

CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

CLRI (NSW)

ABN: 52 476 362 010

Member of the Catholic Church Religious Group

Mr John Howard
Prime Minister
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Mr Howard,

The three thousand members of CLRI (NSW) deplore, in strongest terms, the proposed legislative changes which will send off-shore all asylum seekers who arrive by boat.

You are aware of our obligations under the Refugee Convention to treat asylum seekers with due compassion and care. Article 31 of the Convention requires that signatories do not penalise refugees on the basis of their mode of arrival. Our commitments to this Convention cannot be put aside at the whim of political pragmatism or national interest. To do so is to render as transitory and unimportant all the international agreements to which Australia is a signatory.

Sending asylum seekers off-shore to Nauru and Manus Island flies in the face of all the recommendations of the Palmer Inquiry. Will children again be kept in detention centres? What provisions will be made for the physical and mental care of those in detention? What structures will be put in place to ensure the independent oversight of asylum seekers arriving by boat?

We have great concerns regarding the formulation of immigration policy. These proposed changes have all the hallmarks of policy "on the run", rather than policy which evolves from a review of existing policy involving comprehensive consultation with all those involved in creating and administering policy as well as those who are or have been detained.

Many of our members are involved in the settlement and support of asylum seekers and humanitarian refugees. Daily they see the trauma, the anguish, the loss and difficulties faced by refugees. Detaining asylum seekers in remote Pacific islands with few services and resources may placate the anxieties of our nearest neighbours but it lacks any semblance of compassion or genuine compliance with our international obligations.

Our members are anxious to hear from you.

Yours sincerely,
(Sr) Libby Rogerson ibvm
for CLRI (NSW)
18 April 2006
cc Senator Amanda Vanstone

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

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