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CAPSA welcomes release of refugees but urges that more be done

The release of about 23 refugees, some of whom had been detained for close to nine years, from onshore detention facilities including Melbourne's Park Hotel has been welcomed by the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA).

CAPSA, co-convened by Jesuit Social Services and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia, is an alliance of Catholic peak and national organisations, schools, parishes and individuals advocating for the fair and humane treatment of people seeking asylum in Australia.

CAPSA Co-Chairs Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, and Tamara Domicelj, Country Director of JRS Australia, say the decision to finally grant freedom to vulnerable people who have sought protection from Australia is long overdue.

"CAPSA and our colleagues in the sector, as well as the broader Australian community, have long lobbied for Australia's cruel and inhumane immigration system to be significantly overhauled. This system is hugely detrimental to the mental and physical health of refugees and has received international condemnation. This will forever be remembered as a shameful period in our nation's history," says Ms Edwards.

"The release of a number of people yesterday will hopefully allow them to commence rebuilding their lives after significant trauma, much of it avoidable. But this action should have been taken years ago," says Ms Domicelj.

CAPSA calls for the immediate release of all remaining people in onshore detention who were medically transferred to Australia from PNG and Nauru.

"There are humane alternatives to prolonged, arbitrary detention. It is urgent that these people be released and provided every support in the Australian community to try to overcome the trauma they have experienced, including as a direct result of Australia's policies," she says.

CAPSA also notes that only last week, the Federal Government allocated \$1.28 billion to onshore detention, an increase of \$20.6 million compared to the previous Federal Budget.

"This is critical funding which could be used to safeguard and protect the human rights and dignity of people, including by investing in our settlement and employment support services and ensuring that people seeking asylum have adequate support in the community whilst their claims for protection are adjudicated," says Ms Domicelj.

"CAPSA believes that all people seeking protection and living in the community should receive benefits sufficient for food, shelter, health, utilities and transport, and have access to employment opportunities to give them every chance to lead positive and productive lives."

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