

A CALL FOR COMPASSION

An open letter calling for compassion for Rohingya asylum seekers

We stand together as Christians, calling for mercy for Rohingya asylum seekers. We call on the Australian Government to display leadership in this crisis and use its influence in the region to broker safe passage for those trapped at sea.

There are approximately 8,000 Rohingya asylum seekers currently stranded in the waters off Southeast Asia. These vulnerable men, women and children are facing disease and starvation in this most horrific of humanitarian crises. Since violence erupted in Myanmar's Rakhine state two years ago, more than 86,000 people have fled by boat across the Bay of Bengal to seek refugee protection. Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia are not signatories to the Refugee Convention, and all three nations have indicated that they will not allow the boats to land and the asylum seekers aboard to have their claims for refugee protection processed.

While successive governments in Australia have argued that tough policies serve to stem the flow of asylum seeker boats and save the lives of those who journey by sea, there is simply no evidence to support the position that deterrence saves lives. Prime Minister Abbott has strongly defended the rights of Southeast Asian nations to prevent the boats making landfall - despite the human cost of the policy likely being the lives of thousands of asylum seekers.

We believe that Australia's position in the face of this suffering directly contradicts our commitment to human rights. Jesus taught that to be faithful to God is to live out a mission of hospitality towards the other: to love our neighbour as ourselves. We believe that refugee and asylum seeker policy should be underpinned by a spirit of hospitality and compassion, and that any policy or legislation must reflect the obligations under the international human rights treaties to which we are a signatory.

As Christians, we stand together and call for action. We call for mercy and safe passage for these Rohingya asylum seekers.

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