

7th April 2016

PO Box 2008
Royal Melbourne Hospital
Parkville, VIC 3050
T 03 9320 1022
F 03 9328 5670
www.aasw.asn.au

The Honourable Peter Dutton MP
Minister for Immigration and Border Protection
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

SCHEDULE FOR RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES FOLLOWING SYRIAN CRISIS

In September 2015 the federal government announced it would settle 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees. This number is in addition to the 13,750 refugees taken by Australia each year. In anticipation of the increase non-government organisations, community groups and churches in city and regional areas have rallied support including locating housing and in some cases employing staff in readiness for the new arrivals.

Disappointingly, to date Australia appears to have resettled only about 180 refugees from this cohort. Meanwhile, Australian organisations which have organised additional resources and employed workers wait in limbo for the government to fulfil its promise without an adequate explanation for the delay. Some organisations are now considering laying off staff in the absence of foreseeable Syrian/Iraqi resettlement.

We understand that the delays may in part be caused by the need for security checks. Whilst we appreciate the need for adequate security checks, we note that Australia already has excellent mechanisms for screening that have ensured a world leading, efficient and rapid resettlement programme to date. We note that Canada appears to have addressed this issue by employing a significant number of additional staff to specifically work on carefully targeted cases. At a time of crisis, we believe this is an appropriate response.

Additionally, our members further advise that the longer refugees are forced to wait in dangerous situations or camps without adequate facilities, the greater the trauma they experience and the more difficult the resettlement process. Syrian refugees have now been up to five years in exile. Australian social workers stand ready to help in the important task of helping refugees resettle and restart their lives. Already social workers play an important role in this in federal government departments, in refugee resettlement services, in specialist counselling services, in advocacy settings and within diverse multicultural communities.

We therefore urge the Government to speed the process of accepting the Syrian and Iraqi refugees. We further ask that the Government provide a monthly update on the number of refugees under this program that have been resettled. It would be very helpful for practitioners to know how many referrals had been received, how many accepted and how many departed for Australia. Our understanding, from DIBP sources, is that the referral numbers are now 9,000 – being 6,000 UNHCR referrals and 3,000 under the Special Humanitarian Program.

Yours sincerely



Professor Karen Healy AM
National President