



21 August 2013

Australia – we're better than this

Last week, 78 Australian organisations combined to declare that the destructive debate about asylum seekers and the pursuit of policies to punish the most vulnerable must stop.

The statement, coordinated by the Refugee Council of Australia to mark the first anniversary of the reintroduction of offshore processing of asylum claims, called for a new approach which focuses on protection not punishment, facts not fear-mongering and long-term solutions not short-term political gain.

While the Government's decision to increase the humanitarian intake to 20,000 places is welcome, policies like offshore processing, denial of work rights for asylum seekers and changes to family reunion are cruel and offer no hope for people fleeing persecution in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Federal Opposition's policies to reintroduce Temporary Protection Visas, offshore processing, towing back boats, limiting appeal rights and cutting the humanitarian intake offer even less hope to asylum seekers.

The serious refugee protection challenges facing the region demand true political leadership.

That starts with Australia setting the standard in refugee protection by modelling the best-practice models that need to be replicated in the Asia-Pacific region.

This includes upholding Australia's position as a world-leader in resettlement, abandoning offshore processing, ensuring asylum seekers' prompt access to permanent protection, fair refugee status determination and an end to policies that pit onshore protection against resettlement.

Until Australia makes a serious commitment to encouraging greater regional refugee protection in the Asia-Pacific region, desperate people will continue to have no safe pathway to protection.

Many will still see a dangerous boat journey to Australia as their only option.

How you can help

- Let candidates in your electorate know that the race to the bottom on asylum seekers must stop

- Let them know you will support policies that are consistent with Australia's reputation of fairness, decency and respect for the human rights conventions we have signed up to
- Send them the "Enough is Enough" statement signed by 78 faith and NGOs (<http://refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/130813-NewApproach.pdf>)
- Write letters to the editor outlining your concerns about the direction of asylum policy
- Take the time to think carefully about how you will vote, looking at the candidates (and their policies) for your House of Representatives seat and the Senate in your state or territory.

Essential reading

Statement by 78 faith and NGOs on a new approach to asylum policy
<http://refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/130813-NewApproach.pdf>

RCOA summary of election policies
<http://refugeecouncil.org.au/r/rpt/2013election.pdf>

The Hot Potato campaign to debunk myths about asylum seekers
<http://www.thehotpotato.com.au/>

Arguments to counter claims deterrence policies are about saving lives
<http://bit.ly/12hbzHr>

Recent statement from Refugee Council of Australia

RCOA statement on Australia-PNG agreement
http://refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/130723_PNG.pdf

RCOA statement on Coalition's asylum policy
http://refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/130816_AppealRights.pdf

RCOA statement on Operation Sovereign Borders
http://refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/130727_SovereignBorders.pdf

Where Australia ranks in refugee protection
http://refugeecouncil.org.au/n/mr/130719_GlobalStats.pdf

How to contact candidates and learn more about the parties

The Australian Electoral Commission's list of candidates
<http://aec.gov.au/election/who-are-the-candidates.htm>

The ABC election guide also lists candidates and electorate profiles
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/federal-election-2013/guide/>

It's worth looking at how your preferred party plans to allocate preferences of electors who vote above the line in the Senate
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/federal-election-2013/guide/gtv/>

(If you don't agree, you can always vote below the line, numbering every square)

Websites for parties currently in the Parliament

Dozens of parties are contesting the election. Here is a list of the websites of the parties currently represented in the House of Representatives or Senate:

Australian Labor Party <http://www.alp.org.au>

Liberal-National Coalition <http://www.liberal.org.au>

Australian Greens <http://www.greens.org.au/>

Katter's Australian Party <http://www.kattersaustralianparty.com.au/>

Democratic Labour Party <http://www.dlp.org.au/>

Nick Xenophon group (South Australia) <http://www.nickxenophon.com.au/>

Feedback is encouraged

Please share any responses you receive through your advocacy work. Send any feedback to media@refugeecouncil.org.au

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