



Campaigning for just and fair treatment of refugees and asylum seekers

www.ajustaustralia.com

June 2010

Dear Supporters of A Just Australia,

It seems that the Coalition has decided to reprise the 2001 "we will decide who comes here" election. You may have seen the [Liberal Ad](#) using 1950's style big red arrows to warn of the impending invasion by asylum seekers. Liberal MPs have been briefed on how to handle this issue in the media, constantly using the term 'illegal boat arrivals.' Tony Abbott has firmly declared that if he wins government, the Coalition strategy will be to

1. Turn back boats at sea
2. Process all asylum seekers in offshore camps. If Christmas Island is full, they will reopen the Pacific Solution instead of bringing people to the mainland. This will result in children being detained for extended periods in detention camps.
3. Reinstate Temporary Protection Visas, which keep proven refugees in a cruel limbo, unable to reunite with family members left behind in danger.

Unfortunately, the debate on policy is not being fought in the halls of government. It is being decided on talkback airwaves and in the opinion pages of newspapers.

We need you to take action! Please see below for our supporters kit, to help you tackle talkback and write letters to editors.

In his short essay *Politics and the English Language* George Orwell noted: "if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought"

Your voice needs to be heard to counter the corruption of the debate through inflammatory rhetoric.

AJA membership drive

A Just Australia continues to counter the winding back of policy reform, by promoting positive policies in the media and with politicians. And of course by keeping our members informed so they can get involved.

But to continue this work we need your help - and now more than ever. Each dollar you give to AJA has an enormous impact on just and humane policy reform for asylum seekers.

As you would be aware from previous newsletters, A Just Australia members voted to merge 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.

Our campaign work is now more critical than ever.

Please help by:

- Becoming a regular monthly donor by credit card or bank direct debit. **This form of giving is most important to us, as it allows us to better plan our capacity for work over the year**
- Becoming a new member? many of whom also give an additional donation above the \$55 annual membership fees
- Renewing your existing membership for the year 2010-11. This will now be membership with the Refugee Council
- Giving a once-off donation

When you renew your membership this year, you will be given membership with the Refugee Council of

Australia. Memberships will now be by financial year, not calendar year, so renewing now will take you through to June 2011.

In addition, your donations over \$2 are now **tax deductible**.

Please pay by cheque, money order or credit card by filling out the [payment form](#) available online and post, fax or email it to us.

You can also pay online using our [secure online payment system](#).

The benefits of your membership and/or your donation will flow to others because it will help the Refugee Council continue the A Just Australia campaign for a just society and compassionate treatment for refugees and people seeking asylum.

Supporters Action Kits

We have prepared a range of materials to help you take action in the media.

Join the alert list!

If you want to write letters to editors, send us an email to media@refugeecouncil.org.au so we can add you to the alert list. We will regularly send out alerts when there are articles or issues that need to be responded to with a letter to the editor.

Talkback radio guide

Talkback radio is a powerful tool for the distribution of ideas. It can also be a vehicle for myths and untruths about refugee and asylum seeker issues. There are some shows which regularly talk about this issue, often inaccurately and using inflammatory negative language and false 'facts'. If we do not tackle the issue, who else will counter the misinformation and lies told on talkback? [Get the guide here](#), which includes contact numbers for major talkback stations around the country

Letters to Editor Writing Guide

Writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper is a great way to have your say and participate in the democratic process. [Get this handy guide](#), which includes contact details of major newspapers around the country

'Illegals' media complaints

The media and politicians often use the term *illegal* to refer to asylum seekers and refugees. This term is incorrect and only cheapens the debate around refugee and migration issues.

The Press Council has issued rulings against using the term *illegal* when referring to asylum seekers. If you come across newspaper stories using this term, we encourage you to use this guide to make a complaint. You should also make complaints about the term *suspected asylum seeker* as this also has great negative implications. You don't say *suspected murder victim*. People are only suspected of being criminals, not of being victims. Let's try to lodge many complaints about this term and get a ruling from the Press Council on this one.

[Get the guide here:](#)

Quick facts

We have prepared a new 2 pager to give you the facts you need for letter-writing and calling talkback. [Get it here](#)

Suspensions of visa processing

On April 9, The Government has suspended processing asylum claims from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan and has announced they will house them in a reopened Curtin detention centre - the first group has already arrived there. A disturbing part of the announcement was that there was no clear end, just an agreement to review the suspension after 3 months for Sri Lanka, and 6 months for Afghanistan. There is only a few weeks to go for the first deadline, and we anxiously await what will happen.

Legal opinion on the suspension

A joint opinion from 3 leading barristers (Debbie Mortimer SC, Chris Horan and Kathleen Foley) in relation to the lawfulness of the suspension of the processing of asylum claims made by Sri Lankan and Afghan nationals.

This is a strong, detailed opinion which concludes that the policy is unlawful under international and Australian law. The policy - and persons acting under the policy - are susceptible to challenge in the Federal Court of Australia and the High Court of Australia. A complaint could also be lodged with the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

Coordinated by the Human Rights Law Resource Centre, [read it online here](#):

Amnesty Information on the suspensions

Amnesty has prepared a brief [myths and facts sheet](#) on the suspensions

SRI LANKA Anatomy of a tragedy

The belief that conditions in Sri Lanka have fundamentally changed is wishful thinking, write Stephen Keim and Roshan de Silva Wijeyeratne in this account of the country's ongoing conflict. [Read it online here](#)

Afghanistan

In the week following the International Crisis Group report debunking the notion that Tamil people can be safely returned to Sri Lanka and the evidence that Tamils who have returned are safe, we now have a report from respected Afghan expert and scholar, Professor Bill Maley (board member of the Refugee Council) reporting on the situation in Afghanistan. Professor Maley's opinion supports those from International Human Rights groups on the lack of safety and security for Hazaras. [Read the report here](#)

Response to AJA open letter to the Prime Minister

In December, AJA coordinated an open letter to the Prime Minister about asylum seeker policy. This letter was signed by many organisations and individual concerned citizens.

We, the undersigned members of the Australian public, are writing to you this Christmas because we are concerned about Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. We commend your government on the positive reforms that it has made to our refugee policies so far. Under your leadership, a number of punitive and unfair policies introduced under the previous government were abolished, including the 'Pacific Solution', temporary protection visas, detention debts for refugees and the '45-day rule'. However, we believe that further key reforms must be made to our refugee policies to more closely reflect our international human rights obligations as well as our own standards of fairness, integrity, decency and humanity.

[You can read the letter here](#)

We recently received a response from the Immigration Ministers Chief of Staff.

[You can read the response here](#):