



JANUARY 2012

# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MIGRANT & REFUGEE OFFICE

## News

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- Australian Young Christian Students campaign for Youth Refugees
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To mark Australia Day, the Catholic Bishops Commission for Justice, Ecology and Development calls upon political parties to work towards a common approach to asylum seekers, so that human beings do not become pawns in a political argument. Further, and more immediately, to honour the Australian sense of justice and compassion, there must be a defined limit to incarceration in detention centres for people who are not criminals. The Bishops are calling on the Government to limit detention to three months.

Four of the Bishops who signed this statement minister directly to asylum seekers in immigration detention centres located in their dioceses. Bishop Julian Porteous, Auxiliary Bishop in Sydney, supported the opinions of the other Bishops who have direct involvement in the pastoral care of asylum seekers in detention. "Prolonged and indefinite detention in these facilities can only produce psychological damage", he said.

"In citizenship ceremonies around the country on Australia Day we will again celebrate the great contribution migrant families have made to this great nation", said Archbishop Adrian Doyle of Hobart. "We should be particularly proud of Australia's generosity over the years in providing refuge to vulnerable people fleeing their homelands. It is important that we also remember the men, women and children currently being held in detention centres."

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE



Bishop Gregory O'Kelly SJ of Port Pirie said, "Minister Chris Bowen announced last November that the Government would issue around 100 bridging visas each month for the community placement of asylum seekers. This announcement recognises that prolonged detention does serious harm to vulnerable people. While this brings the Government closer to its 2008 commitment that detention would be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time, the dire circumstance of many detainees requires more immediate action.

"In Port Augusta we have thirty young people, nearly all minors and some in primary school, who have been in detention now for twelve months, at Christmas Island and there. The secondary school age minors have not been permitted to attend school. They are taught English for one hour a day. Apart from that one hour a day there is only an occasional activity to occupy them. Imagine how harmful the tedium is to growing young spirits. Despite a letter issued by the Minister last September, even though the minors are Catholic they are not permitted to attend the nearby Catholic school. We know that no parent and no politician would want their own children to undergo such a regime for so long", he said.

Bishop Christopher Saunders of Broome regularly visits the remote Curtin Immigration Detention Centre in Derby. Bishop Saunders said, "The mass protests, self-harm and suicide we have witnessed over the years show that the harsh conditions in detention centres do not ensure safe and secure environments and, in fact, add to the trauma already experienced by people fleeing war, violence and persecution. A wide range of health experts and practitioners have identified prolonged and indefinite detention as a major factor in the onset and exacerbation of mental illness.

"Detention should be only to establish asylum seekers' identities and to ensure that they are not a threat to Australia's health or security. These checks should take no longer than three months", he said.

Bishop Eugene Hurley of Darwin said, "The fact is that the vast majority of asylum seekers held in these detention centres will be found to be refugees, and as such they have a perfect right to be here. That is clear. The real problem is the way we respond as a community. I know so many of these women, men and families. What I have learned is that I should never judge until I know their story and when I've heard their story, then compassion is all I feel. "Patrick McGorry, the eminent psychiatrist and former Australian of the Year, recently described these detention facilities as 'factories for producing mental illness'. I know there is popular rhetoric about turning the boats around. The important focus for me is not the boats but the fact that each boat is full of human beings, whose stories I do not know. This is not a legal matter but a matter of human rights, indeed a matter of morality. I pray that we might embrace these people as so many of our forebears were welcomed. This is the tradition that has made us great and proud to be Australian. We call on all politicians and agencies of government to treat this as a humanitarian issue rather than a political one", Bishop Hurley said.

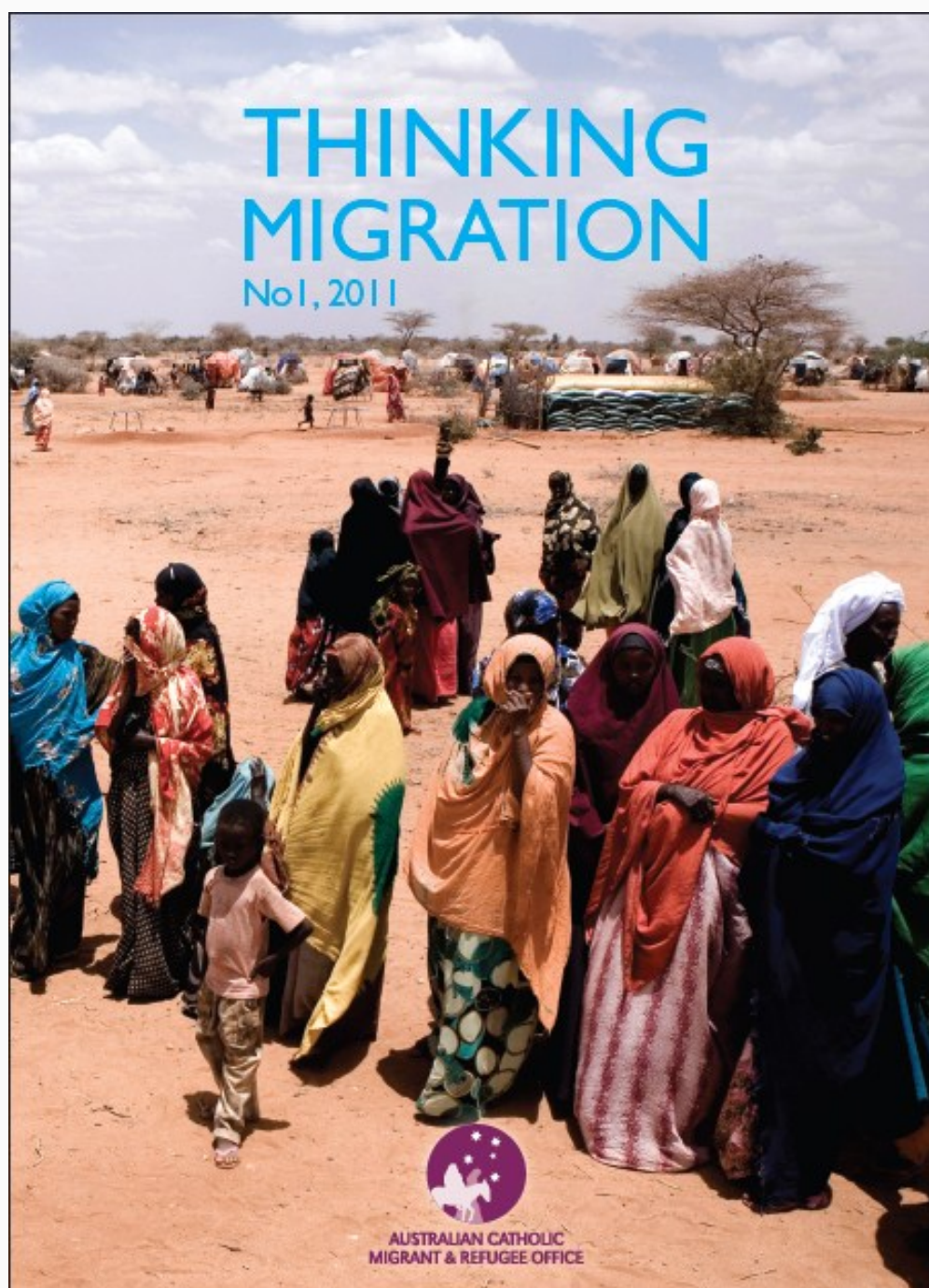
**Most Rev Adrian Doyle AM, Archbishop of Hobart**

**Most Rev Christopher Saunders, Bishop of Broome**

**Most Rev Eugene Hurley, Bishop of Darwin**

**Most Rev Julian Porteous, Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney**

**Most Rev Gregory O'Kelly SJ AM, Bishop of Port Pirie**



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## Australian Young Christian Students launch new campaign “100% Respect: Youth Refugees and Asylum Seekers” on Australia Day

The Young Christian Students movement have launched their new campaign, ‘100% Respect: Youth Refugees and Asylum Seekers’ at their January 2012 National Conference and followed with a tremendously well supported awareness action on Australia Day to kick-start the campaign across the nation.



The Young Christian Students movement uses the Cardijnian method of ‘See, Judge and Act’ to empower high school student to critically analyse issues around them in light of their faith, and take action to change the situation.

Mai Mitsumori-Miller, a Perth Year Twelve student, co-ordinated a thorough ‘See, Judge, Act’ of the issues surrounding youth refugees and asylum seekers at the National Conference in Melrose. This resulted in a direct service aim for local students to educate people in their community about the media perception of the issue, and an advocacy aim targeted at the Federal Government to uphold the UN Convention for Rights of a Child for refugees and asylum seekers under the age of eighteen.

**AUSTRALIAN YOUNG CHRISTIAN STUDENTS**



"The 100% Respect: Youth Refugees and Asylum Seekers campaign was chosen as it was an issue that was identified as relative to many of the students throughout 2011. Refugees and asylum seekers is a major political, social and media topic in our society today, and as students the lives of people our own age was seen as an important place to begin our relationship and understanding of those fleeing their homelands."

"Students will be continually reviewing the issues throughout the two year campaign, and be equipped with the necessary skills to take action on local and national levels based on their faith," Mai said.

The Conference was attended by around forty five students from all around the country as well as by Bishop Biancinni of Geraldton, and Bishop O'Kelly of Port Pirie. Hannah Stavrou, the sixteen year old Conference Co-ordinator from Barmera, South Australia stated that, "this conference gave like-minded and passionate students the chance to create great action that will transform not only themselves but their communities and the world."

The first action of the Youth Refugees and Asylum seekers campaign took place on Australia Day and was the biggest nationally co-ordinated action from the movement for very many years. Almost one thousand people from across the country attended the Facebook event 'bare skin for refugees and asylum seekers' which asked people to write 'for those that come across the seas, we've boundless plains to share' on their skin. This was a huge success, with hundreds of photos uploaded onto the 'Australian YCS' Facebook page in support of refugees and asylum seekers. These will be forwarded to politicians to bring about just policies and practises that uphold the human dignity of these young people.

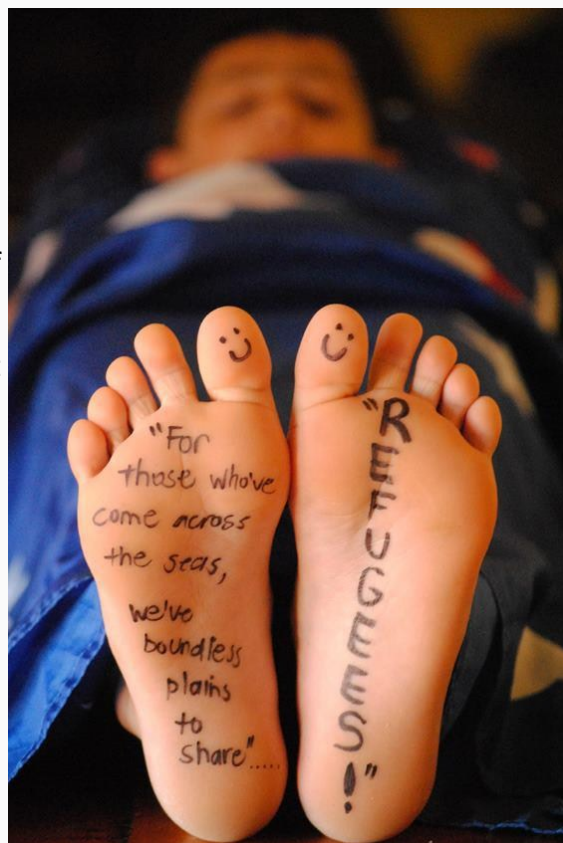
The previous National Chairperson, Liam McGuire of Townsville is excited about the campaign despite finishing school in 2011. 'With all members excited about the new campaign, having their say and already taking action, we hope this is going to be the most effective campaign in our recent history.'

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**Media Release  
30 January, 2012**





## Welcoming Newcomers

**Published: CathBlog - January 15, 2012**

*By Fr MAURIZIO PETTENÀ*

In my many years as a migrant, and a migrant chaplain, I have heard migrants and more recently asylum seekers and refugees being labelled and treated with various degrees of suspicion and unease.

I could tell one or two stories about my own experience as well. Being a migrant for Christ and the Church has always provided me with a high degree of "comfort-ability" in the sense that though, at times, I might have been regarded as one who doesn't quite belong, I know deep down that what, or I should say, who gives me the necessary Visa is Jesus, who in his providential way has called me to be a part of the Church in Australia. And of this wonderful nation Australia! Hence, I am very proud of my Australian citizenship!

Last week, Queensland MP Teresa Gambaro, like myself from an Italian background, spoke out controversially about the need for lessons on personal hygiene for newly arrived migrants. She also mentioned that migrants need to be taught how to wait in queues.

These comments were symbolic, hopefully not of the kinds of queues that exist of people languishing in wait of better lives in detention centres and refugee camps. Having considered quite deeply these comments and heard the views espoused on this issue, it is hard to see why an experienced politician may feel that such comments were appropriate.

They did, however, lead me to reflect much on how we welcome the other. Maybe, from now on, as one of my staff said about Teresa Gambaro's latest remarks: on receiving citizenship, the presiding official might hand down, together with the certificate, a can of deodorant. What a good way to make one feel fully accepted!

Migrants and refugees are my vocation, my love and my passion. It is only natural, therefore, that I am interested in anything that has to do with their welfare. I am also attracted by what challenges or argues against ideas and attitudes such as welcome and hospitality.

In a nation developed and sustained by people "who have come across the seas", is there still a place for fear of the unknown? No "unknown" is feared more than the "unknown neighbour". So, to be more explicit: are our political leaders still espousing, even unconsciously, an environment for xenophobia to thrive?

Researchers ask questions about what incites xenophobia, how it can be disguised behind the façade of politically correct concerns and statements. One cannot stop but amaze at the fact that in a matter of hours or even less, we can be manipulated into fearing and/or discriminating against those who differ from ourselves by characteristics such as the shape and colour of their eyes, the form of their nose, what they wear, or the tone of their voice.

More so, people can be discriminated against for the way they look at life, values and religion; these can have deep xenophobic underpinnings. These days, we come to know that even body odours can contribute to worsen the xenophobia syndrome.

Australia prides itself on being a multicultural nation, but how we react to newcomers quite often contradicts the image we so much boost about in our international relationship.

My ministry takes me to attend often the conferring of citizenship on immigrants who have been contributing to the wellbeing of Australia. I can read a sense of pride and satisfaction, a sense of achievement and being safe.

I remember very well the day I became an Australian citizen. To mark that day, together with my certificate of citizenship, I was presented with a small flag and a small wattle-tree ready to be planted. This is now blossoming in the garden of my Italo-Australian adoptive family.

In her apology, which was encouraged by the public response, Teresa Gambaro did recognise that coming from a migrant background herself, that the contribution that generations of migrants have made has been exceptional".

It now remains to be seen how her comments will make us look internationally, and what their impact will be on public attitudes.

## Nation welcomes new citizens on Australia Day

On Thursday, 26 January 2012, The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowen MP, welcomed around 13 700 people from 144 countries who become Australian citizens as part of Australia Day celebrations.

Mr Bowen said Australia Day was the most popular day of the year for citizenship ceremonies, with 365 special ceremonies held across Australia.

'Australia Day is a special time for all Australians, whether they are citizens by birth or by choice, to come together to celebrate our common bond,' Mr Bowen said.

'It is a particularly special occasion for our newest citizens who are pledging their commitment to our great nation and I congratulate them on behalf of all Australians.

'It is also a great opportunity for all of us to reflect on what it means to be an Australian citizen and celebrate the privileges and responsibilities of Australian citizenship.'

The largest Australia Day ceremony in NSW will be held at Blacktown's Bowman Hall, to be attended by 152 new citizens. The state's biggest regional ceremony in Gosford will involve 116 new citizens.

In the ACT, Prime Minister Julia Gillard will confer citizenship on 27 people officially joining the Australian family. The lakeside ceremony will be part of the national Australia Day celebrations in the nation's capital.

Queensland will welcome the most new citizens, with 3,850 people from 114 countries becoming citizens in 73 ceremonies across the state.

Brisbane City Council will host the largest ceremony with more than 1200 conferees, while more than 80 people will make the pledge on the esplanade in Cairns, and the Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire council in central Queensland is staging its first ever citizenship ceremony, for six people.

Victoria will welcome some 3150 new citizens from 102 countries in 68 citizenship ceremonies across the state.

In South Australia, cricket fans will see 24 people become

citizens during the lunch break at the international test against India at historic Adelaide Oval. There are 43 ceremonies in total across the state, welcoming more than 1200 citizens from 76 countries.

Internationally renowned rock musician, US-born Brian Ritchie of the Violent Femmes, is one of Tasmania's 230 new citizens from 45 countries. There will be 17 ceremonies in the state, including in Launceston, Glenorchy, Hobart, Kingborough and Clarence.

In the nation's west, around 2070 new citizens from 91 countries will make the pledge at 60 ceremonies from Esperance to East Pilbara and Kwinana to Kalgoorlie. Western Australia's biggest ceremony will be held in Perth's northern suburb of Wanneroo, where more than 400 new citizens will gather at the showgrounds to take the pledge and hear an address by leading Para-Olympian Priya Cooper.

Territorians will welcome more than 140 new citizens from 35 countries in a total of seven ceremonies, with the largest being held in Darwin and Alice Springs.

'More than four million people have chosen to become Australian citizens since the first citizenship ceremony in 1949, enriching our nation's culture and traditions,' Mr Bowen said. 'We look forward to the contribution our newest citizens will make to the Australian community.'

**Source:** <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/cb/2012/cb182088.htm>







## Let's share our boundless plains

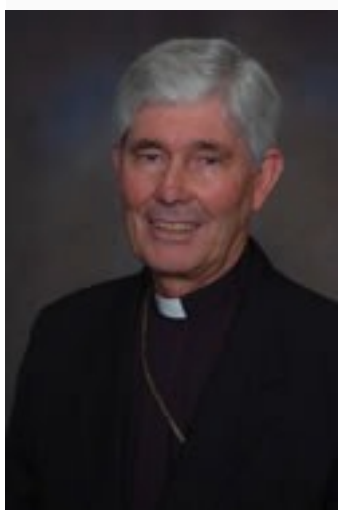
### Published: CathBlog January 24, 2012

*BY BISHOPS EUGENE HURLEY AND GREG O'KELLY*

Part of our ministry as Bishops includes an important pastoral area for which both of us have had a passion since the 1980s.

This issue is the situation for asylum seekers and refugees who come to this country. We have visited them, shared time with them, learned their stories and shared about their family situations. These experiences of knowing human beings do not permit us to keep quiet when viewing the injustice with which some of them have been treated.

The two of us have both been Bishops of the Diocese of Port Pirie in South Australia, where there is currently one supported accommodation facility for asylum seekers in Port Augusta. The Port Pirie Diocese has been home to two immigration detention facilities Baxter and Woomera, places which received much media coverage over the last 12 or so years.



#### **Bishop Eugene Hurley**

In 2007 I was appointed the Bishop of Darwin, and it too brings its graces and challenges, particularly with reference to the very real and obvious struggle for justice for asylum seekers.

On Australia Day each year, it is much on my mind our treatment of those who come across the seas to seek refuge in our boundless plains, and this Australia Day, together with four other Bishops, I have put pen to paper into a statement regarding the effects of immigration detention on vulnerable people.

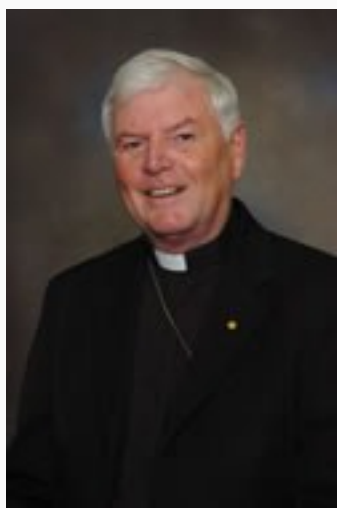
Even the very use of the word detention, and more so the practice, is highly problematic. On the Australian Bishops' Ad Limina visit to Rome last year, one of the main points I made in my conversation with the Holy Father was about the mandatory detention of asylum seekers. I believe that there is just no sense to the way we make these people suffer.

The conversation about boats too is inappropriate. In the context of immigration, we are talking of human beings who are peopling the boats – not just the vessels which carry them. The use of the words “boats” and “detention centres” has the effect of de-personalising the issue. Hearing about boats can help people detach themselves from the reality that there are people inside.

The fact is that the vast majority of asylum seekers arriving on these boats and held in these detention centres will be found to be refugees, and as such they have a perfect right to be here. That is clear. The real problem is the way we respond as a community. I know so many of these women, men and families. What I have learned is that I should never judge until I know their story and when I've heard their story, then compassion is all I feel.

*Eugene Hurley was Bishop of Port Pirie (1999-2007) and is currently Bishop of Darwin.* **8**





### Bishop Greg O'Kelly

Minister Chris Bowen announced last November that the Government would issue around 100 bridging visas each month for the community placement of asylum seekers. This announcement recognises that prolonged detention does serious harm to vulnerable people.

My first involvement with refugees came in the 1980s when I was headmaster at St Ignatius College in Adelaide. When the Vietnamese boat people started arriving, we were one of the first Catholic schools to welcome them. They made a rich contribution to the life of our school.

In the last ten years, most of the students who came to the school were from Afghanistan, mostly Hazaras – an ethnic group that had suffered much persecution in their home country. Most of the boys we taught had had direct contact with the Taliban.

In 2004 and 2005 the difficult story of the Bakhtiari family became news. We attempted to campaign on their behalf through the media and through political involvement, but were unsuccessful, and they were deported in 2005.

In the last year or so, supported accommodation in the community has become the norm in South Australia. The officers and SERCO staff make a tremendous effort and this makes a big difference in Port Augusta to the Vietnamese people who are held in this facility. It is much more humane, and it is obvious that a difficult situation is made more bearable by this gentler approach.

However, as we said in our statement today “while supported accommodation and community integration brings the Government closer to its 2008 commitment that detention would be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time, the dire circumstance of many detainees requires more immediate action.”

It is our prayer this Australia Day that our political leaders consider deeply the words of our national anthem.

Let us celebrate the rich diversity and blessing of migrants to this nation and consider how we as individuals and a community might do better to help them call Australia home.

*Greg O'Kelly SJ is Bishop of Port Pirie.*



## Yemen

The UNHCR report a record 103,000 refugees, asylum seekers and migrants journeyed across the Gulf of Aden or the Red Sea to reach Yemen despite growing instability and a worsening security situation. Those making the journey are mostly from Somalia, Ethiopia and other Horn of Africa countries. In 2009 at least 78,000 people crossed the seas into Yemen and in 2010 53,000 made the same journey.

The UNHCR report that 130 are known to have drowned last year while attempting to reach Yemen. Those that do reach Yemen are mostly found in desperate condition due to dehydration, malnutrition and often suffering from trauma. The journey is incredibly dangerous not just from the seas but also due to threats of physical and sexual violence as well as trafficking.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> January three Ethiopians were killed by smugglers operating along Yemen's Red Sea Coast. The Ethiopians were shot while trying to escape from the smugglers, who were attempting to extort money.

## South Sudan

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, the UNHCR reported an air attack on vulnerable refugees in Elfoj in South Sudan's Upper Nile state. The bombing of a civilian area injured one Sudanese boy and left 14 other refugees missing as they fled the area. The first of two strikes saw several bombs hit a refugee transit site located less than 10 kilometres from the Sudanese border. The site hosted 5,000 refugees who are in transit to new settlements.

Since the 6<sup>th</sup> January, the UNHCR have moved 11,500 refugees from Elfoj with a further 4,000 refugees leaving spontaneously by their own means. The UNHCR report there have been previous attacks on Sudanese refugees in border areas including the bombing over several days of New Gufa in Maban County.

In total, the UNHCR report more than 78,000 people have fled Sudan's South Kordofan and Blue Nile states since August last year. The majority (54,000) have fled to South Sudan's Upper Nile state and 24,000 to Unity state.

## Philippines

The International Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has made an urgent appeal for emergency assistance to help displaced people in Mindanao. Just days before Christmas, more than 100,000 families were affected by the flash flood which claimed the lives of more than 1,200 and left many more missing. The JRS report the storm destroyed more than 10,000 houses and displaced more than 300,000 people mainly in the cities of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro.

Further information on how to donate to JRS for Philippines flood victims can be found at; <https://www.jrs.net/donate?LID=531&L=EN>

