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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Refugee Week: Catholic advocates call for permanent solutions for people left in limbo after offshore detention

As Australia marks Refugee Week 2026 (14-20 June) and celebrates the milestone of welcoming one million refugees since World War II, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia and St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia are calling on the Federal Government to provide permanent and dignified solutions for the hundreds of people still trapped in limbo.

“There are people in our communities, including children, who are living in limbo, separated from family and denied certainty about their future,” said JRS Australia Country Director Fr. Brett O’Neill S.J.

Around 700 people who were previously transferred to Nauru and Papua New Guinea under Australia’s offshore processing regime, and later brought to Australia for urgent medical treatment, remain on temporary visas with no pathway to permanency.

“Many of these people have spent more than a decade in Australia. They are part of our communities, workplaces, schools and churches. They deserve permanent and dignified solutions,” said Fr. Brett.

One of those people is [Thanush](#).

Thanush sought asylum in Australia in 2013, and then spent 7.5 years detained on Manus Island, before being transferred to Australia under the Medevac law due to an injury he sustained in detention. On arrival he was detained again in a hotel in Sydney.

Thanush has since become a prominent advocate for people seeking asylum, speaking in schools, churches, community forums and with decision-makers, through JRS Australia’s Refugee Leadership Program.

“Half of my life has been spent fighting for freedom,” shared Thanush.

“There are hundreds of people like me. We have built lives here and are part of the community in Australia. But we still do not have the right to stay in the place we call home.”

Earlier this year, after 13 years seeking safety in Australia, Thanush accepted a protection offer in New Zealand. He raised concerns about Australia’s renewed use of offshore detention arrangements, warning against policies that continue to inflict profound harm on people seeking safety.

“It was the worst time in my life,” shared Thanush. “We have to keep going. We have to keep advocating for a better future for everyone in Australia.”

St Vincent de Paul Society National President Mark Gaetani said Refugee Week was an opportunity for Australians to recommit to compassion and to confront the problems with our asylum system.

“Australia is a compassionate and welcoming country,” Mr Gaetani said. “We have a proud legacy of protecting people seeking safety, and we should stand up when people are being left behind.”

“Refugee Week offers an opportunity to celebrate the leadership, creativity and contributions of refugees and people seeking asylum across Australia, and to stand up for their right to stay.”

This Refugee Week, JRS Australia will host a [Refugee Leadership Exhibition](#) in Sydney, bringing together refugee leaders to share stories, advocacy and artwork with the community.

JRS Australia has also launched new [educational resources for Catholic schools](#) to support students and teachers to engage more deeply with refugee experiences and help build a more welcoming Australia.

“Stories have the power to build understanding, empathy and hope,” said Fr. Brett.

“Refugee leaders continue to challenge harmful narratives and remind us of our shared humanity. Their voices are essential in shaping a more compassionate national conversation.”

For more information about JRS Australia’s Refugee Week events and resources, visit their [Refugee Week page](#).

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