



Office of Senator Chris Evans
Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship

Sister Grace Ellul SM
Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW
Social Justice Committee
PO Box 259
ROSEBERY NSW 1445

Dear Sister Ellul

Thank you for your letter of 27 October 2008, on behalf of the Social Justice Committee of the Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in New South Wales, concerning the processing of the asylum claims of the people who recently arrived unauthorised in our northern waters and who have been taken to Christmas Island. The Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf. I regret the delay in responding.

The Minister appreciates your feedback and your support in regard to the Rudd Government's new approach to refugees and asylum seekers. The Government's election platform included a commitment to reform and a more humane treatment of those seeking our protection.

The Minister acknowledges that in the past, there has been strong criticism of the processing of protection claims by those persons whose unauthorised arrival was at an excised offshore place and who are now processed on Christmas Island.

As part of the 'New Directions in Detention', the Minister announced a new processing regime for those who arrive in an excised place and claim protection, to remedy those deficiencies, commensurate with assistance available to people claiming asylum onshore.

Henceforward, asylum seekers will receive publicly funded advice and assistance, access to independent review of unfavourable decisions and external scrutiny by the Immigration Ombudsman. These measures will build on strengthened procedural guidance for departmental decision-makers.

All unauthorised boat arrivals, including those who arrived recently, will be treated humanely and their asylum claims will be assessed speedily within the improved processing regime.

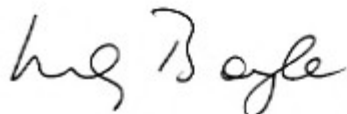
In totality, these robust processes will deliver outcomes in which we can be confident and will reassure the world that we are meeting our international commitments.

The integrity of these processes will reinforce our capacity to expedite the return to their home country of people found not to be in need of protection. With the abolition of the Temporary Protection Visa regime, people found to be owed protection will be allowed to apply for and be granted a permanent visa to remain in Australia.

The Minister will look forward to working together with you and the members of your Committee in implementing the Government's detention reforms.

Thank you for bringing the views of your organisation to the Minister's attention.

Yours sincerely



Dr Michael Boyle
Chief of Staff

5 January 2009