



CCJP

CATHOLICS IN COALITION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

PO Box A21
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Scott Morrison MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

10th May 2013

Dear Mr Morrison,

Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace (CCJP) is a coalition of individuals and groups, working for the emergence of just social structures in Australia and overseas. It works as an integral part of the Church at the service of the world and especially for victims of injustice. CCJP aims to act in solidarity with the poor, deprived and oppressed people of Australia and the world in the struggle for justice and peace.

Offshore processing

It is of great distress to our many members to see the recent reports about the severely inadequate physical and medical conditions endured by asylum seekers on both Manus Island and Nauru. These reports by ABC News, taken from a Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) submission and a Four Corners documentary, show that asylum seekers' health, safety and welfare are in grave risk.

The DIAC submission about the Manus Island Centre highlights problems with water supply, electricity supply, accommodation structures, heat and mosquitoes as well as concerns about its location noting it is in 'a low-lying swampy area subject to localised inundation which encourages mosquito breeding'. The fact that the Government restricts journalist access and that the Australian Human Rights Commission has not been invited to review the centres, increases the cause for concern among our members.

The Four Corners programme estimates that it has so far cost \$1 million per asylum seeker for the Nauru centre and that the Government will spend \$2.3 billion over the next 4 years on off-shore processing centres. At a time when the Government is seeking to reduce its expenditure, the continuation of any offshore processing policy makes no economic sense.

It is also a morally unacceptable one. The mental health risks posed by indefinite detention and specifically by off-shore detention have been highlighted through several reports and documentaries. When such risks are combined with poor



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planning, poor and insanitary housing and, as Dr. John Vallentine stated in the Four Corners programme, insufficient and inadequate medical supplies, then to put any person, not to mention children and sick people, into such conditions is inhumane.

CCJP asks you to reverse your off-shore process policy and to call for the closure of all off-shore processing centres.

If off-shore processing remain a policy of both Government and Opposition the CCJP call for an independent body, such as the Australian Human Rights Commission, to conduct a full and open review of the Manus Island and Nauru detention centres. This review should cover the medical service and supplies, the accommodation and facilities, as well as the 'No Advantage' rule in order to better manage the physical and mental health, safety and welfare of the people detained at these centres and to reduce the stress, uncertainty and lack of clarity they face.

The welfare of families and children on bridging visas in the community

While we are glad to hear that asylum seeker families will be moved from offshore processing centres into the community on bridging visas, we are very concerned that the conditions of the bridging visas will force these families to live in deplorable conditions. We ask you to make it part of your policy that any asylum seeker moved onto a bridging visa will have the opportunity to seek work.

Recent policy changes deny this right to some asylum seekers based on their time and mode of arrival in Australia. Without work rights, asylum seeker families could live in a limbo of uncertainty and social exclusion for years.

CCJP knows from first-hand experience that often these families live in dire poverty and are dependent on hand-outs of food and other donations in order to provide the basic necessities.

We ask you to support work rights for all asylum seekers whilst their asylum applications are processed. This will enable them to move towards financial self-sufficiency and could therefore result in significant financial savings from a budgetary perspective.

Yours sincerely,

Sr. Anne Lane pvbm
On behalf of Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace