



# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

## **Migrants and Refugees challenge us to enact a culture of encounter, welcome and acceptance, says Bishop Long**

**Media Release  
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In this Year of Mercy, with many newly arrived migrants and refugees in Australia, we must enact a culture of encounter, welcome and acceptance in practical, personal and communal ways, says Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv.

Speaking ahead of Migrant and Refugee Sunday on 28 August 2016, the Bishops Delegate for Migrants and Refugees drew attention to the example set by Pope Francis on his way back to the Vatican from the Greek Island of Lesbos in April this year, 'he brought with him 12 Syrian refugees, all of whom are Muslim and had their homes destroyed by war'.

'This is the international context for this year's Migrant and Refugee Sunday, which will be celebrated on 28 August in Australia. Although we are far removed from the crisis, we are challenged to open our hearts to the sufferings of others.

'Compassion – which literally means to suffer with - is the hallmark of Christianity. In keeping with the Jubilee Year of Mercy, the Holy Father has chosen as its theme: *Migrants and Refugees challenge us: The Response of the Gospel of Mercy.*'

Bishop Long noted that across Australia 'many parishes and organisations are actively assisting refugees that have recently arrived from war-torn Syria and Iraq. It is a great opportunity for us to make a difference and to influence government policies in relation to refugees and asylum seekers'.

In his message celebrating the 102<sup>nd</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis said 'Migrants are our brothers and sisters in search of a better life, far away from poverty, hunger, exploitation and the unjust distribution of the planet's resources, which are meant to be equitably shared by all. From this perspective, it is important to view migrants not only on the basis of their status as regular or irregular, but above all as people whose dignity is to be protected and who are capable of contributing to progress and the general welfare'.

The Bishops Delegate for Migrants and Refugees said, 'Australia has had a long history of welcoming migrants and refugees, including many "boat people" who in turn have contributed to its wellbeing and development. The Pope's message and example provide us with a timely and fresh impetus to reclaim the welcoming and generous spirit that has shaped our great nation'.

Finally, Bishop Long reiterated an urgent plea to the Australian authorities to close offshore detention centres in Manus Island and Nauru, and to end the sufferings of the asylum seekers by way of a more humane solution. 'Any breach of their right to be treated with humanity and with respect for their inherent dignity will stain our conscience and blight our future as a nation,' he said.

In order to assist parishes and communities, the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) has produced a Migrant and Refugee Kit 2016 with information and resources to celebrate the event. The Kit is available on the ACMRO website: [www.acmro.catholic.org.au](http://www.acmro.catholic.org.au)



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