

The Hon Bob Carr  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra

19 December 2012

Dear Minister Carr,

It was revealed last night on Channel 10 news that the Government is poised to divert at least \$375 million from overseas development programs to cover the costs of supporting refugees and asylum seekers here in Australia.

The primary purpose of Australia's aid program is to help people overcome poverty. The diversion of funds in this way will not contribute to that aim. Instead it will strip money meant for the world's poorest. It is unacceptable that a desire to balance a budget takes precedence over the rights and needs of desperate and suffering people.

In 2000 the Australian Government joined 180 other nations pledging support for the Millennium Development Goals, the aim of which is to halve extreme global poverty by the year 2015. It is hard to understand why the proposed decision to divert funds from our foreign aid would be taken, when the Prime Minister herself is the co-Chair of an international Working Group meant to ensure that developed countries meet their commitments to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

This reported decision is not in line with undertakings that Australia made to the world as it sought support for significant positions in global leadership. On the eve of Australia taking its seat on the United Nations Security Council, now is the time to show leadership by non-negotiable commitment to our international responsibilities to assist the poorest people of our world.

As an alternative to your proposal if asylum seekers and refugees in this country were permitted to work the financial costs would not be as great and, additionally, they would contribute to our economy and enjoy some degree of self-esteem and better mental and emotional health than many currently experience.

In this Christmas season characterized by giving and good will it would be a travesty of justice to try to balance the budget on the backs of the poor.

We call on the Government not to proceed with this reported decision and honour its aid commitment to help people in the developing world to overcome their poverty.

Yours sincerely,

Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace