



Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group Inc. ABN 99296621082

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Patron: Dorothy Hoddinott AO.

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group Endorses The Uluru Statement From The Heart.

Committee Secretary

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group is making this submission to voice our grave concerns regarding the Migration Amendment (Removal and Other Measures) Bill 2024.

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group (BMRSG), a broad-based community group of volunteers, was founded in 2001 and has a membership of over 300. BMRSG has a long standing commitment to the rights of refugees and asylum seekers.

We are fearful that the new Bill gives the Minister for Immigration extraordinarily broad powers which could have drastic consequences for many refugees seeking asylum in Australia. This Bill gives the Minister new powers to deport people from Australia and prevent people from entering Australia.

We are most concerned that those who do not obey a deportation order would face criminal charges. They would have a criminal record, face imprisonment and a possible fine. We see this as a denial of human rights. It is cruel and unnecessary. The inclusion of mandatory imprisonment is alarming to say the least.

The new Bill also empowers the Minister to reverse protection findings. It is widely acknowledged that the fast-track processes for temporary protection applications have been fraught with inconsistencies, lack of fairness and lengthy delays. As a result, many people with strong, genuine claims who have had their applications or appeals heard through this process have not been granted protection. A consequence of this new Bill is that the Government now has a right to forcibly deport people who have been unsuccessful in this flawed fast track process. As well, those who received a positive determination could have that decision overturned and face deportation, without any right to oppose that decision. The people of most concern are those who fear persecution and serious harm if they are forcibly returned to their country of origin.

For many years BMMSG has supported people who have arrived in Australia (often by boat) to escape persecution and violence. Many of these refugees are part of the 10,000 ("removal pathway non-citizens") who are in limbo as they wait for their visa status to be confirmed. Some have been waiting over 10 years. The emotional and physical strain of this uncertainty is taking its toll. One asylum seeker in this desperate situation who has been regularly visited by BMMSG members for over 5 years, attempted to take their life last Thursday night. This person attributed this action to the despair felt when hearing media reports about the new legislation and its implications.

We appreciate the opportunity to make this submission and appeal to the Committee to seriously consider the issues we have raised.

Sincerely

Judy Lynch

Vice Chairperson

Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group