



# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

## Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



### **Help Carry One Another's Burdens**

**Fr Pettená - Director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office**

**Media Statement 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011**

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is part of the community delegation supporting the Federal Government's positive pathway towards community-based alternatives to immigration detention.

### **Responding to the challenges**

Fr Pettená explains how helping to carry one another's burdens is a sure way to live out the divine call to love our neighbour.

"Those who come to Australia to seek refuge carry a heavy burden. Let us not become tired of doing good; for if we do not give up, we will yield solidarity and goodwill in our community and throughout our international community" he said.

### **Migration Policy**

"The dignity of human life is most important. Always seek migration policy that builds up and reaffirms human life as this is how we would like to be treated" said Fr Pettená.

### **On Boat Arrivals**

"As often as we have the chance, we should do good to everyone. The welfare of boat people should be top priority. Being in a situation of exile, leaves people vulnerable to many forms of danger and abuse. Stopping the boats does not save them from any better fate – it only changes their destination which sadly, due to the prevalence of exploitation, torture and persecution may be even worse" said Fr Pettená.

"The Challenge then, is to pursue the welfare of all people in the country of origin, transit and destination. To achieve this requires international collaboration between nations and by putting the interest of people in exile before the interests of the state; it inspires other nations to do the same".

### **On the Humanitarian Program**

"Community detention is an encouraging initiative and the government should be congratulated on their efforts to get children and families out of immigration detention centres. Great involvement of the community sector in resettlement will bridge divides and foster harmony" he said.

"The Catholic Church remains against the policy of indefinite mandatory detention as asylum seekers are not criminals and should not be treated as such. The Catholic faithful are urged to pray for this policy to end" said Fr Pettená.

"The Catholic Church encourages the Australian government to increase the intake of refugees in proportion to the overall migration program. Currently this proportion is around 8%, in financial year of 1999-00, it was over 22% and has declined ever since. All nations are responsible for the suffering of others made destitute by poverty and war, for rich nations like Australia there is a greater onus to do more" he said.

**For media enquiries or to arrange an interview with Fr Maurizio Pettená CS, please contact Beth Doherty on 0407 081 256**