



The New Zealand Psychological Society

*Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa*

**Media Release**

**New Zealand Psychological Society**

**4 September, 2015**

**For immediate release**

**Attention: Health and Social Issues Reporters**

**The Refugee Crisis**

“Psychologists cannot remain silent on the refugee crisis. To ignore this issue is in breach of our ethical principles that demand that we address and challenge social injustice in our broader society,” said Dr Kerry Gibson, President of the New Zealand Psychological Society. Dr Gibson said it was important that psychologists and other health professionals take a stand on this issue: “Nowhere does it say that our ethical responsibilities for social justice stop at the borders of our own country. As health professionals we have a duty to call on the Government to take in more refugees.”

“The refugee situation is being spoken about as though it were an economic or political issue dependent on the ideological position we hold or what we think we can afford. But ultimately this is a moral and ethical decision that has to do with the way we treat human beings.”

“The people who flee their own countries do so only in the face of suffering that often goes beyond our worst imaginings. Many refugees experience high levels of trauma both from their experiences in their home country and from their struggles in escaping. To arrive with the hope of finding sanctuary, only to face rejection and further hardship, is even harder to bear.

Psychologists are involved in providing therapy and support to refugees and are well aware of the psychological trauma resulting from these experiences,” said Dr Gibson. She said she had no doubt that many New Zealanders were horrified by the stories and images of the refugees they were seeing in the media. “While some respond to this distress by saying they will no longer read the newspaper, many will be wanting to channel their sense of horror into doing something that can improve the situation for at least some people,” she added.

Dr Gibson said New Zealand had a reputation as a world leader in human rights. “Ordinary Kiwis take great pride in this identity and will experience a sense of collective shame if we feel we have not stepped up to help.”

She said the New Zealand Psychological Society was also calling on other health professionals to take a stand on this issue.

### **Background to the New Zealand Psychological Society**

The New Zealand Psychological Society is the largest professional association for psychologists in New Zealand. It has over 1500 members and subscribers and aims to improve individual and community wellbeing by representing, promoting and advancing the scientific discipline and practice of psychology.