



# Edmund Rice Centre

for Justice & Community Education

Awareness ♦ Advocacy ♦ Action

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Sydney - Wed, 7th October 2020**

### **2020-21 Federal Budget:**

## **First Nations People and Refugees should not pay the price for Australia's recovery**

The Edmund Rice Centre today expressed serious concern at the disregard for the needs of First Nations Peoples and Refugees in the 2020-21 Federal Budget.

“It has been said that the Federal Budget is statement on the nation’s priorities. Clearly if that is the case, judging by this Budget, First Nations Peoples, refugees and people seeking asylum – some of the most vulnerable people to the pandemic - are very low priorities for this Government”, Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre and President of the Refugee Council of Australia said today.

Two months ago the Prime Minister signed a new *Closing the Gap Agreement* committing Federal and State Governments to a long-term program to finally reduce the huge disparities in life expectancy, health, incarceration, education and employment between First Nations peoples and other Australians.

“Prime Minister Morrison’s signing of the new Closing the Gap Agreement just two months ago was a welcome step, but in last night’s Budget the Government provided no resources to make it happen”, Mr Glendenning said. “Surely it was possible for the Government to support its own flagship Indigenous Affairs policy”.

The Government did provide some monies for Indigenous Home Ownership, mentoring a program to increase First Nations peoples’ access to water, and support for the return of cultural heritage material from overseas.

“These are all worthy and significant, but they are not going to close the gap or change the inequities First Nations peoples face in this nation”, Mr Glendenning said.

However, money was provided in the Budget for reports on Closing the Gap targets.

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“So there is money to report on progress, but no money for the essential work to actually make the progress that is to be reported on!”

In similar vein, the Budget also severely slashed support for some of the world’s most vulnerable people - refugees and people seeking asylum - as 5000 places a year were cut from Australia’s Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

“The Morrison Government has now joined with President Donald Trump in cutting refugee resettlement at a time when millions of refugees are in dire situations made worse by the impact of the pandemic”, Mr Glendenning said.

Significantly, financial support for people seeking asylum has been cut by a massive 86% (from \$139.8 million in 2017-18 to just \$19.6million in 2020-21).

This has occurred at the same time as a substantial increase in the numbers of people seeking assistance because of the pandemic; thousands of asylum seekers have lost their jobs forcing them to seek help from state government services and charities.

Yet, at the same time, the Government has allocated \$1.9 billion for punitive offshore processing.

“Put simply, the Government is prolonging the suffering of people seeking protection at the expense of programs which offer desperate people the possibility of a path to safety”.

“If you follow the money, this Government, like the Trump administration, prioritises punishing asylum seekers rather than protecting them. All at a time of global crisis”.

“The First Nations People of Australia, refugees, and people in need of protection, should be priorities in good times and bad, and they certainly should not be asked to pay the price for Australia’s economic recovery”, Mr Glendenning concluded.

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