

Is Australia in crisis? DO HUMAN RIGHTS MATTER?



A **Forum**
on our treatment of **Asylum Seekers** and **Refugees**

Kaleide Theatre, RMIT
360 Swanston St Melbourne

MONDAY
26 AUGUST 2013
6.30 - 8.30pm

Arrival & refreshments from 6pm

Entry by Donation

Enquiries : 0409 252 673

REFUGEE ADVOCACY NETWORK

A COALITION OF VICTORIAN GROUPS CAMPAIGNING
FOR RIGHTS FOR REFUGEES IN AUSTRALIA

refugeeadvocacynetwork.org



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Bishop Philip Huggins
Vice-Chair of Australian
Churches Refugee Taskforce

A Forum on our treatment of Asylum Seekers and Refugees

12 years ago, the Tampa Incident was a key focus in an election campaign. The Howard Government's response drew worldwide attention, and sharp criticism from legal experts and human rights advocates. Offshore processing, known as The Pacific Solution, was established on Nauru, and later on Manus Island. The suffering of those held in these detention centres has been well documented, and international human rights agencies condemn Australia for these harsh policies of deterrence. In 2007 the Rudd Government moved to close these centres.

However, the policies of deterrence have continued relentlessly, with an extensive network of detention centres established across Australia, and on Christmas Island. Under the Gillard Government off-shore processing was re-established, and we have appalling accounts of despair and misery from Nauru and Manus Island. The whole of the Australian mainland has been excised from the Migration zone, in order to reduce our legal obligations to asylum seekers. In August 2012 the No Advantage principle was adopted, resulting in hundreds of asylum seekers being held in detention with no action taken to assess their claims for refugee status. People released in the community are denied the right to work, and are denied basic supports.

With an election just weeks away, the arrival of asylum seekers in leaky boats is being framed as something of a national emergency, indeed, a threat to our sovereignty. The Rudd Government has announced the most radical plan yet, by denying asylum seekers any hope of future resettlement in Australia, through a 'deal' in which Papua New Guinea in exchange for increased levels of aid funding.

Increasing numbers of people are fleeing from persecution in many countries in and near our region. Seeking asylum is an established legal and human right, and as the wealthiest country in our region, it should be possible for Australia to offer protection and resettlement to asylum seekers. All people seeking asylum undergo a rigorous assessment process to determine whether they should be granted refugee status. Over the last decade, 90% of those who arrived by boat were found to have legitimate claims for refugee status.

HOW IS IT THAT AUSTRALIA, AS A SIGNATORY TO THE REFUGEE CONVENTION AND A CHAMPION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES, HAS BECOME SO INTENT ON DENYING PEOPLE THEIR RIGHT TO SEEK ASYLUM?

What has happened to the Australian sense of the 'Fair Go'?

DON'T MISS THIS IMPORTANT EXAMINATION OF CURRENT ISSUES AND POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES WITH EXPERTS:

Julian Burnside AO QC is a Barrister and Human Rights Advocate. Julian has been active in public debate and raising community awareness on the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees since the Tampa Incident in 2001.

Prof. William Maley is Director Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific, and specialises in Australian Government And Politics, International Relations, Migration, and Political Theory And Political Philosophy. He is the Vice-President of the Refugee Council of Australia, and a member of the Australian Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP).

Dr. Leanne Weber, School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University. Leanne researches border control using criminological and human rights perspectives. She is Deputy Director of the Border Crossing Observatory hosted at Monash University and is the co-author of 'Globalization and Borders: Death at the Global Frontier'. Leanne is a Senior Research Fellow specializing in migration policing and has been contributing to the recent public debate on border control.

Bishop Philip Huggins is the Vice-Chair of the recently formed Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce and is the Chair of the Melbourne Anglican Diocese's Social Responsibilities Committee. He also Chairs the Board of the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Bishop Philip is responsible for the seven-metre banner that has just been installed on one of the spires of St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne which proclaims the words 'LET'S FULLY WELCOME REFUGEES'.