



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Asylum seeker community support more than reasonable says Catholic Church **Media Release** **February 17, 2012**

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) supports the Government's efforts to reduce the human cost of prolonged and indefinite detention.

Media reports which criticise the Government for providing asylum seekers released into community detention with up to \$10,000 of home furnishings, electrical goods and other financial support has been called misleading and provocative by the ACMRO.

ACMRO Director Fr Maurizio Pettenà said today that community detention is not only cheaper in financial terms but also reduces the impact on the mental health and recognises a sense of human dignity.

"These costs are an appropriate expense to facilitate community detention which is a much more dignified way to host asylum seekers while awaiting their refugee claims to be processed", he said.

"These asylum seekers do not own these goods, they are owned by the Australian community who places them at the service of a truly humane and compassionate program for those who are in great need of our help."

"We also expect to see some reduced downstream costs, including the cost of mental and physical health services, family intervention services and other support programs. There is also the potential that time in community detention could facilitate a faster entry to the workforce once a client gets a visa."

"It can be expected that asylum seekers will experience better mental health and better integration generally as they have an opportunity to learn about the Australian community and have autonomy over their own lives", said Fr. Pettenà

Bishop Eugene Hurley who has just been appointed to the Minister's advisory council on immigration also spoke out on the matter, saying that the newspaper's treatment of this issue is simplistic and incorrect.

"By providing asylum seekers, particularly families, with essentials, we demonstrate a more humane way to assist vulnerable people. This reflects more fully our interest in living up to our international convention obligations and the values of a more compassionate society", he said.

A spokesperson for the Department of Immigration said that they expect that costs will actually decrease with this new move.

For media enquiries or to organise an interview with Fr Pettenà or Bishop Hurley, please contact Beth Doherty on 0407 081 256