



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

Prophetic. Pro-Active. Prayerful.

Mr Kevin Rudd
Prime Minister
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

April 14, 2010

Dear Mr Rudd,

I write on behalf of the Social Justice committee within the NSW Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes. CLRI (NSW) represents approximately 3,500 Catholic religious, men and women, throughout the state, as well as many people working in organisations run by religious institutes.

The decision to suspend the processing of Sri Lankan and Afghani asylum seekers is inherently wrong and grossly unfair. It is immoral and unethical because human beings, desperate and traumatised human beings, are being used as instruments in a plan to deter asylum seekers and people smugglers. They are the “sticks” wielded by your government against people smuggling. This decision is in contravention of Article 3 of the Refugee Convention which asks that asylum seekers be processed “without discrimination as to race, religion or country of origin.” It is wrong because the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that children should be detained only as a last resort and for the shortest period of time. It is wrong to create an impression that “changing conditions” ensure that asylum seekers from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan will be repatriated to safety. No amount of verbal sophistry can disguise the fact that, for the Australian government, Afghanistan is unsafe for travelling Australians and safe for returned Afghans.

This decision leaves asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka in limbo – uncertain and unsure. The members of CLRI NSW who have worked for many years with refugees and asylum seekers have, unfortunately, a great deal of evidence to show just what an impact prolonged insecurity and detention has on people, particularly children - mental illness, trauma, sickness, family break down and much more. Professor Patrick McGorry, Australian of the Year, described detention centres “as factories for producing mental illness and mental disorder.”

It seems that human dignity, fairness and respect for suffering human beings are to be sacrificed on the altar of political populism. We had hoped for so much from your government and it began so well– the abolition of temporary protection visas and the payment of detention charges, the putting in place of fairer and more efficient procedures for processing asylum seeker claims and your

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

PO Box 259, ROSEBERY 1445
(72 Rosebery Avenue)

Ph: (02) 9663 2199 Email: clrinsw@ozemail.com.au Website: www.clrinsw.org

commitment to lessening the length of time an asylum seeker could be detained – all undermined and negated.

The members of CLRI(NSW) urge you to reconsider the decision to suspend the processing of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

We would be more than happy to meet with you or members of your department to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Libby Rogerson ibvm". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Libby Rogerson ibvm
for CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Committee