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Medevac repeal a shameful day in Australian history: Jesuit Social Services

The Federal Government's repeal of the Medevac laws is a shameful day in Australian history and equates to political point scoring with the lives of vulnerable people, says Jesuit Social Services.

"We are deeply dismayed and saddened with the Morrison Government's repeal of these valuable laws which had rightly put medical decisions in the hands of medical professionals, not politicians," says Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services.

"These laws, while not perfect and with scope for reform around transparency and timeliness, nonetheless recognised that a small number of people seeking asylum and refugees held offshore by the Australian Government in PNG and Nauru are seriously ill and desperately required adequate health care.

"Medevac was a small step towards respecting the fundamental human dignity of people held offshore, and crucially was supported by medical colleges including the Royal Australian College of Physicians and the Australian Medical Association as well as thousands of medical professionals across the country," says Ms Edwards.

In its submission to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee's inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019, Jesuit Social Services highlighted the serious and lasting damage caused to people under Australia's inhumane offshore detention regime.

"There have been 12 tragic deaths in offshore detention facilities as well as countless reports of self-harm and poor mental health. Denying vulnerable people, some of whom are seriously unwell, access to the health care they need is cruel, vindictive and nothing short of treating them as pawns in a political game," says Ms Edwards.

"The repeal of Medevac places these men in even further limbo and we have serious concerns for their health and well-being, as well as that of others. Not only should Medevac have been retained, but it should have been strengthened to ensure the timely evacuation of people who had been approved through the process," says Ms Edwards.

"We call on the Morrison Government to erase this terrible stain on our national history by immediately resettling all people in PNG and Nauru, in a safe and secure country, and ensuring they get the medical treatment they require. This could include accepting the New Zealand offer which remains on the table. These people cannot wait any longer, and neither can the people of Australia."

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