



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



New policy on community integration for asylum seekers “promising” says Catholic Church.

**Media Release
28 November, 2011**

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office welcomed today the decision by the Minister for Immigration Chris Bowen to move asylum seekers arriving by boat into the community on bridging visas while their claims are assessed.

Director of the ACMRO Fr Maurizio Pettenà CS said that the announced policy change is another important step by the Government to alleviate the detrimental effects of prolonged detention of desperate people.

“This is a very appropriate step and one that has been made due to the passionate support of the Departments and charitable organisations who have made hosting asylum seekers in the community such a great success.

“It shows good will for which we are very grateful. Australia’s commitment to uphold the dignity of those who seek asylum was stated when signing the 1951 refugee convention. These changes seem to reflect something of that statement”, he said.

The ACMRO also welcomes the decision to grant work rights to those on bridging visas. The right to work is essential for anyone in order to protect and provide for their family.

“I believe this policy will be well executed, and asylum seekers who are given the opportunity to live and work in the community with the support of the Department and other Non-Government Organisations, will see their lives greatly improved and the community will be all the richer for it”, said Fr Pettenà.

The policy would see asylum seekers released into the community as soon as it is deemed that they do not present a security risk to the country, and they would be allowed to live in the community freely until their claims for asylum are adequately processed.

Those considered too vulnerable to be given “bridging visas” such as unaccompanied minors have already been released into the community under an existing program, and under this policy, would continue to be given a high level of support.

Mr Bowen said the first group consisted of long-term detainees, all single men, previously accommodated at a range of detention facilities across Australia and at various stages of their asylum claims. They are mostly Afghans and Sri Lankans.

For media enquiries, please contact Beth Doherty 0407 081 256 or Joe Moloney 02 6201 9895