



Uniting Church in Australia Assembly

Media Statement

The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia welcomes the following statement by Australian church leaders:

Joint Statement by Christian leaders on the passing of the asylum seeker legislation

As Australian church leaders, we stand together to express our grave concern at the passing of legislation to allow for the offshore processing and indefinite detention of asylum seekers.

Core to the Christian faith is the principle of ‘welcoming the stranger’, and Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan guides us as we seek to care for those who are vulnerable and marginalised in society. As Christians, we are called to cross the road to help, to not turn away those in need.

The Seventh Forum of the National Council of Churches in Australia in 2010 called on all political parties to meet Australia’s responsibilities by “accommodating and processing in Australia asylum seekers who reach Australian territory”.

Australia is an open and hospitable country. Many of our churches grew here as a result of people having fled places of violence or migrating to seek better futures for their families.

We welcome the commitment of the Government to increase the number of places in our humanitarian program to 20,000 and hope that it will continue to increase the program as the Houston Panel has recommended.

However, we are deeply troubled by the potential for asylum seekers to suffer adverse mental health consequences and to experience other detrimental impacts as a result of this legislation. We are concerned that this damages our credibility and, in particular, our ability to negotiate a humane regional system of protection.

Finding answers to this complicated humanitarian challenge is difficult. As long as our world is broken and countries are ravaged by war, then people will flee violence and persecution.

But as a rich and secure nation, Australia has a particular responsibility to ensure that we work positively with other nations to develop a range of strategies that are grounded in compassion and that seek to honour the moral responsibility we have to victims of violence and persecution.

It is only through such cooperation that we can provide asylum seekers with real alternatives to undertaking a desperate boat journey to find safety.

SIGNATORIES

The Most Reverend Doctor Phillip Aspinall
Primate, Anglican Church in Australia

Reverend Craig Brown
Federal Coordinator, Churches of Christ in Australia

Commissioner James Condon
Australia Eastern Territory, The Salvation Army

Ms Maxine Cooper
Yearly Meeting Clerk, Religious Society of Friends

Reverend Professor Andrew Dutney
President, Uniting Church in Australia

Dr Joe Goodall
Moderator, Congregational Federation of Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand

The Most Reverend Denis Hart
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

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