



DECEMBER 2011

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MIGRANT & REFUGEE OFFICE



Merry Christmas

News

Special Interest

- Thinking Migration
- World Council of Churches Migration Conference
- Presentation of Migration experience in Australia
- Increase humanitarian intake to help prevent asylum tragedy at sea

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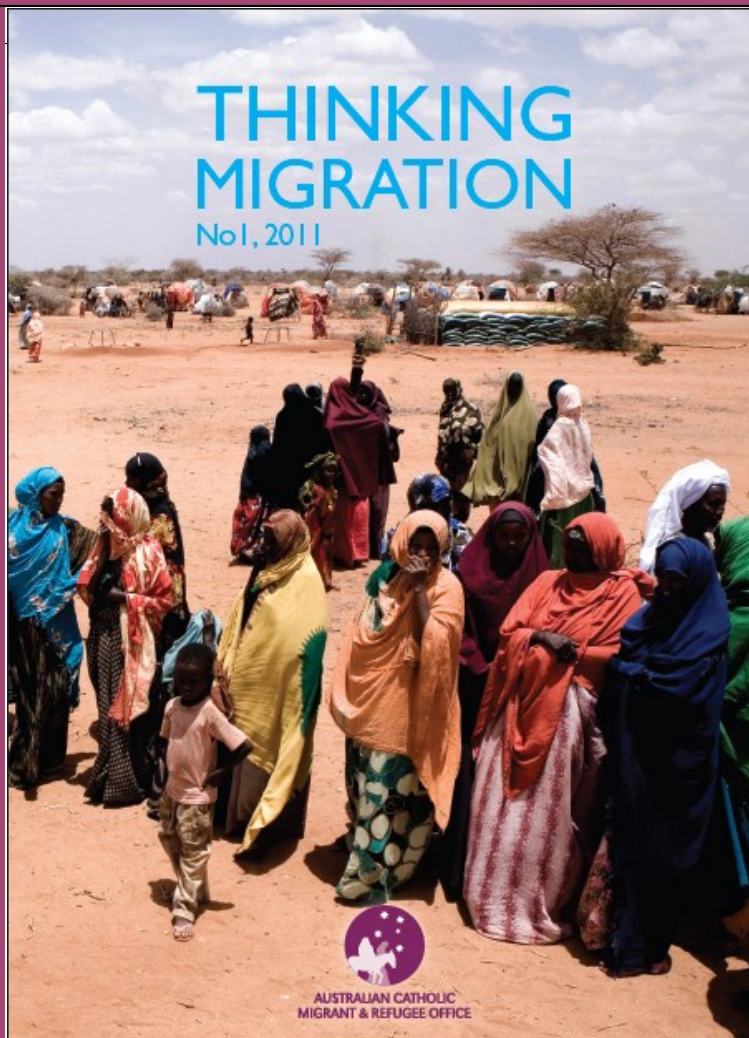
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I am delighted to launch the first issue of "*Thinking Migration*" for the year 2011, a publication of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, a ministry of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Why is the Catholic Church so much "Thinking Migration"? Because "nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo" in the hearts of the Disciples of Christ." (GS, Preface) The Catholic Church has a long history of commitment to migrants and refugees and continues to be at the forefront in providing guiding principles and pastoral care at a grassroots level.

Mass Migrations is undoubtedly one of the genuinely human and recognizable "signs of the times" today. This is a phenomenon which during the centuries can be said to have taken on structural characteristics, representing an important presence in the labor market world-wide, a consequence, among other things, of the fast take off of globalization. (Benedict XVI, 92 World Day of Migrants). Mass migration is a key building block and a stark outcome of globalisation and will continue to be a major manipulator in determining the social, religious, political and economic life for the foreseeable future.

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE





Mass migration is, of course, not a new phenomenon, but it poses questions of political and moral nature. Politically, migrants and refugees are people who cross borders between states and nations. They move from one country to another in search of protection and with the hope of a better life. Migrants and refugees are often treated as criminals and terrorists, thus, allowing for the growing violation of their human rights: the traffic of humans, especially of minors and women, often for sexual exploitation; the increase of asylum seekers, displaced people and of those categorised as irregular migrants, who, due to their precarious legal status, are exposed to the harshest and most degrading work.

In some countries, the tightening of migration legislation that is ever more rigid and discriminating reveals the ongoing tension between migration policies and the people's struggle for survival and protection. On one hand, they call for negotiation of their fundamental individual and political rights; on the other hand, they pose questions to the receiving society that may become divisive and complex and somehow hinder a solution satisfactory to all parties.

Central to the moral nature is the biblical memory of the exile and the exodus and the call to treat and love the "alien amongst you" as "one of your own citizen" (Lev 19:33). Jesus identifies himself with the foreigner longing for welcome and hospitality and determines one's eternal blessedness on whether or not welcome and hospitality are offered or denied. (Mt 25:35). Christians need to be vigilant against the danger to consider migrants and refugees as merely recipients of charitable activities and customers of social services. For the Disciples of Christ, migrants and refugees are children of God: members of the one body of Christ.

Our daily experience tells us that migrants and refugees offer privileged avenues for the spread of the Kingdom of God.

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"Thinking Migration" intends to be a forum to echo the thoughts and reflections of the Catholic Church in Australia who, aware of the complexity of the matter, focus on the sacredness of the human being and is committed to welcome migrants and refugees.

Thinking Migration is comprised of four parts. The first part features the two key-note talks given to the participants to the Second National Conference on the Pastoral Care to Migrants and Refugees in Australia, "Widen the Space of Your Tent" (Sydney 27-29 October, 2009). The second part focuses on the pastoral visit to migrant chaplains and migrant communities by His Excellency Arch. Antonio Maria Veglió and Rev Fr Gabriele Bentoglio, President and Under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Migrant and Itinerant People, Holy See. (Australia May 3 – 14, 2011). The third part publishes the proceedings of the Inaugural Colloquium on Ethics and Migration, dedicated to the memory of the late Bishop Joseph Grech (Melbourne September 8, 2011). At the beginning of the year 2011, ACMRO began collaborating with various academic Institutions to offer students the possibility to deepen the study of migration and build a platform to further a better and wider educational service. The final Essay of this issue represents the end result of this promising partnership.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Australian Catholic Bishops, the Clergy, the men and women of religious Congregations and the lay pastoral workers for the support, encouragement, care and leadership they provide in the ministry to migrants and refugees. I look with gratitude to the ACMRO Staff who are an outstanding, enthusiastic and concrete expression of this ministry.

Fr Maurizio Pettenà CS

National Director

Canberra, ACMRO November 4, 2011

Memory of St Charles Borromeo.





Migration changes ecclesial landscapes

How is migration changing the world's ecclesial landscapes? What are these changes, and how do they impact migrant communities? What can churches do to promote acceptance of diversity and devise new answers to the theological question, "Who is my neighbour?" in an increasingly globalized world.

A three-day World Council of Churches (WCC) regional conference in Beirut, Lebanon explored these questions, gathering narratives of the enriching experiences of thirty participants from Africa, Europe and the Middle East, representing churches, ecumenical organizations and non-governmental activist groups.

The conference was organized by the WCC programme on **Just and Inclusive Communities**, and hosted by the **Middle East Council of Churches** at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut from 5-7 December.

Participants from Africa reflected on how migration is not a new phenomenon, but has always been present, with people on the move for their livelihood. It was also noted that in Africa internal migration has outnumbered external migration.

Presenters pointed out poverty, unemployment and conflict as the major reasons behind mass migration, which is taking place in Africa and beyond. With these challenges, they said, the theology of welcoming and loving one's neighbour becomes more crucial than ever before.

Contributing to the discussions, Sarah Silomba Kaulule, vice-moderator of the WCC Faith and Order Commission, focused on migrants' situation in Zambia saying that changing ecclesial landscapes demand that we incorporate issues of interfaith relations, identity, justice, racism, advocacy and diakonia in dealing with migrants as our neighbours.

"The church's mission is to receive migrants and refugees. For this we need a strong foundation that does not cause divisions and displacements in the churches, but helps us to understand and accept each other as we pursue the ecumenical goal of 'called to be one'," she said.

Kaulule encouraged the churches to overcome the challenges in providing a safe space for all, including migrants, who often are abused and fall prey to human trafficking, a common practice around borders.

Experiences shared by participants showed how migrants face social exclusion, and are treated as the "other".



They also addressed the issues of gender relations and family dynamics. It was highlighted that due to changes in power relations when women take up the role of breadwinner, incidents of domestic violence have occurred.

In addition, women migrants face sexual abuse in some situations. To challenge this violence and support migrant women, churches reaffirmed their role in providing a faith-based and ethical viewpoint from which to address these issues.

While reviewing the outcomes from the discussions, participants quoted several biblical references calling the faithful to "liberate the most disadvantaged and the marginalized", an approach which can be embodied by the churches through enhanced and engaging efforts towards supporting migrant communities.



Participants of the WCC Global Ecumenical Network on Migration conference in Beirut, Lebanon. 7th December 2011

The particular situation of migrants in Europe raised issues of identity, cultural diversity and dynamics between older churches and the new international churches that are sometimes called "migrant churches".

Dr Gerrit Noort, director of the Netherlands Mission Council, spoke about the challenges posed by multiculturalism. He said, "Faith communities and churches have been the social sites and spaces for experiments in dealing with issues of cultural diversity in Europe."

Giving an example from the Netherlands, Noort said, "the 'old' and 'new' churches in the Netherlands are increasingly aware of each other, and are more pro-active in ecumenical cooperation."

These changes in the ecclesial landscape, according to Noort, are likely to influence and shape the relationship between the churches in the direction of a more collaborative ecumenical cooperation to support cultural diversity.



Responding to migration dynamics

The dynamics of the “Arab Spring” and its impact on migration in the Middle East brought some significant revelations. Presenters from the region as well as the hosts shared their views about the complexity of political developments, due to which many people are choosing to migrate.

Amidst the current wave of migration, where people are fleeing political turmoil, conflict and persecution, promoting respect for religious minorities and initiating meaningful interreligious dialogue is especially pertinent, according to the participants.

Dr Audeh B. Quawas from Jordan, a member of the WCC Central Committee and member of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem commented, “To promote respect for religious minorities and to initiate a positive dialogue especially among Christians and Muslims, churches will have to do more.”

“Churches in the Middle East are called to defeat fear and the sense of insecurity among the communities who choose to migrate, as this causes a serious threat of ‘brain drain’ in our countries,” he said.

The issue of “forced migration” was discussed in detail. Many people flee their homes due to ecological disasters. It was noted that environmental disasters can result in migration.

Pointing to global warming and climate change as the major indicators for migration in his region, Rev. Asora Amosa from the Pacific Council of Churches described church initiatives helping environmentally displaced people.

Providing an ethical perspective in the churches’ support for migrants, he said, “The theological basis of the churches’ concern in regard to the environment is God’s relationship to his created world.”

He said, if “we are to be good stewards of God’s creation – fanua (land) and moana (sea), we have to reflect on the Creation story in the book of Genesis, which emphasizes that God is our creator and we are his creation.”

According to Amosa, this is the theological basis for supporting environmentally displaced people, which is part of the forces changing the world’s ecclesial landscape.

Following the concluding session of the conference, a working group began to prepare a theological statement on migration with the hope that this document will enrich discussions in the autumn of 2013 at the WCC’s upcoming 10th Assembly in Busan, Korea, addressing the theme, “God of life, lead us to justice and peace”.

Source: World Council of Churches,

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/news/news-management/eng/a/article/1634/migration-changes-ecclesi.html>

ACMRO Attend World Council of Churches Conference on Migration

Presentation of pastoral experiences in Australia, 7th December 2011, Near East School of Theology, Beirut Lebanon

Joe Moloney Research and Information Office ACMRO

Australia is a very multicultural society. Since 1901, about 23% of Australia's population has been born overseas. Our national census in 2001 reported 26% of persons born in Australia had at least one parent born overseas – that is they were 2nd generation Australian. This year the Australian Bureau of Statistics announced six million migrants from over 200 different countries call Australia home. Just under half of all migrants come from Europe, with growing populations migrating from Asia and the Pacific.

The Catholic Church in Australia is founded on migration. The first Catholics were Irish convicts on board the first fleet. Our first Bishop was from England and the majority of our first Priests were Irish ensuring the Church would develop along the Irish model.

After WWII was a time of mass migration to Australia and represents a historical shift away from identifying as a British outpost to identifying as our own separate nation. This phenomenon of Mass migration was largely accepted due to the public fear that Australia had a population that was too small to protect itself from foreign invasion – we needed to populate or perish. This massive post war migration increased the number of Catholics by 119% in comparison to the total population which increased 68%. To coordinate the pastoral care of these new migrants our office was established in 1947 originally to care for British migrants but soon expanded to care for all European migrants. By 1960s Australia had resettled over 700,000 post war settlers from war torn Europe.

Since then our Church has continued to be refreshed by new migrant groups. Refugees have been very much a part of Australian Catholicism, always in terms of social and pastoral support and more so in matters of advocacy from the 1970's on. Besides eastern Europe, Australia has hosted

subsequent waves of refugees from Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, Chili and other South and Central American groups in the early seventies, East Timor and Vietnam in the late seventies, the horn of Africa, Sudan and other parts of Africa in the 1990's and more recently, waves of asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Sri Lanka.

Next year the theme for Migrant and Refugee Sunday will be "migrants and the new evangelisation" this is very appropriate to Australia. Migrants are the face of the Catholic Church in Australia, they represent the majority of Mass attendees and our Church community like the rest of Australia is very much multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic in fact every Sunday Mass is celebrated in over 30 languages.

The Catholic Church in Australia has encouraged migrant communities to continue to express their faith in their own ethnic or cultural way and to facilitate this, we have been blessed with hundreds of migrant chaplains who administer to nationals from the same country or language background. These migrant chaplains reflect the community and many of these migrant priests view Australia as missionary – not in the traditional sense of helping those in poverty but in a very challenging way to re-evangelise our secular society and to administer to local communities who have been unable to source their own native born priests.





Australia has had a positive net migration rate since the 1950's this remains true today- just last financial year saw around 170,000 permanent migrants moving to Australia.

Economically Australia benefits from this positive flow of migration due to current low unemployment and skills shortages. We have an aging population and if we are to maintain current standards of living it is recognised by many that Australia needs positive migration rates. In contrast, there are just as many who believe Australia already has too many people – But given the size of Australia and the fact we only have 22 million this attitude is largely based more on fear than reason. Like all Nations, how resources are used is far more important than the numbers who use them.

Asylum Seekers

Last financial year Australia received just fewer than 5000 asylum seekers. Historically most asylum seekers fly to Australia under a tourist or student visa and then claim asylum once they get here and they are free to work and live in the community and their claim is decided under the full protection of Australian law. Less than half of our asylum seekers arrive by boat and their reception is completely different.

In order to deter people getting on boats Australia developed three unique and particularly harsh responses which ultimately do serious harm to those we have said we will protect as signatories to the 1951 refugee convention. These methods are employed despite the well-known fact that fundamental human rights are violated, and against all contrary evidence which suggests deterrent measures simply do not work.

The first response is the use of indefinite mandatory detention. I believe Australia is the only western country that detains everyone who arrives undocumented and can hold these individuals in detention until the day they die.

Under the Refugee Convention we have an obligation not to discriminate on mode of arrival, or on whether they have valid documents or not as people fleeing for their lives do not always have time to ask their governments for a passport. And this is certainly true of Australia - Our boat arrivals in detention are mostly from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Sri Lanka, so it is well known they had no chance to get any identity documentation.

Currently we have just over 5000 boat arrivals in immigration detention across 8 immigration detention

centres. We have witnessed 6 suicides in this past year, seen several riots and roof top protests. Understandably detainees are frustrated at the length of time they spend in detention – with little access to the outside world. The remoteness of several detention centres leads to isolation and lack of community services. Also, our detention centres are run by a private British company who specialise in providing prison services and this has been insufficient for asylum seekers who have fled from very traumatic situations.

The second response is our excision policy. In 2001 the Australian government introduced legislation that excludes a number of Australian islands from our Migration Act. For boat people who arrive at an excised off-shore island they are denied any legal right to claim asylum. In practise, Australia accesses whether they are a refugee or not, but this remains in the hands of the parliament instead of the legal system. Unsuccessful applicants have no legal right to challenge the decision. This is important because failed claims are sent back to places where they may be killed.

The good news is that this policy was ended in practise last week however the legal framework remains because our government would still like to process asylum seekers in a third country particularly Malaysia and will need this legislation in the future to do so.

The third response is the linking of our onshore asylum program with the offshore humanitarian program. Australia caps the number of refugees and asylum seekers at around 13,500 people. Of this figure 6000 are set aside for the UNHCR and this number doesn't change. The remaining places are then split between onshore asylum seekers and special private sponsorship for refugees to sponsor family or people at great risk. When a place is filled by an asylum seeker it subtracts from the number of places available for sponsorship. In Australia this policy has led to a very disruptive myth that asylum seekers are jumping the queue. People believe asylum seekers are taking the place of people who have been waiting up to 10 years for resettlement through UNHCR; when in fact, the number of places available through UNHCR is not affected by the number of asylum seekers—it is just really small.

Since 2001, around 15000 asylum seekers have made it to Australia by boat, it is also confirmed that 406 have died making this journey and last December 52 people died as their boat smashed on the rocks of Christmas Island. So we do want to see an end to arrivals by boat but by creating legal pathways not by deterrence measures.

In Australia, these deterrent measures are often justified by arguing we must stop the boats to stop people dying at sea! This may be true but if we are really concerned for their lives why would we lock them up knowing full well this may lead them to commit suicide. A challenge for our office is to remind Catholics in Australia that the word Catholic means "universal" therefore our concern is not just for the welfare of those who attempt to get to Australia by boat but for all people who are in precarious situations throughout the world. While 400 have died over the last decade on their journey to Australia, several estimates suggest up to 40,000 were killed during the final stage of the 2009 conflict in Sri Lanka –Stopping the boats does not save these people from any better fate.

Why all the negativity towards boat people?

The biggest issue is mandatory detention. People are only put in prison if they have committed a very serious crime, so by locking up asylum seekers it leads the public to believe that they are dangerous. Our media plays on this, the media also like to report the huge cost of detention which is in the hundreds of millions. And a lot of people blame asylum seekers for this cost even though they are dying to be released.

In Australia our two major political parties can win or lose an election based almost entirely upon their approach to asylum seekers and both need to be seen as both tuff and compassionate. Unfortunately been tough usually outdoes compassion.

However, our current government have made great efforts to get children out of detention, have introduced complementary protection legislation for those in a precarious situation but who do not meet refugee status, and has announced the use of bridging visas to allow detainees to be released into the community.

Last week our Immigration Minister again made the statement that Australia can and should take more refugees. Doing so can address three major concerns; Australian's want to see an orderly migration process, they want to see better outcomes for refugees in camps and also want to discourage boat journeys to Australia. Increasing resettlement places achieves all three.

A big fear in Australia, is that showing compassion will open the flood gate and Australia will suddenly be

swamped with boat people. Again this is nonsense, Australia is one of the hardest countries to get to and the majority of refugees do not leave their home regions.

But allowing people to seek asylum does raise the question of open borders and I would argue that Australia like many other nations already has open borders but only for certain people.

Last financial year there were over 30 million movements back and forth across our boarder. This number is massive because we have open doors for tourist from many nations, open doors for the highly skilled and open doors for New Zealanders.

The question we need to reflect on is not whether to have open borders but who to open them too?

And this question is as challenging as the call to love your neighbour.

Catholic Social doctrine teaches that everyone has the right to live a dignified life in their homeland. And if this right is violated, people then have the right to immigrate to another country. This right to immigrate cannot exist in conjunction with borders that prevent entry to those seeking asylum.

In Australia, choosing to accept refugees has led to many social and economic benefits'. This year research was published by Australia's immigration department on the economic , social and civic contribution of first and second generation humanitarian entrants. This research found that the capacity of humanitarian entrants to contribute to the economy increased significantly with time.

Humanitarian entrants had the youngest age structure of any other migrant group and would spend their entire working lives in Australia this greatly helps our workforce to grow faster than the total population helping to address our aging population issue. In the first few years of settlement humanitarian entrants have higher unemployment but this converges to the National average and the second generation exceeds this average.

The report also found that humanitarian entrants display greater entrepreneurial qualities with a higher than average proportion engaging in small and medium business. Australia has 8 billionaires – 5 come from a refugee background. The point is that the economic contribution of migrants is often the justification for allowing migration and as such it is important to recognise that been a refugee is merely an experience and once given the same opportunities anyone can make an economic contribution.

MEDIA RELEASE 19 December 2011

"Increase humanitarian intake to prevent future asylum tragedies" says Catholic Migrant office

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) today expressed sorrow over the tragedy which has resulted in the deaths of a possible 160 people, mostly thought to be asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Iran.

This time last year, a similar tragedy occurred when just short of safety, a boat carrying 50 Middle Eastern asylum seekers crashed off the rocks of Christmas Island.

Director of the ACMRO Fr Maurizio Pettenà CS expressed his sadness that a repeat is being seen of such tragedies, and urged people to consider carefully the reasons why these events occur.

"This is a time to reflect on what we can all do better together to protect people in need. There is a great need for Australia to increase its humanitarian intake. It is important to understand that people who risk their lives at sea do so because more secure avenues are denied to them", he said.

The boatload of asylum seekers crashed off the coast of Indonesia yesterday and there are varying estimates of how many people perished in the disaster, some as high as 200.

Just a week from Christmas, Fr Pettenà highlighted that the most important focus should be on the humanity of people who flee persecution, rather than on politics.

"Various solutions are being proposed and all should be examined on their merits. The main thing I would say is that in our failure to find ways of sharing the numerous resources that we have in Australia points out the failure of our own political and social systems to fully embrace the extent of human suffering", he said.

At the Geneva meeting marking the 60th anniversary of the Refugee Convention and the 50th anniversary of the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the Holy See's permanent observer to the United Nations Archbishop Silvano Tomasi CS encouraged reflection on the reality of asylum.

"The world's 33 million plus refugees are the flashing red light of alarm pointing out deep social and political failures and an urgent call to remedy their suffering", he said.

Archbishop Tomasi highlighted that poorer countries host the majority of the world's refugees and richer nations should at least accept refugees in similar proportion to poorer states", he said.

The ACMRO particularly calls upon Christians at this time to contemplate the mystery of the Holy Family in search of a place for Jesus to be born.

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