



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

“IT IS TIME TO BRING THEM HERE”

Statement in support of offshore detainees

By Archbishop Denis Hart, President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

13 October 2016

One of the greatest crises of our day is the plight of people forced from their own countries by war, persecution or poverty and forced to live without a home, without safety and often separated from their families.

Pope Francis has called on Catholics to welcome such vulnerable people as our brothers and sisters. In Australia, we do not have to directly meet the responsibilities that many other nations bear. But we do bear the shame of the expulsion and harsh treatment of the people who sought our protection only to be detained on Nauru and Manus Island.

International agencies have been appalled by the conditions under which they live and the effects on their health, spirits and self-respect. Pope Francis, to whom people detained on Manus Island have written, has also expressed his deep concern. The human costs on the detainees are mounting by the day.

The Australian Catholic Bishops also deplore the detention of our brothers and sisters on Nauru and Manus Island. While recognising the effort of the Government to find a solution, we say that enough is enough. We call on the Government to bring offshore detainees to Australia while awaiting further decisions on their future.

We endorse the campaign to ‘Bring Them Here’ to Australia. We pledge the help of our Catholic communities and institutions to welcome and support these refugees when they arrive, including Catholic health, education and social services.

As the Jubilee of Mercy comes to a close, it is time to cultivate the works of mercy and to harvest its fruits as a Church.

The Australian Catholic Bishops are working with the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) advisory group, which brings together Catholic peak bodies across education, health, welfare, and the broader church along with key national Catholic organisations.

CAPSA is ready and willing to lead a coordinated approach to support the men, women and children currently on Nauru and Manus Island as they arrive in Australia. Many parishes and local communities are also ready to assist.

Members of the Catholic community who wish to be of assistance, you are invited to contact CAPSA at, www.capsa.org.au or info@capsa.org.au.

Media Contact: Aoife Connors on 0450 348 597 or media@catholic.org.au

Social media hashtags, #BringThemHere #WithRefugees #YearOfMercy



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Some additional quotes from Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv, Australian Catholic Bishops Delegate for Migrants and Refugees.

For media purposes

‘Australia, often galvanised by popular pressure, rose to the challenge in the past with its generous embrace of migrants and refugees. It proved itself especially courageous during the Indochinese exodus and accepted an unprecedented number of Asian refugees for the first time in its history. Many thousand former Vietnamese boat people and I are living witnesses to this.’

‘Australia is a wonderful country but where it is in terms of its treatment of asylum seekers should galvanise us into action. We cannot be his disciples if we ignore the plight of the marginalised and the vulnerable.’

The Pope writes, ‘Today, more than in the past, the Gospel of mercy troubles our consciences, prevents us from taking the suffering of others for granted, and points out ways of responding which, grounded in the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, find practical expression in works of spiritual and corporal mercy’.

Background

These have been developed to guide CAPSA's activities.

The heart of the Gospel is God's passionate love for each human being. Jesus expressed that love in his care for the ill, the poor, the stranger and for those disregarded by society. He invited his followers to reach out in love to strangers, and to shape a society that respects the human dignity of the poor out of its solidarity with them.

People who come to Australia seeking asylum are among the most disregarded and most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. Respect for their human dignity and health and wellbeing requires that they are properly fed, sheltered, secure, provided with appropriate educational opportunities, receive medical care and have their claims adjudicated fairly within a reasonable timeframe.

The fundamental Catholic principles of respect for human dignity and of solidarity within and between nations that makes the flourishing of the weakest the concern of all, were embodied in the United Nations Convention on Refugees.

The 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol are the global legal instruments explicitly covering important aspects of asylum seekers' rights and responsibilities of signatory countries during and post the refugee determination process. This instrument has helped to protect millions of people in a wide variety of situations.

Other relevant conventions to which Australia is a signatory include: the UN Declaration of Human Rights, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UN Convention Against Torture.

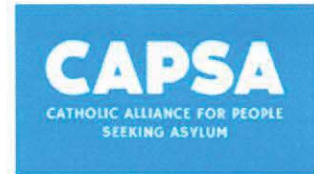
Global movements of people as a result of conflict and persecution demand a global response. Solidarity between nations in responding to the needs of refugees requires of Australia and other wealthy nations' leadership, serious international negotiation, courage and a well-considered response in which the human dignity of those fleeing persecution is non-negotiable.

CAPSA principles

1. Australia should continue to work within the region and international context to lead a more humane, ordered response to processing the claims of people seeking asylum.
2. All asylum seekers who make a claim on Australia must be processed with respect for their human dignity demanded by the UNHCR Convention on the Status of Refugees. Their claims for protection should be processed promptly and fairly.
3. The principles of deterrence, by which the members of one group of people who have come to Australia to seek protection are treated harshly in order to modify the behaviour of others, should form no part of Australian policy.
4. People seeking asylum should not be referred to as "illegal" or in other derogatory terms.
5. People who come to Australia to seek protection should not be transferred from Australian territory to other nations for processing or protection unless there is a firm regional agreement assuring that they will have equivalent rights and support in the countries to which they are transferred, and that they will be promptly resettled if found to be refugees.

6. Arbitrary or indefinite detention at any stage of the refugee determination process is unacceptable.
7. People who seek asylum should live in the Australian community. Respect for their humanity demands that they have the right to work, access to basic services, and to some financial support if they cannot find work. The financial burden of their support should be accepted by the Government and not be shifted to the community sector.
8. Children should not be held in detention in Australia or in offshore detention centres, but housed in the Australian community with the full range of services necessary for their welfare. Young unaccompanied children and adults, families with children and those with mental and physical health issues should also be carefully supported when living in the community.
9. In the Catholic tradition, if people are to live with dignity their family ties are essential. People should have the opportunity to be reunited with separated close family members promptly once they are found to be refugees.
10. Those who have exhausted all appeals against rejection of their claims but who cannot be returned to their countries should not be compelled by destitution to return in keeping with the principle of non-refoulement. *

*Article 33 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees outlines the principle of *non-refoulement*. According to this principle, parties must not forcibly expel or return (*refouler*) a refugee to a situation where their life or freedom may be threatened on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.



Advisory Group Terms of Reference

[last updated 15th February, 2016]

Jesuit Social Services and Cabrini Health are partnering in an asylum seeker advocacy project that aims to influence the hearts and minds of Catholic communities and the broader Australian society.

The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum seeks to connect, support, encourage and resource Catholic people, entities and organisations who want to express their support for people seeking asylum.

The Alliance is intended to complement the current advocacy and activity in support of asylum seekers from Catholic leaders and institutions and local communities.

Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum Advisory Group

The Advisory Group meets twice a year or as required and includes:

Organisation
Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office
Australian Catholic Social Justice Council
Australian Catholic University
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (Observer Status)
Caritas
Catholic Health Australia
Catholic Social Services Australia
Catholic Mission
Catholic Religious Australia
Catholic in Coalition for Justice and Peace
National Catholic Education Commission
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia

Terms of reference:

1. To actively engage the respective Catholic networks and communities by providing them with information and opportunities to participate in campaign activities, and by feeding information and ideas sourced from those communities back to the Alliance.
2. To speak out publicly with a unified Catholic voice on shared principles and provide public commentary (where agreed) on policy to influence government.

Responsive Decision-Making Process

The Advisory Group will agree to a responsive decision-making process to facilitate CAPSA being able to achieve its objectives.