



MEDIA RELEASE

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Community and church groups call for a more humane approach to people seeking asylum

Seventy one Catholic organisations and leaders from across the country have joined forces to renounce the immigration policies of both major political parties as inhumane and contrary to Australia's moral and international obligations.

The organisations endorsed a statement condemning policies that impact severely on the rights, dignity and wellbeing of people seeking asylum in this country. They expressed strong concern about the treatment of children, who have little control over their circumstances and are particularly vulnerable.

A Catholic consortium that provides community detention services in Victoria (Jesuit Social Services, MacKillop Family Services and CatholicCare) prepared the document due to their concerns about refugee and asylum seeker policy.

Commenting on the release of the statement, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, Julie Edwards said, "Detention centres are no place for children, and the impact of confinement will have long-term impacts on their mental and physical health. Sending children and young people offshore raises additional health concerns such as malaria and the risk of abuse.

"Through our work with asylum seekers and refugees in the community, many of us know the long lasting impacts on dignity and wellbeing that policies in this area can have. At last count there were over 8,500 people in immigration detention, including 1,731 children, as well as 15,000 asylum seekers living in the community. We must support these people, not shun them."

Supporters of the statement include Bishops, peak bodies of Catholic health services, social services, and religious orders, while an online petition has been established to garner support from the wider community.

Fr Joe Caddy, CEO of CatholicCare Melbourne, noted the importance of speaking out on this issue, "As groups and organisations committed to the wellbeing and dignity of all people we felt a need to come together and speak out. As a community we must accept that there can be a more humane way to respond to this issue."

The statement endorses principles on seeking asylum developed by the Refugee Council of Australia. Micaela Cronin, CEO of MacKillop Family Services, said, "The principles offer a way for Australia to restore its credibility and reputation for a fair go. We invite members of the community to show their support by signing our petition."

An online petition has been established at <http://asylumseekercampaign.com.au/>

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