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Martin backs East Timorese in talks with Ruddock

The Martin Government has thrown its support behind the Northern Territory’s East Timorese community calling on Federal Minister Phillip Ruddock to allow 84 former residents to remain in the Territory.

Ms Martin phoned Mr Ruddock in Canberra this morning, telling him of the special circumstance that these people find themselves in.

"I spoke to Mr Ruddock of the valuable contribution that these people have made living in the Territory and that we want them to remain in their adopted home," she said.

"Many of these people have jobs, are raising children, studying and contributing greatly to our multi-cultural lifestyle."

Ms Martin said the Minister had made it very clear that he would look at each person on a case-by-case basis but there would be no special circumstances.

"This is very disappointing because I believe there is a special case to be made for East Timorese in Australia, and the Territory, as a group and I believe this should be considered."

While committed to helping these people, Ms Martin said the proper legal processes must be followed and that ultimately the final decision would rest with the Federal Government.

"Mr Ruddock made it very clear that each case would be looked at individually under section 417, which is where the Minister has discretion," she said.

"What I will do is make sure that every Territory case of the East Timorese is the best, most comprehensive and most winnable case that he will see.

"I believe there are strong cases, with some of these people arriving in Darwin up to 13 years ago, and I would like to see some Government resources go towards developing their cases.

Ms Martin said that the Territory Government was developing other ways in which it could support these people.

"As part of this process that I have written to the Minister, and community fund-raising options are currently being considered."