

# REPORT FROM THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MIGRANT AND REFUGEE OFFICE

## TO THE AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

(October 2005 to September 2006)

### AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC MIGRANT AND REFUGEE OFFICE (ACMRO)

Monsignor John Murphy is full-time Director, assisted by three part-time staff: Jenny Ingloff (Information and Administration Officer), Lisbeth Westra (Labour Agreement Administrator) and Kathy Brennan (Clerical Assistant).

### MEETINGS/TELECONFERENCES.

In the period of this report, the Director participated in the following meetings, consultations or teleconferences:

- **Two Governing Committee meetings of the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC)** in Rome – on 25-28 November 2005 and 1-3 July. Among the decisions made were the following:
  - To approve a Strategic Plan for the work of ICMC with migrants and refugees until 2010
  - To increase member participation in the work of ICMC
  - To identify roving ambassadors in the various regions (Australia is in Oceania) and to promote regional forums.
  - To seek new ways of fund-raising, eg creation of an endowment fund
  - To publish a regular “Migration Monitor”
  
- **Peak agencies meeting with Senator Amanda Vanstone**, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs about the composition of 2006/2007 Humanitarian Program. Issues raised included the financial difficulties faced by voluntary agencies in offering sponsorships for humanitarian cases (especially the payment of travel. ACMRO also made a formal submission to the Minister on the proposed program.
  
- **Consultations** between the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) and Non-Governmental Organisations on the Humanitarian Program in February and July.
  
- **The Canberra Consultative Advisory Group for ACMRO** (4 meetings). During the period of this report, the Committee addressed the following issues:
  - National Conference on Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees (16-18 November 2005) – preparation and follow-up.
  - Protocol for religious workers in Immigration Detention Centres
  - Visas for religious students

- Trafficking of women and children
  - Issues for DIMA/NGO meetings
  - Proposed new Asylum Seeker processing laws (April 2006, withdrawn from Senate before voting in August 2006).
  - Bridging Visa Review
  - Review if DIMA Detention Services Contract (current contract due to end in August 2007)
- **The Consulters' Group for the Catholic Immigration Office, Sydney** (1 meeting)
  - **Planning for the National Conference for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees** (November 17/18 2005). A subcommittee of six people, with Noelene Veness as Facilitator, held a number of meetings and teleconferences to plan the details of the Conference. Mgr Murphy and Jenny Ingloff were members of the subcommittee and ACMRO was the executive office.

The Conference celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Bishop John Scalabrini and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coming to Australia of the first Vietnamese refugees in 1975. The theme of the conference was “ For you are all one in Christ Jesus” ( Gal.3:4 ). Apart from a presentation on the Church and Migration globally by Cardinal Fumio, President of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People, and a presentation of the Instruction “Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi” in an Australian context by Fr Maurizio Pettena, the Conference revolved around eight themes:

- The changing role of migrant chaplains and their pastoral relationship with parishes
  - Models of Pastoral Care to people on the move
  - Interaction of Catholic Eastern and Western Churches in Australia
  - Spiritual and material needs of aged immigrants
  - Migrants in rural and provincial dioceses
  - Refugees, asylum seekers and the Church
  - Immigrants, the liturgy and popular devotions
  - The evolving identity of the Church in Australia
- **Planning for the Migrant Chaplains' Conference Day** (16<sup>th</sup> November) was coordinated by Fr Dominic Ceresoli, Episcopal Vicar for Immigration, Sydney Archdiocese, and the Catholic Immigration Office, Sydney. Monsignor Murphy was a member of the coordinating committee. His Eminence Cardinal Fumio Hamao, President of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People, and Fr Adrian Pittarello were the speakers on this day at Chevalier Resource Centre, Kensington, NSW. 90+ migrant chaplains attended. The day concluded with concelebrated Mass (Cardinal Hamao was Principal Celebrant and Preacher) and the evening meal.
  - **Evaluation and Implementation following the National Conference.**
    - An evaluation meeting was held in Sydney on December 19<sup>th</sup> 2005
    - Two committees were formed to address the two principle issues which emerged from the Conference recommendations: 1) To consider the formation of a National Pastoral Plan for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees; 2) To consider the preparation of seminarians for work in a multicultural Church. The

- work of these committees is ongoing
- The next day for Migrant Chaplains will be held in the second half of 2007
- The next National Conference is scheduled for 2009
- **Teleconferences (5) with Priests and Religious Sisters who provide pastoral care at the Immigration Detention Centres** at Baxter (Port Augusta), Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. The major issues were:
  - The new DIMA protocol for religious workers at Detention Centres
  - Nomination of Chaplains and religious Workers under the new protocol
  - The Parliamentary Bill (April 2006) for increased off-shore processing of asylum seekers
  - New DIMA contract for Detention Services Provider (to begin in August 2007)
  - Regular reports from each detention centre. Asylum seekers are now only a small proportion of those in detention. The majority are illegal fisherman and people who have broken visa conditions.
  - Refurbishment of the Centres – assurances were sought that DIMA will provide space for religious services.
- **Community Consultative Group at Maribyrnong (Vic) Detention Centre.**  
Mgr Murphy is a member of this group which meets each two months.
- **The Catholic Immigration Office Directors annual meeting** in Sydney on April 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. This was followed by a meeting of the Directors with the Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees on May 1st at which the Directors brought the following points before the Bishops:
  - Proposed Federal Government legislation (April 2006) to send all asylum seekers, who arrive by boat, off-shore for processing
  - Trafficking of Women and Children
  - DIMA Review of Bridging Visas
  - Recommendations for the observance of Refugee and Migrant Sunday (27<sup>th</sup> August 2006)
  - Recommendations for the implementation of recommendations from the National Conference (November 2005) and for the preparation of the next Conference in 2009
  - The annual reports from the Catholic Immigration/Multicultural Directors

**Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees. (4<sup>th</sup> May 2006)**

The following points were included in the agenda:

- The Committee's decision to recommend to the Bishops' Conference that closed letters be written to the Prime Minister as follows: 1) requesting that the proposed legislation to increase off-shore processing of asylum seekers be withdrawn: 2) commending the Government for its work so far in addressing the issue of Trafficking and suggesting possible action. The Committee prepared draft letters for presentation to the Plenary. Eventually the two letters were sent by the

- President of Conference and replies were received from the PM's office.
  - Reports to the Committee by the Apostleship of the Sea, the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (ACLRI) and ACMRO.
  - Report for 2005 to the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People
  - Implementation of National Conference recommendations
  - "Welcoming Priests from Overseas" (final document)
  - DIMA Protocol for Detention Centre pastoral workers
  - 13<sup>th</sup> Report from the Joint Liason Group on Child Migration
  - Refugee and Migrant Sunday (27<sup>th</sup> August 2006). It was decided that the Poster would be sent to schools only (not parishes)
  - Progress of the ACBC Labour Agreement for bringing priests, religious and lay pastoral workers to Australia
- **The Joint Liason Group for Child Migration** (2 teleconferences).  
In addition to finalising the Family Tracing Project, the Committee is keeping a watching brief on Child Migration issues.
  - **A meeting (28<sup>th</sup> September 2005) called by DIMIA to consider the formation of a protocol** for Priests and Religious who provide pastoral care at the Immigration Detention Centres. Peter McArdle, Research Director of the ACBC and Mgr. Murphy represented the Catholic Church at this meeting. Preparation of the protocol has made good progress since the meeting.
  - **The National Council of Churches in Australia** (Refugee and Displaced Persons Committee) – two meetings (24<sup>th</sup> January and 27<sup>th</sup> June).
  - **Refugee Council of Australia teleconferences** (ten) with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These teleconferences addressed current issues concerning refugees and asylum seekers, with a special emphasis in 2006 on the proposed off-shore processing of all asylum seekers who arrive by boat.

## **SUBMISSIONS**

- To Minister Amanda Vanstone on the composition of the 2006/2007 Humanitarian Program
- To the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee on the Inquiry into the Administration and Operation of the Migration Act 1958

## **MEMBERSHIP OF ORGANISATIONS.**

ACMRO is a member of:

- Refugee Council of Australia
- A Just Australia (Organisational Supporter)
- Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA)
- National Council of Churches (Refugee and Displaced Persons Committee)
- ACT Multicultural Council

## **REPRESENTATION TO THE MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND OTHER PARLIAMENTARIANS.**

A number of requests were made to Minister Vanstone to use her Ministerial Power to grant more favourable decisions in refugee/asylum seeker/migrant cases.

### **CASE WORK.**

Fr Murphy and Jenny Ingloff are registered (non-fee charging) migration agents and respond to requests for help in coming to, or remaining in Australia (most frequently under the Humanitarian Program, but also under the Migration Program). These requests (approximately 300 in the year) come by email, mail and telephone from people overseas and in Australia. People already in Australia (eg visa applicants on temporary visas and/or their sponsors) often visit the office. Requests from overseas come most frequently from African countries.

In order to continue as registered migration agents, Mgr Murphy and Jenny are obliged to participate in a renewal course each year.

### **MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES FOR DIRECTOR.**

- Meeting with Ms Anne Plunkett, newly appointed Ambassador to Ireland and the Holy See (21<sup>st</sup> February)
- National Launch of DIMA Client Service Improvement Program (2<sup>nd</sup> June) and regional Launch (19<sup>th</sup> July)
- Funeral of Dr Laszlo Benyei (3<sup>rd</sup> June), former Director of Resettlement Department of the Australian Council of Churches (now the National Council of Churches in Australia)
- Meetings re renewal of Detention Services Contract (July and September)
- Australian Christian Heritage Forum (6/7 August)
- Australian Labor Party's review of Temporary Protection Visas and Bridging Visas (16<sup>th</sup> August)
- Meeting with DIMA and DEWR (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations) re extra places in the Labour Agreement for Permanent Visas for Lay Pastoral Workers.

### **MEDIA RELEASES.**

In the period of this report, subjects of media releases from the Bishops' Committee for Migrants and Refugees included:

- Changes to asylum processing a step backwards (April 19<sup>th</sup>)
- Catholic Bishops write to Prime Minister urging him to reconsider changes to asylum processing laws (May 17<sup>th</sup>)
- Catholic Bishop welcomes government's withdrawal of offshore processing bill (August 14<sup>th</sup>)

## **REFUGEE AND MIGRANT SUNDAY 2006/2007.**

Material for Refugee and Migrant Sunday 2006 (27<sup>th</sup> August) was sent to Bishops and Catholic Education Commissions for distribution to parishes and schools. It was also sent to all media (Catholic and secular). The material included a poster (to schools only), messages from Pope Benedict XVI, from Bishop Grech, and from ACMRO, and Liturgy notes. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, Mgr Murphy participated at the National Council of Churches Office in Sydney at the judging of the winning entries for the secondary schools' media competition for Refugee and Migrant Sunday 2007. As in past years, Catholic schools provided most of the entries.

## **LABOUR AGREEMENT.**

ACMRO administers a Labour Agreement with the Department Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The Agreement provides for the temporary and permanent entry to, and stay in Australia of a specified number of religious workers (and their dependents where applicable) for service in the Catholic Church in Australia. Our very dedicated and capable Administrator of the Agreement is Lisbeth Westra. A new Agreement is about to be signed for the three period commencing 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006/

Each year ACMRO is obliged to provide a Monitoring Report of the Labour Agreement to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. The following points are taken from the Report to DIMA for the period 1 October 2005 to 30 September 2006

- During the third year of the current Agreement (beginning 1<sup>st</sup> December 2005), a total of 138 nominations and 117 visas were approved. Compared to the previous year, this represents a small increase of two additional nominations.
- Information relating to the 117 visa approvals in the following categories (*see Appendix 1 for further detail*)
  - Visa Category (Temporary or Permanent)
  - Occupational Classification
  - State of Residence in Australia
  - Gender and Age
  - Length of Visa Issue
  - Country of Origin
  - Exceptional Appointments on the grounds of Age for all Occupational Classifications
  - Exceptional Appointments on the grounds of Proficiency in English for all Occupational Classifications.
- Information on the number of nominees that are undertaking formal and informal English training. These figures are based upon the responses received to a questionnaire sent out by ACMRO to dioceses and religious congregations.
- ACMRO is in the process of compiling a handbook on the Labour Agreement to assist dioceses and religious congregations. In the handbook we stress the importance of vocational English and inform dioceses and religious congregation about accredited English language training through the Australian Migrant English Program.
- Dioceses or Religious Congregations provide maintenance for their nominees. The occupation of nominees is to carry out Pastoral Work in the Catholic Church under

the terms of the Agreement.

- The visa ceilings agreed for year 3 of the Labour Agreement are:
  - 121 for Permanent entry, with a separate inclusion of 16 lay pastoral workers
  - 155 for Temporary entry, with a separate inclusion of 15 lay pastoral workers
- Owing to the continued and acute shortage of priests and religious personnel we request the retention of the current ceiling levels of 155 Temporary Visas and 121 Permanent Visas under the new Agreement.
- However, the current ceilings restrict the Church's ability to nominate lay pastoral workers for Permanent Residence. In the current year there were insufficient places for permanent appointments of Lay Pastoral Workers. We will therefore ask for a substantial increase in the new agreement

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