

MEDIA STATEMENT

8th March 2013

Jesuit Social Services' statement on Coalition asylum seeker proposals

Jesuit Social Services condemns in the strongest possible terms the proposal by the Shadow Minister of Immigration, Mr Scott Morrison, to suspend the release of asylum seekers into the community and to impose heavy restrictions on those who are already in the community. It is a further attempt to portray asylum seekers as criminals.

The facts are that asylum seekers have a right under the UNHCR convention to seek asylum in Australia, that few asylum seekers have been accused of crimes, and that detention has been shown to damage the mental health of asylum seekers.

Jesuit Social Services also deplores the political context within which Mr Morrison made his remarks. In its comments on refugees the Coalition has continually represented the Government as not treating asylum seekers harshly enough. It has continually proposed measures harsher than the Government can countenance.

This distracts from the suffering caused to asylum seekers under the present Government policy, and particularly the denial of work rights, the delay in processing claims and so of reuniting families, and the exiguous support offered to asylum seekers who have arrived in Australia after the release of the Houston report in August 2012. Together these measures fail to respect the humanity of asylum seekers to whom Australia has a responsibility.

Jesuit Social Services calls on members of both political parties to accept Australia's responsibility towards asylum seekers according to the terms of the UNHCR Convention to which Australia is a signatory, to speak honestly of them and to act justly and with a proper compassion towards them.

Jesuit Social Services is a not-for-profit organisation which works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

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