



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Reflection on the Malaysian Solution: Fr Maurizio Pettena CS Media Release 26 May, 2011

Of fundamental importance in any policy dealing with forced migration is the dignity of human life. Through a commitment to respect and build up people from all nations, the global phenomenon of migration, voluntary or compelled, can be successfully managed and beneficial. It remains essential for Australia to hear asylum seekers when they knock at our door.

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office acknowledge the purpose of the Australian government's negotiations with Malaysia is to address people smuggling. The journey of a refugee places them in precarious situations and it is important for nations to pursue the safety and protection of forced migrants. This concern for their welfare must not stop at our border.

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office acknowledges the policy of sending the next 800 boat arrivals to Malaysia might be a deterrent for further boat arrivals. However cannot condone this policy; as essentially swapping human life goes against the moral teaching of the Church.

ACMRO has grave concerns for the welfare of the potential 800 candidates that may be sent to Malaysia due to the already heavy burden that Malaysia carries. While Malaysia appears willing to uphold the key aspect of the Refugee Convention to not return asylum seekers to the origin of danger; this alone does not afford asylum seekers the opportunity of a sustainable life.

The burden of irregular migration flows is one which needs to be shared more equally between countries based on their capacity to care for asylum seekers.

Australia has one of the most successful resettlement programs in the world and it is appropriate that the number of refugees under this program be increased. Australia is better placed than other countries in the region to resettle refugees due to the economic success underpinning our Nation.

The negotiations between Australia and Malaysia represent a bilateral agreement and a step towards a regional framework for managing and protecting forced migrants. Any regional framework is likely to include countries that are not signatory to the Refugee Convention. What is not negotiable, is the welfare, dignity and respect of migrants both forced and voluntary.

It is important to remember that people smuggling is merely a symptom of the underlying problem of war, poverty and inequality in the world. This underlying problem does not disappear by decreasing boat arrivals to Australia.

The people smuggler business model is diminished by increasing Australia's humanitarian intake. By providing desperate people with a valid pathway into Australia they do not need to risk their lives on a boat.

Irregular flows of forced migrants do not continue indefinitely; but how we respond as a nation will be remembered.

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