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Temporary protection is second rate protection

While welcoming the decision to allow 42 West Papuan refugees to stay in Australia, the Director of the Jesuit Refugee Service, David Holdcroft SJ, has voiced concern over the “second rate protection” offered to refugees who seek asylum within Australia’s borders.

“Temporary protection is essentially second rate protection and it’s just not good enough”, said Fr Holdcroft

We’ve been told that refugees entering Australia by so-called “front door” means can expect to be warmly accepted and supported by the Australian community. For people applying offshore, this is exactly what occurs. But for the West Papuan independence activists and their families granted temporary protection visas this, unfortunately, will not be the case.

The Department of Immigration has recognised them as bona fide refugees. They took the most expeditious “front door” route to safety, boarding traditional dugout canoes and making a beeline for Cape York. And yet they are denied the red carpet “front door” treatment. Why?

“This case throws a spotlight on the arbitrary and unjust results that flow from discriminating against refugees according to how they got here,” said Fr Holdcroft.

Some refugees are able to apply for resettlement through the UNHCR in overseas refugee camps. Their travel is sponsored and they receive a generous resettlement package from the Australian Government. For some refugees, like the West Papuans, this option is not available.

They may flee by the quickest and safest means possible. They may come with compelling evidence of serious persecution. But they will not be given the opportunity to begin rebuilding their lives in Australia.

For three years, they must live in limbo on a temporary protection visa – unable to access government sponsored resettlement services and English classes, unable to leave the country and return, unable to sponsor family members to join them and unsure whether or not they will be sent back in three years time. After three years, they must prove their claims all over again.

Then, we bill them for the privilege. “Every refugee released from detention is billed for their own incarceration and the account must be settled in full before they can hope to leave Australia and return, or become Australian citizens,” stated Fr Holdcroft.

“This, surely, is no way to welcome refugees to Australia,” concluded Fr Holdcroft. “It’s a millstone, not a welcome mat.”

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