



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Catholic Bishops urge Australian Government to process asylum claims 3 July 2014 Media Release

Australian Catholic Bishops are deeply concerned for the lives of the 153 Tamil people on board two vessels that were making their way to Christmas Island and were last heard from on Friday 27th of June. The Catholic Bishops are urging the Australian Government to ensure that no asylum seeker is returned to a country where they may face persecution, violence or oppression.

Director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, Fr Maurizio Pettenà, says that while the Government has provided little information on the situation, he is alarmed by media reports claiming that the asylum seekers may be returned to Sri Lanka without proper processing of their claims for asylum.

Calling on the Government to provide each asylum seeker with the opportunity to put forth their claim for refugee status, Fr Pettenà says we have an obligation to find out why these people have attempted to come to Australia.

“It is a dangerous journey and one which is often made by people who are desperately in need of protection and safety,” Fr Pettenà said.

“While the brutal civil war in Sri Lanka has come to an end, underlying discrimination remains a violent reality for many of the Tamil people.

“Several reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have revealed the precarious situation for Tamils, including those who have been marked by torture and the unexplained disappearances of civilians who have been critical of the current Sri Lankan Government.

“At a time when we are witnessing some of the greatest humanitarian challenges and highest numbers of displaced people around the world, it is crucial that Australia remains a country of refuge for those suffering from persecution.

“The UN Refugee Convention defines who is considered to be a refugee. The first step towards establishing this fact is to sit down on a case-by-case basis and listen to the stories of each person arriving into Australia’s jurisdiction seeking asylum.

“To offer a blanket response that unfairly treats all asylum seekers as illegal, and returns them to the country from which they have fled, is both immoral and contrary to our international obligations as a signatory to the Refugee Convention.”

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