PM O'Neill: Manus Regional Processing Centre will Close

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The Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, Hon. Peter O'Neill CMG MP, has announced that the Manus Regional Processing Centre will now be closed following the decision of the Supreme Court of Papua New Guinea that found the existence of the centre to be unconstitutional.

The Prime Minister also noted that the closure of the centre will have a negative effect on the local economy on Manus, and the Government will work with Australia to seek to minimise damage to businesses and workers.

"I have considered the ruling of the Supreme Court of Papua New Guinea and welcome this outcome," Prime Minister O'Neill said.

"Respecting this ruling, Papua New Guinea will immediately ask the Australian Government to make alternative arrangements for the asylum seekers currently held at the Regional Processing Centre.

"As I stated recently at the at the Australian Press Club, we did not anticipate the asylum seekers to be kept as long as they have at the Manus Centre

"For those that have been deemed to be legitimate refugees, we invite them to live in Papua New Guinea only of they want to be a part of our society and make a contribution to our community.

"It is clear that several of these refugees do not want to settle in Papua New Guinea and that is their decision."

PM O'Neill said the closure will have a detrimental effect on the local Manus economy and this would have to be carefully managed.

"A number of local businesses have invested to expand their operations to support the Manus centre, and their businesses will now suffer.

"These are many small and medium enterprises and their employees who will now be out of work. Our Government will work with Australia in order to transition these businesses and workers to new opportunities so that their communities do not suffer."

The Prime Minister said he is proud that Papua New Guinea was able to play an important part in stopping the loss of life that was occurring due to people smuggling, which is a challenging global problem.

"Papua New Guinea offered to help when we saw thousands of children, women and men losing their lives as they attempted to make their journey between Java and Christmas Island.

"Our Government drew on the earlier agreements signed by the Somare and Howard Governments and we re-established the Manus Centre. While there may be critics, we must never forget that this policy has stopped many people from losing their lives at sea.

"We appreciate the reasons why people might seek to make such a perilous journey to find a better life.

"Those deemed to be legitimate refugees are often people who are fleeing from war or disaster, and as a global community we need to step up and do more to help.

"But there can be no justification for the vile trade in human misery that is peddled by people smugglers."

The Prime Minister said negotiations with Australia will focus on the timeframe for closing the Manus facility and managing the settlement of legitimate refugees who are interested in staying in Papua New Guinea.

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