



INSTITUTE OF
SISTERS of MERCY
OF AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

ABN 42 931 784 103

6 November, 2013

The Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister

Subject: A Joint Appeal to the Prime Minister about the use of the Term 'Illegal Maritime Arrivals'

As the Leader of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea, I write to express our deep concern at the Australian Government's recent decision to refer to asylum seekers who enter Australia by boat as "*illegal maritime arrivals*". We strongly support the Joint Letter issued 6 November 2013 by the Refugee Council of Australia and endorsed by 138 non-government agencies, faith-based organisations and community groups.

The use of this language, "*illegal maritime arrivals*", does nothing to acknowledge the individuals as human beings. It implies that in seeking asylum in Australia they are doing something illegal which is incorrect. They are **people**; they are not '*illegals*'. They are '**people in boats**'; they are not 'boat people'.

As a Catholic Religious Congregation of women who works with asylum seekers, we continue to vehemently condemn current Australian policies and actions which increase the suffering and anguish of asylum seekers and, simultaneously diminish our common humanity. We believe we are **all** called to respond to the needs of others and are challenged to *offer the gift of extravagant compassion, justice, hospitality and promote the human rights of asylum seekers*.

Australia has a responsibility to uphold their human rights. How will you do this? What is your response to the recent compassionate actions by the Italian government and, to the words of Pope Francis?

The Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea urges the Australian government to "*work towards its objectives in ways that place a much higher value on cooperation, diplomacy, respect and honesty. We ask you, for the sake of highly vulnerable people and for the good of our nation, to take the better path*".

Institute Centre - Stanmore

33 Myrtle Street
Stanmore NSW 2048

P 02 9572 5400 **F** 02 9560 5435 **E** institute@ismapng.org.au

It is very important to us that this issue has public awareness so our communication with you and any subsequent correspondence may be highlighted in our newsletters and on our website.

Yours sincerely



Sister Berneice Loch RSM

Leader, Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia and Papua New Guinea