



STATEMENT

29 August 2017

Peak body defends lawyers providing legal help to refugees and asylum seekers

The National Association of Community Legal Centres (NACLC), the peak body for Community Legal Centres across Australia, today expressed concern about Government criticism directed at lawyers providing assistance to asylum seekers and refugees.

The Immigration Minister Peter Dutton is reported to have called lawyers and law firms ‘un-Australian’ yesterday for providing legal help to asylum seekers.

Over 180 Community Legal Centres across Australia provide free legal advice to people who cannot afford a lawyer, including refugees and asylum seekers. There is also a network of specialist centres, these include: Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Immigration Advice and Rights Centre, Refugee Advice and Casework Service, Refugee and Immigration Legal Service, Refugee Advocacy Service of South Australia, Refugee Legal Service (Tasmania), the Humanitarian Group and Refugee Legal.

“Community Legal Centres across Australia, along with many of our pro bono partners provide vital legal help to refugees and asylum seekers every day. Asylum seekers and refugees have rights under both international and Australian law and our centres provide them with help to exercise those rights” said Nassim Arrage, NACLC Chief Executive Officer.

“We strongly support the work of Community Legal Centres and other lawyers providing legal help to refugees and asylum seekers.” he added.

“The Minister’s comments yesterday are extremely concerning. The rule of law is a cornerstone of the Australian legal system and helping refugees and asylum seekers is a key example of the role lawyers play in upholding that rule of law” said Mr Arrage.

“More broadly, we remain concerned about Government policies in relation to refugees and asylum seekers and call on the Government to fulfil its international obligations and introduce a more humane policy approach in this area that treats asylum seekers with dignity and respect. We also call on the Government to distance itself from the comments made by Minister Dutton and reaffirm its support for the ongoing and important role legal help plays in ensuring people can exercise their rights” he concluded.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact:

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NACLC acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands across Australia and particularly the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, traditional owners of the land on which the NACLC office is situated. We pay deep respect to Elders past and present.