

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING : 19 October 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(SE15/027) - PNG resettlement - Programme 1.5: IMA Offshore Management

Senator Carr, Kim (L&CA 87) asked:

Ms Briscoe: There are 48 refugees currently in the transit centre, and the remaining 118 are still residing in the RPC.

Senator KIM CARR: This is the question: how much time do you anticipate they will be there before they are resettled into the community?

Mr Pezzullo: That is a matter that ultimately will need to be answered by the government of Papua New Guinea. We can make inquiries of that government, because it relates to applicable laws, policies and practices that they have in place. If there is anything we can assist the committee with, we will, but we will do it on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: There have been suggestions that people there are indefinitely engaged through that centre whether they are refugees or not—

Mr Pezzullo: Sorry, Senator?

Senator KIM CARR: There will be an indefinite stay because there is no arrangement for resettlement.

Mr Pezzullo: The government of Papua New Guinea, prior to entering into this agreement in the middle part of 2013—and this is a matter of public record—did not have an established refugee and humanitarian program. We are assisting them with that. This is something that they desire to create for all sorts of reasons, one of which is pursuant to their agreement with Australia but also from the point of view of being members who wish to uphold the international system of protection. They need to arrive at the place we did many decades ago, which is: once you have grounded someone—in this case—in permanent protection, how do you go about their settlement and integration? They are still working through those issues, with our assistance. I do not wish to speak for the government of PNG other than to reflect on their own public statements and comments that they do not wish to see anyone 'indefinitely' held in any form of detention. Their ultimate goal will be to achieve in-country resettlement, which is one option; third-country resettlement, where that is to the mutual satisfaction of all parties; and, in the case of those not found to be refugees, their ultimate repatriation.

Answer:

The settlement of refugees in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a matter for the PNG Government. On 23 October 2015, the PNG Government announced that it had approved its National Refugee Policy, paving the way for settlement to commence.