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MEDIA RELEASE

Vinnies calls for humane policies for asylum seekers and new migrants

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has called for the Federal Government to mark Refugee Week by showing compassion to Priya and Nades Murugappan and their Australian-born daughters Kopika, 6, and Tharnicaa, 4, by allowing them to return to Biloela.

National President Claire Victory said the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs should exercise his discretion and grant a visa extension for the Murugappan family until a permanent solution can be reached.

'People seeking asylum are among the most marginalised and vulnerable people in our nation, and Australia's policies towards them shape our national character. In addition to working two jobs, Nades volunteered for Vinnies in Biloela and has shown his willingness to contribute to the community,' Ms Victory said.

'Yet since then, this family has been detained offshore for three years at a cost of \$6 million. We welcome the Minister's first step to move the family into community detention in Perth, but the circumstances warrant further exercise of ministerial discretionary powers. This is a matter of national interest, with the community concerned for the welfare of this family and calling for their return to Biloela.'

The National Council also calls for policy changes that would allow a more compassionate approach to asylum seekers and new migrants, including:

- equal remuneration order funding for settlement services
- extending the schedule of the 'fast-track' processing of 1,100 people seeking asylum
- review of the eligibility criteria for the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS), reinstatement of the 2017 funding levels, and extending access to people who have been released from immigration detention
- the rejection of legislative change that will force new migrants to wait four years to access Carer Payment, Carer Allowance, Family Tax Benefit Part A and B, Parental Leave Pay and Dad and Partner Pay.

'This four-year wait will not encourage self-sufficiency and will adversely affect women and children in particular. It will not compel potential recipients to work because, as carers, they are limited in their capacity to do so. As a wealthy country, we can do more,' Ms Victory said.

'We acknowledge the importance of keeping our country safe and the Government's responsibility to control the security of our borders, but people coming to Australia to seek our protection should be treated humanely and in accordance with our international obligations.

'We also believe that detainees should only be held on Australian territory, with access to community support and legal resources, and only for the period required to assess their health and security status.'

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.

Media contact: 0475 068 209 / media@svdp.org.au

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