



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Tackle Asylum Seeker Phenomenon at the Source

Media Release

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The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) expresses great sadness of the loss of life of the asylum seekers who's vessel capsised attempting to reach Australia.

“The decision to get on a boat in order to seek asylum is not made by someone who has any other choice” said Fr Maurizio Pettenà Director of ACMRO “No one wants to be an asylum seeker. No one wants to risk their life on open waters.”

“This news will likely attract a lot of attention towards people smugglers and political concerns around offshore processing, let's not forget these tragedies are a reflection of a much greater issue”he said.

“There is a great and urgent need to tackle the phenomenon of asylum seekers at its source”said Fr Pettenà. Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Sri Lanka all feature in the top 20 countries at risk of serious human rights violations and mass killings.

"These people are desperate. We cannot expect asylum seekers will always behave rationally" he said "they know the boat journey is dangerous and they know they're likely to end up in detention, but in their situation, it is often seen as a necessary step in order to secure their long-term future"

ACMRO urge the government to explore alternative measures which would allow a number of these people who are most at risk to depart in an orderly fashion directly from countries of conflict and persecution and then be processed in Australia.

“Australia should explore suitable arrangements with countries like Afghanistan, Iran and Sri Lanka to allow people through an orderly process to escape at the source and take away the need for many to put themselves at the mercy of smugglers and dangerous boat journeys" said Fr Pettenà “ currently these people have no alternatives”.

We are greatly encouraged by Minister Bowen's call to increase Australia's humanitarian intake. "Quite simply, the demand for refugee visas far outstrips supply" said Fr Pettenà "Increasing the number of available places is by far our best solution to the asylum seeker phenomenon"

For media enquiries or to arrange an interview with Fr Maurizio Pettenà please contact Joe Moloney on (02) 6201 9848.