

Open letter to all Federal Members of Parliament

In a recent statement, *A Vote For The Voiceless: a statement by the Catholic Bishops of Australia on the election*, the Catholic Bishops of Australia listed the treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum as their number one issue of concern, stating these people are 'often seen as a problem to be solved rather than as human beings in need of our help'.

In line with this statement, I write to you now on behalf of the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum – a national initiative to influence hearts and minds in the Catholic community towards a more just, compassionate and humane welcome of people seeking asylum.

CAPSA was formed in response to intense concern about the conditions for people seeking asylum in Australia, in stark contrast to the core Gospel-teachings and recent messages of Pope Francis.

These are the principles and policy positions that we, the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum, hold:

1. Offshore, mandatory and indefinite detention are wrong.
2. The principle of deterrence, by which people who have already tried to come to Australia to seek protection are treated harshly in order to stop others doing the same, cannot be justified morally.
3. People seeking asylum in Australia should live in the Australian community. Those sent to Nauru and Manus Island should be returned to Australia
4. Those living in the community should have the right to work, access to basic services, and to some financial support if they cannot find work.
5. Children should not be held in detention anywhere, but be housed in the Australian community with the full range of services necessary for their welfare.
6. In the Catholic tradition, if people are to live with dignity their family ties are essential. People should have the opportunity to be reunited with separated close family members promptly once they are found to be refugees.

Pope Francis has named this the Year of Mercy. We want our politicians to take responsibility for the harshness of the treatment of people seeking protection here, and to exercise mercy and compassion. We want change.

With the recent revelations of the dire conditions on Nauru, especially for children, we observe that now more than ever our political leaders have the opportunity and the responsibility to be courageous and compassionate. We will continue to engage with members of the Catholic and broader community about the need for an empathetic and welcome approach to people seeking asylum.

We urge you to consider this and work – as quickly as possible – to show compassion for those vulnerable people seeking protection on our shores. As Catholics, we believe fundamentally in the dignity of each human person. At present, we do not see this being upheld in our political system.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Edwards

Julie Edwards
Chair
Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum