intercepted on their way to Australia in February this year.

They were granted refugee status by the Immigration Department in September but were forced to remain in Nauru while the previous Government cast around for another country to accept them.

Appeals for the men to be settled in Australia by the regional spokesman for UNHCR, Richard Towle, immediately after the Immigration Department ruling, fell on deaf ears.

"It's not easy to persuade third countries to resettle refugees who have already fallen within the jurisdiction of a developed state like Australia," Mr Towle told the ABC in September.

In their letter to Senator Evans, PHRRE said his early attention to resolving "this sad episode in the history of the Immigration Department will send out a strong signal to the world that Australia has shed its xenophobic and bigoted past and ushered in an era of enlightened multicultural democracy".

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