



Campaigning for just and fair treatment of refugees and asylum seekers

www.ajustaustralia.com

Feb 2010

Dear Supporters of A Just Australia,

As you would be aware from previous newsletters, at our annual general meeting in December last year, A Just Australia members voted to approve the board's proposal that our organisation be merged into the Refugee Council of Australia, with RCOA assuming management of the A Just Australia campaign and association.

Our members agreed that not only will the AJA campaign be best preserved under the direction of the Refugee Council, but it will in fact have a greater ongoing impact with the resources, staff and policy expertise that RCOA is able to provide. Equally, the work of the Refugee Council will now be strengthened by the active political advocacy, community education and financial support of existing AJA members and by the campaigning experience of the AJA staff.

A Just Australia has retained its public awareness role, becoming the advocacy arm of the Council.

AJA will continue to inform the public and counter negative sentiment on issues such as boat arrivals and detention and to provide ideas and resources for grassroots activities to encourage positive policy reform. However, AJA will now also be better resourced to run more proactive campaigns on long-term refugee issues.

AJA farewells Zhi Yan, welcomes back Kate Gauthier

Kate Gauthier has returned back to AJA from maternity leave. Unfortunately this means we have farewelled Zhi Yan, who was AJA's campaign officer and then steered the campaign as National Coordinator while Kate was on leave.

We would like to commend Zhi for her excellent work during her time with AJA, and we wish her well for the future.

AJA's 2010 campaign focus

We are still finalising plans for our 2010 campaigns. What has become obvious is the critical need to tackle Coalition plans to roll-back asylum seeker reforms. Please see below for our call to action so you can help.

We will also be continuing our campaign against the use of the term 'illegal' to describe asylum seekers entering Australia. You can see below how regularly the term 'illegal' has been used in the media lately. With the additional resources from RCOA, we will be expanding this campaign to include TV and radio, starting by trying to get the very first ruling on this issue through the Australian Communications and Media Authority, the TV/Radio version of the Press Council.

Call to action: Opposition wants to bring back Pacific Solution and temporary protection

In spite of all the research showing they are failed policies, the Opposition has said they want to wind back policy reform and bring back the Pacific Solution, temporary protection for refugees and the 45 day rule, as well as suggesting they would go so far as to tow boats back to Indonesian waters.

Now is the time to make your voice heard!

Please write to the opposition (addresses below) and let them know that these policies would breach human rights standards, would cost Australian taxpayers far more than more humane approaches and would, like the earlier policies they copy, fail to reach their policy objectives.

You may wish to include the following points (in your own words)

- The Pacific Solution was costed by Oxfam and A Just Australia at \$1billion. Processing the same numbers of asylum seekers onshore would have cost a fraction of this amount. The provision of humane services and timely visa processing in remote locations is high on impossible. Studies have documented much higher rates of mental health issues among those detained under the Pacific Solution and have uncovered many examples of people being returned to situations of persecution and, in some cases, killed.
- The introduction of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) in October 1999 directly led to increased numbers of asylum seekers arriving by boat, as families separated by persecution were blocked from Australia's family reunion process. More than 10,500 asylum seekers arrived by boat in the 2½ years following the introduction of TPVs, more than at any other time in Australian history.
- The TPV system increased processing costs, requiring the Department to look at the same cases every three years. Almost all people granted a TPV were later granted a permanent visa, most of them by the Howard Government.
- The 45 day rule introduced by the previous government granted or denied work rights purely on the basis of when an asylum claim was lodged. This left many refugees destitute for extended periods, adding to the misery of people who had fled horrific circumstances. Those who were advised to apply before the 45 day deadline were given work rights, regardless of the strength or weakness of their protection claim. The policy introduced in 2009 was a vast improvement, focusing on a prompt resolution of Protection Visa applications and linking the granting of work rights to an applicant's compliance with the Migration Act.

Please write to Tony Abbott, Leader of the Opposition and Scott Morrison, Shadow Minister for Immigration.

The Hon Tony Abbott MP,
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Tony.Abbott.MP@aph.gov.au

Mr Scott Morrison MP
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
No email listed, but you can write via [this link](#)

Upcoming 2010 membership drive

The merger with the Refugee Council will also bring benefits to our members and donors, because *all donations to the Refugee Council are tax deductible.*

The valuable support of our members and donors has been critical in allowing us to continue our campaign and to help achieve considerable reforms in domestic asylum policy. However, it is evident from recent events that old attitudes, fears and divisive politics on key aspects of asylum seekers policy remain in significant parts of the community. It is sadly obvious there is still much to do.

We will soon be conducting our membership drive for 2010, and we hope that our members will continue to support our revitalised campaign alongside the Refugee Council.

Negative language campaign

With the greater resources of the refugee council, our campaign against media use of the term 'illegals' has stepped up a notch. We had no idea just how prevalent it still is! You will be able to

judge the success of our campaign by the space this section will take up by the end of the year. Please see all the items we have found recently, which we are making complaints on.

"If the Government now provides passage to the mainland at say, Darwin, to process onshore the people who have illegally arrived in Australian waters before their asylum claims have been tested, this will be the final nail in the coffin for the strong border protection regime Kevin Rudd inherited from John Howard," Mr Morrison said. Scott Morrison, 15 December 2009

...the use of Christmas Island to detain asylum seekers was inappropriate, adding that its excision from Australia's migration zone had not reduced the number of illegal boat arrivals. (AAP in Sydney Morning Herald, 16 December)

Meanwhile, illegal boat arrivals are expected to ease in the coming months because of dangerous seasonal conditions. (ABC Online, 31 December)

Normally, there is a lull in the arrivals of illegal boats brought on by the inclement monsoon season from mid-December to March, but intelligence suggests there will be little or no let up...has encouraged a greater resurgence of people smuggling than most would have thought possible when examining the successful reduction in illegal boat arrivals brought about by the Howard government's policies. Daily Telegraph, 1 January.

Mr Morrison said 178 people arrived illegally on boats last summer. This summer already 584 people have arrived. (The Australian, 4 January)

The Opposition has slammed Kevin Rudd's decision to soften immigration laws, blaming the August 2008 decision for the sharp rise in illegal boat arrivals. (Herald Sun, 5 January)

...Alby Schultz, recently slammed Prime Minister Rudd ...after the arrival of the 71st illegal boat since the Government weakened the border protection system in August 2008. "another illegal boat was intercepted in Australian waters last Sunday." Mr Schultz said. ...Last Sunday Customs Border Protection Command (BPC) intercepted the 71st illegal boat to arrive in Australian waters. (Young Witness and Alby Schultz MP, 8 January)

The Federal Opposition is calling on Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to act immediately on illegal immigration, as another boat of asylum seekers are processed at Christmas Island...The Opposition's immigration spokesman Scott Morrison says in the last six weeks, there has been an average of 100 people a week arriving in Australia illegally. (ABC Online, 9 January)

There were reports yesterday that the Rudd Government was being warned to start processing illegal immigrants in Darwin?But Acting Chief Minister Delia Lawrie said the federal government was not planning on bringing the asylum seekers to Darwin. "My understanding of the Commonwealth's situation with illegal immigrants is they are continuing to build capacity at Christmas Island and the illegal immigrants will continue to be processed at Christmas Island." she said. (Northern Territory News and Deputy Chief Minister Delia Lawrie, 15 January)

...prompted a review of the way Defence personnel handle illegal boat arrivals. (Lindsay Murdoch , "Defence personnel feared under attack, inquiry told" Sydney Morning Herald, 30-Jan-2010, Page: 11)

Hadley says thankfully Federal Home Affairs Minister Brendan O'Connor was not able to 'trot out his regular diatribe' when another boat load of illegals arrived at Christmas Island. (Ray Hadley 2GB, 2 February, 9.05am)

Ray Hadley talks to Shadow Immigration Minister Scott Morrison about the arrival of nearly 200 illegal boatpeople on Christmas Island overnight. (Ray Hadley 2GB, 2 February 9.23am) & on website as Nearly 200 illegal boat people arrive on Christmas Island

In Morrison's view, Rudd considers population growth, as he does the problem of illegal boat arrivals. (The Australian 1 February Page: 14)

Headline "Illegal boat's shock arrival" (The Australian 2 February)

"It is now at bursting point, with this latest illegal arrival, thanks to the failed policies of the Rudd Government." Opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison, ABC News Online, 2 February

Later, in speaking to the Advertiser on Australians' attitude to "boat people", Senator Evans said people were dismissive of illegal migrants until they had some contact with them. (Parramatta Advertiser, 3 February, Page 9)

Hadley says yesterday almost 90 illegal boat people were granted visas and flown to the mainland from Christmas Island. Hadley says there are almost 1700 illegal immigrants on Christmas Island. Hadley says the Department has confirmed another illegal immigrant has tuberculosis. (2GB Ray Hadley, 4 February)

Notices

AJA gets donation from Ethical jobs:

Thanks to our supporters who went online and voted for us! AJA got the most votes, and Ethical Jobs have donated \$680 to our campaign. The results are listed below [and here](#)

A Just Australia 33.99%
Aid/Watch 28.85%
Animal Liberation Victoria 16.21%
The Otesha Project 20.95%

Call for help: Caring for unaccompanied refugee minors

You may know that recently a large number of asylum seekers have arrived on Christmas Island. Of these, many are unaccompanied children - mostly boys from Afghanistan who have been sent away from their families as they reach adolescence (therefore 'fighting age', and they become of interest to the Taliban).

There is a need for people who may be able to accommodate these boys when they receive their visas. If they don't have a home to go to, they may be sent to public group housing (not ideal!).

I have just become the 'carer' (not legal guardian) of a 14 year old Afghan boy I met in a jail in Jakarta who made it to Christmas Island. I have been in close contact with DHS in the lead up to his arrival, and I have been amazed at the level of support they offer to people entering into a carer arrangement.

The timeframe is flexible / negotiable - generally until the child either turns 18 or their parents arrive in Australia. Parental applications under the 'split family' provisions are being prioritised to ensure that these children are reunited with their families as soon as possible. A reasonable timeframe for that to happen is around 18 months, but there are no guarantees.

Please consider this thoughtfully. You can see a video on the background of children in detention in Indonesia here: <http://vimeo.com/7308275> (this is the context that most of them are arriving from directly).

Please don't hesitate to send me an email and I will pass on the details of the relevant DHS contact.

Jessie Taylor
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