



CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES
IN NEW SOUTH WALES
CLRI(NSW)

Prophetic. Pro-Active. Prayerful.

RELIGIOUS LEADERS URGE POLITICAL LEADERS TO ACT WITH COMPASSION

The Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW [CLRI(NSW)] has expressed serious concern about the proposed direction of both major parties in their proposed treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.

‘There is a desperate need for leadership from all sides of politics,’ said Sister Marie Duffy rsm, president of CLRI(NSW). ‘We are concerned that the scaremongering and tough rhetoric of politicians, who should be showing strong and compassionate leadership, are playing on the fears of the Australian community and creating false assumptions.

We applaud the Prime Minister’s vision of negotiating a regional solution, but is it any more than an alternative to the Coalition’s ‘Pacific Solution’? Without rational discussion, without accompanying compassionate measures, and without bi-partisan support, it seems as if the proposals at this stage have done little more than inflame the debate and perpetuate misinformation about miniscule numbers of people who are fleeing desperate situations. ‘We believe that Australia is better than this.’

Religious women and men in Australia have worked for many years with asylum seekers and refugees and they point out, asylum seekers are not criminals. They are people fleeing treatment and conditions unimaginable to most Australians. They do not deserve to be punished in the ways that both major parties are proposing.

Religious leaders ask that the real facts regarding asylum seekers be stated clearly by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. And these facts are irrefutable.

We know that 90% of boat people are found to be genuine refugees – people in real fear for their lives, people who have no other way of escaping their countries (because there is no queue there, and their only option is torture and death).’

We also know that measured against 42 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, including 16 million refugees and asylum seekers, Australia’s annual allocation of fewer than 14,000 places under the humanitarian program is small. The number of boat people is only a tiny fraction of this number.

‘ We urge leaders not to use asylum seekers as political footballs in the lead-up to the coming election, but to help relieve ill-founded anxieties, and demonstrate that we as a nation are more decent, compassionate and just than our leaders seem to believe.’

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