

**MEDIA RELEASE – 9 October 2019**

## **ChangeMakers welcomes change to discriminatory refugee policy**

ChangeMakers Resettlement Forum has welcomed the change to New Zealand’s refugee policy to remove the requirement that people born in Middle Eastern or African countries must have a family member already in NZ to be able to apply for refugee status.

“ChangeMakers believes it was hard to describe the policy as anything but unfair and discriminatory. The policy was introduced by a National Government in 2011. Its rationale at that time – that Middle Eastern or African refugees could be a threat to national security – is flawed and unsubstantiated. Refugees from Africa and Middle East are as law abiding as other refugees,” said Ibrahim Omer, Chair of the ChangeMakers’ Board.

The policy was widely condemned by international agencies, including the UNHCR and Amnesty International. NZ’s recently appointed Race Relations Commissioner Meng Foon, described the policy as “racist and discriminatory”. He went on to say, “It is not right. No one chooses to be a refugee. To imply that African and Middle Eastern refugees pose a security threat and can slip through the cracks is misleading and reinforces harmful stereotypes.”

The policy came under scrutiny following the terrorist attacks on two mosques in Christchurch where 51 people died on 15 March this year.

Ibrahim Omer says that refugees must be treated equally and fairly. “As a country, we should be giving a home and protection to as many people as we can. The need is so great! The Government is moving in the right direction by doubling NZ’s refugee quota and establishing more resettlement centres in NZ.”

ChangeMakers’ vision is that New Zealanders from refugee backgrounds are able to participate fully in life in Aotearoa New Zealand. This vision is realised through advocacy, research and community development.

“We applaud the government for its timely decision to rectify a wrong. We look forward to continuing to work with the government agencies, NGOs and others who are committed to supporting refugees settling in Aotearoa NZ,” said Ibrahim.

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