

**CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**CLRI (NSW)**

**ABN: 52 476 362 010**  
**Member of the Catholic Church Religious Group**

Senator Christopher Ellison  
The Senate  
Parliament House Canberra  
ACT 2600

Dear Senator Ellison,

Your recent remarks regarding the West Papuan refugees have created great disquiet among the more than three thousand members of CLRI NSW.

The right to seek asylum from persecution, discrimination or threats to life on the basis of race, religion, nationality or political affiliation is a fundamental human right and, as a signatory to the International Refugee Convention, Australia is seen to uphold this right.

Assessing asylum claims on the basis of "national interest" is in direct contradiction to the spirit and the letter of the Refugee Convention. Subsuming the essentials of the Refugee Convention to "national interest" indicates a cavalier attitude to conventions which underpin and protect human rights. Many nations look to stable democracies, such as Australia, to take the lead in preserving and enriching human rights. It would be tragic if, under the umbrella of "national interest", we were seen to be undermining basic human rights.

While we appreciate the complexity of the West Papuan situation and our relationship with Indonesia, fundamental human rights cannot be sacrificed in the interests of border protection and bi-lateral relationships. Nor can we jeopardise the safety of asylum seekers, their families and friends by involving, in the refugee determination process, the country alleged to be the persecutor.

We urge you to allay the fears of many asylum seekers, and those who work with them, that our commitment to the Refugee Convention is being weakened.

We look forward to hearing from you on this urgent matter.

Yours sincerely,

Libby Rogerson ibvm  
*for CLRI (NSW)*

**SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

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