



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishop Long welcomes announcement Australia will accept 12,000 more refugees

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Australia has a primary obligation to protect desperately vulnerable people and so I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement today that an extra 12,000 refugees will be accepted from Syria and Iraq.

'This is a generous response to suffering that demonstrates the compassion of the Australian people,' says Bishop Vincent Long, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council.

'These are the sort of vulnerable people we should focus on when responding to claims for refugee status,' he added.

Bishop Long was speaking at the launch of the Australian Catholic Bishops' 2015-2016 Social Justice Statement entitled, 'For Those Who've Come Across the Seas: Justice for refugees and asylum seekers'.

The Statement calls for the processing of asylum seekers claims onshore and for the limitation of detention in immigration facilities to the shortest period possible to undertake identity, health and security checks. The Bishops say that no child should be detained solely on the basis of their immigration status and affirm that all children are entitled to a healthy family life with the support and nurture of their parents.

The Bishops call on the government to work:

- globally to develop in-country solutions that can effectively protect displaced people
- regionally to increase genuine protection spaces in countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, and
- locally by substantially increasing Australia's humanitarian intake.

Bishop Long said, 'Australia, like every other nation, has the right to regulate migration flows and assess the status of people seeking protection within its borders. And, certainly, we should be working to stop people smuggling and preventing deaths at sea. But these concerns must not lead us to treat asylum seekers and refugees with cruelty, harshness and injustice.'

'Australia cannot claim the moral high ground and justify its policies by claiming they prevent deaths of asylum seekers at sea, when it offers no other way of giving protection and organising any avenue of safe arrival,' Bishop Long stated.

Launching the Statement, Mr Phil Glendenning, President of the Refugee Council of Australia, said, 'We have to stop treating asylum seekers as if we are at war with them. Compassion is not weakness – it is our greatest civilising strength. Australia has benefited greatly through the contribution of generations of immigrants, including those who were refugees and asylum seekers. They have brought wonderful diversity to our culture, lent their skills and hard work to the labour market and added youth and vitality to the nation.'

Bishop Long added that Australia must realise we are blessed because we do have the means to welcome our brothers and sisters. ‘There is another way; a way to make a real difference. This other way is characterised by acceptance, leadership and generosity.’

The 2015-2016 Social Justice Statement can be downloaded from the [Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website](#)

Media queries, please contact– Aoife Connors on 0450 348 597 or media@catholic.org.au