



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Excision policy: a disturbing proposition for the international protection of asylum seekers **Media Release** **2 November 2012**

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office are gravely concerned with the proposal to excise the whole Australian territory for asylum seekers who arrive by boat. The excision policy places boat arrivals in a precarious legal position and denies them the legal right to ask Australia for protection due to their mode of arrival.

“We appreciate the considerable challenge that the Australian Government faces to ensure asylum seekers do not lose their life reaching Australia. Unfortunately, we do not decide who comes to Australia or the manner in which they arrive” said Fr Maurizio Pettena, Director of ACMRO.

“Australia has an exceptionally high level of regulation across our borders. Nonetheless, there will be times when people seeking asylum by boat will challenge this and our level of compassion” he said. “We should not give in to these challenges by disregarding our respect for human rights and the Refugee Convention.”

“Australia is not immune to the conflict and persecution affecting those in other parts of the world. We are part of the global community and must act accordingly. The excision policy has disturbing ramifications for all other nations that have signed the Refugee Convention” he said.

“We need to be cautious of the example we set for the rest of the world. If other nations choose to bypass the Convention then, as humanitarian crises emerge, people will have no place to go for protection and far more will have to travel longer distances to seek asylum.”

“We need to reflect whether these restrictive policies contribute towards achieving justice and peace in the source countries caught up in the trials of war and ethnic violence” said Fr Pettena.

The right to emigrate is essential for people caught in humanitarian crises as their survival often depends on their capacity to escape. The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office maintains that all countries who are signatory to the Refugee Convention must unequivocally uphold the right of people to seek asylum.

“We hear from many Catholics who are horrified at people risking their lives at sea, but at the same time are concerned they are treated fairly once they reach Australia. This is why we have made this issue the exact focus of the Third National Conference on the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees” said Fr Pettena.

The Third National Conference will be held on the 6-7 December 2012 at St Patricks Campus ACU Melbourne. People interested in attending the Conference can find more information at www.acmro.catholic.org.au

For media enquiries, please contact Beth Doherty 0407 081 256 or Joe Moloney (02) 6201 9848