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NEWSLETTER *September 2011*

Editorial by Bruce Duncan

Asylum seekers: time for a fresh start

The High Court has torpedoed the Gillard Government's attempt to swap asylum seekers with Malaysia, and may well end prospects of processing others offshore in PNG or Nauru. Yet in the heightened politicisation of the debate it is hard to be optimistic that good sense will prevail.

Despite the pleas of the churches and community groups to end mandatory detention, offshore or onshore, on humanitarian grounds, some politicians and shrill opponents of asylum seekers can readily stir up fears in the community, including political parties.

Why do a few thousand men, women and children arriving in boats frighten so many? People who come by air and claim asylum are allowed to move straight into the community and have work rights. No one is concerned about them. In recent decades, hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees have settled in Australia, to our country's lasting benefit. And most of our forebears sought refuge and a better life here.

With the Australian Council of Social Service, hundreds of community groups have signed a petition calling on the government to end offshore processing and indefinite mandatory detention. Other countries can quickly process refugees and asylum seekers for health and security checks, and allow them into the community. Why cannot Australia do the same?

Bishop Joe Grech memorial lecture

"One Human Family Across Borders"

with the **Federal Immigration Minister,**
the Hon. Chris Bowen

& Bishop Christopher Prowse of Sale

facilitated by SBS presenter, Anton Enus
at Australian Catholic University, Fitzroy
Thursday 8 September 7 - 9pm.

The event will be available as a live webcast at

www.catholic.org.au and on

www.acmro.catholic.org.au

*Organised by the Australian Catholic Migrant and
Refugee Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops
Conference*

We need to challenge the sophistry of "turn the boats back". Most of the boat people who arrived in Australia have been found to be genuine refugees. They came seeking protection from persecution and danger. Instead of humanely honouring our obligation to them, Australia has sought to treat them so harshly, even to driving many into mental illness or attempts at suicide, that others will be deterred from coming. Surely we Australians can treat such vulnerable people better than that. ♦

The Yarra Institute
for Religion and Social Policy
invites you to the launch of
Geoff Lacey's

SUFFICIENT FOR THE DAY: **towards a sustainable culture**



Guest speaker:
Dr Paul Mees

Thursday

15 September,
6.00 for 6.30 pm

at Dymocks,
234 Collins Street,
Melbourne

Enquiries: Yarra Institute,
(03) 9899 4777; 0409 897 971;
admin@yarrainstitute.org.au

Australia's overseas aid improving **by Bill Frilay**

Australia is significantly lifting the quantity of its overseas aid, as well as improving the quality of that aid, and putting in place ways to ensure that aid efforts



integrity • values •
accountability

are working well, according to Mr Marc Purcell. He is Executive Director of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), which represents 70 Australian aid organisations.

Speaking at an SPC public forum in Melbourne on 16 August, Marc said that these changes were an Australian contribution to meet the Millennium Development Goals and a response to new challenges to aid efforts, arising from voices demanding that Australia restrict its aid to groups within this country, and also to the changes in why, how and where aid is needed. These latter changes arise from factors such as

difficult economic conditions after the global financial crisis, economic growth in some developing countries, severe problems arising from climate change, and urbanisation in the Third World.

In November 2010, Kevin Rudd as Minister for Foreign Affairs commissioned an independent review of Australia's aid, which reported in July 2011. ACFID also made a submission to this review, stressing that, since much of development work was being done through the NGOs and religious groups, the Australian government needed to relate directly with these civil society networks, and not restrict its dealings to governments.



Marc Purcell at the SPC forum

ACFID argued for increased emphasis in our aid program to reduce inequality and poverty. It also argued for greater transparency in our distribution of aid, and avoiding using it to pay for other measures like immigration detention centres. ACFID also wanted to see reinforced the rights of disadvantaged groups, including women, children, the poor and the disabled.



Kevin Rudd at the launch of the Independent Review on Aid.
Photo courtesy AusAid

The Independent Review made 39 recommendations to the government, 37 of which were accepted. The main points were:

- ✓ Establishing a single clear objective on poverty alleviation
- ✓ Endorsing a whole-of-government approach on a 4-year plan with a secure funding commitment
- ✓ Setting up an evaluation committee
- ✓ Committing to a transparency charter
- ✓ Agreeing to a civil-society framework

- ✓ Developing partnerships within the Australian community, especially with academics, think tanks, etc
- ✓ Recognising the critical role of the business community, and
- ✓ Setting clear criteria for effectiveness.

However, Marc Purcell added that there were some disappointments.

- Human rights were not really included as a guiding framework, nor were the Millennium Development Goals adequately considered.
- There was not a high emphasis on reducing inequality.
- The report did not focus on planning.
- There were some unexplained hurdles at the level of Federal Cabinet, and Marc wondered if this could lead to a future government reversing the effort to reach stipulated aid targets by 2015.

Marc considered that the Australian Government and development groups had made significant steps, not only increasing Australia's aid but also planning to improve the delivery, effect and quality of the aid. In his view, there is still room for improvement, but Australia's aid policy is moving in the right direction. He recommended ACFID's pamphlet, *Myths Busted – The Facts about Australian Aid* (August 2011).

Bill Frilay's full report on Marc's address can be found on the SPC website, along with a podcast of the talk and YouTube clips.

SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY 2011

Melbourne launch

Building Bridges, not Walls: Prisons and the Justice System with Fr Joe Caddy,

CEO CatholicCare, Melbourne

Respondent – Sr Mary O'Shannassy SGS

Thursday 15 September, 11.30 for 12 noon

Cathedral Room, Cardinal Knox Centre,
383 Albert St., East Melbourne

RSVP justice@cam.org.au, or 9926 5710 by 12 September

For further resources contact

www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/

See also

I was in Prison and you visited Me
by the National Council of Churches in Australia
at www.ncca.org.au/departments/social-justice

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