



CCJP

CATHOLICS IN COALITION FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

PO Box A21  
Enfield South  
NSW 2133

Jason Clare MP  
Minister for Home Affairs and Justice  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

10<sup>th</sup> May 2013

Dear Minister,

Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace (CCJP) is a coalition of individuals and groups, working for the emergence of just social structures in Australia and overseas. It works as an integral part of the Church at the service of the world and especially for victims of injustice. CCJP aims to act in solidarity with the poor, deprived and oppressed people of Australia and the world in the struggle for justice and peace.

### **Offshore processing**

It is of great distress to our many members to see the recent reports about the severely inadequate physical and medical conditions endured by asylum seekers on both Manus Island and Nauru. These reports by ABC News, taken from a Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) submission and a Four Corners documentary, show that asylum seekers' health, safety and welfare are in grave risk.

The DIAC submission about the Manus Island Centre highlights problems with water supply, electricity supply, accommodation structures, heat and mosquitoes as well as concerns about its location noting it is in 'a low-lying swampy area subject to localised inundation which encourages mosquito breeding'. The fact that the Government restricts journalist access and that the Australian Human Rights Commission has not been invited to review the centres, increases the cause for concern among our members.

The policy of off-shore processing, reinstated by the Labor Government, is proving to be ineffective in its stated goal of reducing arrival numbers. It is also extraordinarily expensive. The Four Corners programme estimates that it has so far cost \$1 million per asylum seeker for the Nauru centre and that the Government will spend \$2.3 billion over the next 4 years on off-shore processing centres. At a time when the Government is seeking to reduce its expenditure, the continuation of this policy makes no economic sense.

It is a politically and economically ineffective policy. It is also a morally unacceptable one. The mental health risks posed by indefinite detention and specifically by off-



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shore detention have been highlighted through reports on the previous Pacific Solution policy. When such risks are combined with poor planning, poor and insanitary housing and, as Dr. John Vallentine stated in the Four Corners programme, insufficient and inadequate medical supplies, then to put any person, not to mention children and sick people, into such conditions is inhumane.

**CCJP asks the Government to reverse its off-shore processing policy and close all off-shore processing centres.**

If the Government is to persist with its off-shore processing policy then CCJP calls on the Government to invite an independent body, such as the Australian Human Rights Commission, to conduct a full and open review of the Manus Island and Nauru detention centres. This review should cover the medical service and supplies, the accommodation and facilities, as well as the 'No Advantage' rule in order to better manage the physical and mental health, safety and welfare of the people detained at these centres and to reduce the stress, uncertainty and lack of clarity they face.

**The welfare of families and children on bridging visas in the community**

While we are glad to hear that asylum seeker families will be moved from offshore processing centres into the community on bridging visas, we are very concerned that the conditions of the bridging visas will force these families to live in deplorable conditions. We ask you to ensure that any asylum seeker moved onto a bridging visa will have the opportunity to seek work.

Recent policy changes deny this right to some asylum seekers based on their time and mode of arrival in Australia. As a fundamental human right, asylum seekers should have the right to work. Without work rights, asylum seeker families could live in a limbo of uncertainty and social exclusion for years.

At CCJP, we have many close connections to other community and church organisations who provide direct support to asylum seeker families living in the community. We know from first-hand experience that often families are living in dire poverty and are dependent on hand-outs of food and other donations in order to provide the basic necessities.

We ask you to support work rights for all asylum seekers including families whilst their asylum applications are processed. This will enable them to move towards financial self-sufficiency and could therefore result in significant financial savings for the Government.

Yours sincerely,

Sr. Anne Lane pbvm  
On behalf of Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace