



National Council of Churches in Australia

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from the National Council of Churches in Australia

It's Time for a Humane, Bipartisan Approach to the Treatment of Asylum Seekers

Asylum seekers are people in need of care and not to be feared, say Australian Churches.

At the recent National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) triennial Forum, the Churches affirmed the Australian Government's right and responsibility to ensure legitimate border protection but also expressed grave concern over the treatment of asylum seekers.

The Churches believe that it is time for the major political parties to work toward a humane, bipartisan approach to the treatment of asylum seekers. To look to an approach that fulfils our international obligations and enhances Australia's reputation as a just and humane global citizen.

Reverend Tara Curlewis, NCCA General Secretary, said, "It is time that both political parties stop misleading our community by painting pictures of asylum seekers as people to be feared. Asylum seekers are vulnerable, often traumatised people fleeing conflict and persecution. As a safe and secure country we must treat asylum seekers with compassion rather than placing them in detention in enforced limbo.

"Australia's Churches are calling for the humane treatment of asylum seekers, the expeditious processing of their protection claims and a new bipartisan commitment to accommodate asylum seekers within Australia while claims are assessed.

"Australian Churches have repeatedly stated strong opposition to Government approaches that transfer processing from Australian territory. Past experiences processing asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island have demonstrated the devastating effects such policies can have on people's lives, such as extended separation from families and serious mental health problems. These methods have caused increased traumatising, difficulty integrating into community life and problems finding jobs once released into Australian communities. We are concerned that proposals for a processing centre in East Timor or any other country will repeat previous mistakes and fail to adequately protect the rights of asylum seekers," said Rev Curlewis.

"It is past time for a bipartisan approach which recognises the spirit of generosity and hospitality that has made Australia the country it is today.

"We remind Australia's political parties that Australia has committed, as a signatory to the Refugee Convention, to assess each asylum seeker case according to agreed criteria. We must take this commitment seriously," said Rev. Curlewis.

Rev Tara Curlewis is available for Interview
Media Enquiries: Debra Porter (02) 9299 2215

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379 Kent Street Sydney

✉ Locked Bag 199
Sydney NSW 1230

☎ (+61 2) 9299 2215

☎ (+61 2) 9262 4514

🌐 www.ncca.org.au

ABN 64 493 941 795