



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

7 October, 2011

Dear Elected Representative

Re: Refugee Policy

I write on behalf of the NSW Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes to express our grave concern about the proposed legislation regarding asylum seekers and refugees. CLRI numbers approximately 3,500 Catholic religious women and men, and their Associates, and we have a long history of involvement with asylum seekers and refugees. We appeal to you at this critical juncture in our history for justice and compassion for these people.

We believe that we are at a significant crossroads as a nation, and that the debate this week will not only help to define the nature of our political leadership, but indeed will influence irrevocably the underpinning culture of our nation and people.

We have been appalled by the proposed legislation and by the level of debate. The hysterical, destructive and toxic political rhetoric has demonstrated how easily we have abandoned truth for political expediency. The misinformation and fear-mongering engendered by the tabloid press, the radio shock jocks and some politicians shames us all. Surely, as a nation, we are better than this?

As has been indicated by many Australians, the proposed legislation abrogates your stated policies, places unprecedented power in the hands of Ministers of Immigration, weakens the protections for asylum seekers, and eliminates any responsibility on the part of government to protect the human rights of asylum seekers.

We urge in the strongest possible terms, that you abandon your plans for off-shore processing and that you implement the vision you announced three years ago as your policy platform:

- **To process asylum seekers on-shore**
- **To use detention as a policy of last resort – and only for the purposes of health, security and identity checks**
- **To uphold our international obligations regarding refugees and asylum seekers**
- **To establish independent (administrative or judicial) review panels**
- **To exercise justice and compassion towards those seeking protection.**

We need leaders who will give accurate information and then challenge us, as Australians, to be people of truth, compassion, generosity, tolerance and acceptance. At this critical time, you have such an opportunity.

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for CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Committee

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