



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **The Salvation Army statement on involvement to asylum seekers in Nauru and Manus Island**

1. The Salvation Army is an international movement operating in 124 nations. We are committed to proclaiming and demonstrating the love of God through serving people suffering disadvantage. Our aim is to help these people experience hope and freedom amid circumstances that can threaten their dignity and harm their lives. This commitment has seen The Salvation Army provide services in all kinds of places and areas of human need.

This extensive frontline experience, and our centralised command structure, enables The Salvation Army to deploy resources quickly and effectively in response to human emergencies and emerging needs. Most Australians would be aware of the extensive range of our services and our advocacy work. Even in wartime, Salvation Army personnel serve close to the frontline, supporting soldiers and others who put their lives at risk for the sake of peace and freedom in the world.

2. It is with this motivation and experience that The Salvation Army announces its intention to enter into a contract with the Australian Government to provide humanitarian and support services for asylum seekers who will be housed and processed on Nauru and Manus Island.

3. Over the past decade, The Salvation Army has been a strong supporter of programs that provide asylum seekers with community-based alternatives to detention. It has also provided support to asylum seekers held in detention, and is currently involved in the provision of housing and support services under the Australian Government's Community Detention program.

4. The Salvation Army understands the tragic circumstances of asylum seekers and their aspirations for a better, more stable life for themselves and their families. The Salvation Army also recognises the difficult challenges and policy decisions facing the Australian Government as it seeks to prevent desperate, suffering and vulnerable people being exploited by those who seek to profit from their plight. We understand that urgent and strong action must be taken to prevent further tragedies occurring at sea.

5. While we share the view of the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers that much more needs to be done to improve refugees' access to protection before they embark on dangerous journeys to Australia, our organisation, like many Refugee Advocacy groups, is concerned about the decision to reintroduce offshore processing of asylum seekers who have entered Australian territory. On September 2, The Salvation Army joined other Christian churches in issuing a joint statement of concern about the potential

consequences of this new policy on people seeking protection from persecution. Although The Salvation Army remains concerned about the impact a lengthy placement on Nauru and Manus Island may potentially have on the well-being and mental health of asylum seekers—we cannot remain idle while this policy is enacted. We are a people of action who stand with the vulnerable and oppressed, and therefore commit ourselves to give our very best to serve those who will be transferred for off-shore processing. The Salvation Army recognises the enormity of the task ahead of us, but is determined to do its best to support people who are placed there, and to help them prepare for the day when freedom finally arrives. Providing emotional support and practical assistance to the men, women and children transferred to the islands will not be easy. Many will be bitterly disappointed that their perilous journey across the sea has been fruitless. Many will be distraught by the prospect of long periods of waiting for a determination of their refugee status and separation from their families. We bring over a century of experience and skill to this task, and boundless amounts of faith, hope and love. We are convinced that even in the darkest circumstances, light and good can emerge. We recognise the challenges of providing quality care in conditions that initially will not be ideal, and undertake to treat every person with respect and dignity—striving to use our contact with them to enhance their lives and futures.

6. The Salvation Army also commits to work in partnership with governments and other stakeholders to contribute to the development of new regional strategies and initiatives to more compassionately resolve the significant asylum seeker issues in our region of the world. The Salvation Army has a significant presence in many countries in this region and we intend to meet with other Salvation Army commands, including Indonesia, Malaysia, and Papua New Guinea, to develop alternative solutions.

7. We ask all Australians of faith to pray for our personnel who undertake this important work and for all those who will come into our care. We ask all Australians to think compassionately and generously towards those displaced in the world, who are searching for a new home and a safe haven.

**ENDS**

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