

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

Ms Eve Gallagher
Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in New South Wales
PO Box 259
ROSEBERY NSW 1445
4 DEC 2003

Dear Ms Gallagher

Thank you for your correspondence of 21 October 2003 to the Prime Minister regarding the SIEV X tragedy. The Prime Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf I apologise for the delay in responding.

Your views on the above issue have been noted. As you may be aware, the Senate Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident found that there was no evidence of negligence or dereliction of duty by Australian agencies in relation to the SIEV X tragedy.

Australia has a proud humanitarian record and the government remains committed to meeting its humanitarian obligations. Australia is one of only nine countries in the world which operate dedicated resettlement programmes, demonstrating this country's ongoing commitment to assist those in greatest need of resettlement. In situations where the Australian government has intercepted asylum seekers, the government has ensured that they are properly cared for, through the provision of appropriate food, shelter, medical assistance and other supplies.

Australia ensures that asylum seekers have an opportunity to have any claims to refugee status determined, and that they are not returned to a place of danger. The government acts decisively but compassionately to protect Australia's territorial integrity and combat people smuggling in the region.

Yours sincerely

Joshua Frydenberg
Senior Adviser