



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE
Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Refugee Week

18-24 June 2017

‘With courage let us all combine’

By Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv

Bishop Delegate for Migrants and Refugees

Refugee Week 2017 (18-24 June 2017) is a time to celebrate Australia’s rich diversity and shed light on the success stories of migrants and refugees in our communities. Refugee Week coincides with World Refugee Day on 20 June 2017.

During Refugee Week Australians come together and celebrate the contribution migrants and refugees have made to our country. Australia has a rich multicultural heritage, adding to its diverse heritage. Australia’s success as a Nation is in part due to this rich diversity.

Refugee Week also provides a time to reflect on the ongoing difficulties many migrants and refugees face, particularly those on Manus Island and Nauru. It is evident that our nation still has a long way to go. We need to continue to work towards the just and humane treatment of migrants and refugees in our care.

Recently, the Australian Government made a \$70 million conditional settlement deal with the 1,905 Manus Island past and present detainees. Whilst a monetary payment will never heal the wounds of time spent in detention, this settlement is at least an acknowledgement of the hurt and damage these people have gone through in trying to find a better life.

This is an opportunity for discussion amongst the Australian people, of the realities and harshness of mandatory offshore detention. Domestic advocates and international agencies have been appalled by the conditions under which asylum seekers live and the effects on their health, spirits and self-respect.

Minister Dutton has also stated recently that the boat turn-backs will be a permanent fixture of Australian immigration policy.

We need to continue to advocate for a regional solution to the refugee crisis. One where countries such as Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia work together to provide assistance to those most in need in our region.



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Australia has a rich tradition of having a big heart for migrants and refugees. Recently we have seen an erosion of this tradition in our political leaders. It is up to the community, to revive this tradition and continue the work of welcoming strangers.

In the light of the global refugee crisis, Australia needs to be a model and responsible world citizen with a more generous, non-discriminatory and balanced immigration policy – one which accords with the capacity of our nation and the best natures of all Australians. The government's present immigration policy is far from being a model for other nations. We therefore need to continue to work in bringing about the end to indefinite offshore detention. We must shed light on successful programmes and continue to advocate for the implementation of more humane programs.

Many refugees on Manus Island and Nauru still face uncertainty about their future. There has been slow progress on the settlement deal with the United States of America. Whilst interviews have taken place, there is still no definite timeframe of settlement in the United States. This state of perpetual limbo continues to prove detrimental to the mental health and wellbeing of those in Manus Island and Nauru. The Australian Government needs to honour its commitment to caring for those being held offshore. Adequate access to health, rehabilitation programmes and clean amenities are a must for the welfare of those held on Manus Island and Nauru.

It is hoped that during Refugee Week 2017 women and men of good will can voice their concerns, share their stories and bring about concrete changes to policies which do not respect the dignity of the human person. May we all continue our work to bring about positive outcomes for our refugee sisters and brothers who are less fortunate than us.

For media enquiries, please contact Aoife Connors on media@catholic.org.au

