

DESPERATE AND SEEKING ASYLUM

Asylum Seekers

*“They are begging us, you see, in their wordless way,
To do something, to speak on their behalf
Or at least not to close the door again”*

Derek Mahon, *A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford*

The stories of the desperation and the needs of asylum seekers continue to be reported in the news and as always there are different points of view. It is vital that their human dignity is respected in a very practical manner, not solely in words.

- Do you feel threatened by their pleas or challenged to respond with understanding and compassion?
- Are you concerned for their physical and mental well-being and for the protection of human rights?
- Will you voice your concerns to the Minister for Immigration and other politicians?

Contact Senators and Members

If you are concerned about these issues contact the relevant politicians

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members

In March, the campaign ***Out of Sight, In Our Minds*** <http://www.outofsight.org.au/> was highlighted. The campaign raises awareness about the plight of children and adult asylum seekers detained on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea under Australia’s watch.

Understanding Refugees

Understanding Refugees lists key moments in Australian policy concerning refugees. (See *attachment following this page*) This document provided by the Social Justice Committee, Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in NSW, asks

*What do you want to see in the future of immigration to Australia?
Make an informed choice in this election year.*

Further Information

Refugee Council of Australia: Myths about refugees and asylum seekers see:

<http://refugeecouncil.org.au/f/myth-long.php>

UNDERSTANDING REFUGEES



Australia becomes a signatory to the **UN Convention on the Status of Refugees**

1954

The Whitlam government abolishes the **White Australia Policy**.

Thousands of refugees enter Australia following the **Vietnam War**.

1973

Australia's first formal refugee policy is enacted, stating firstly that Australia recognises its humanitarian commitment.

Immigration Minister Michael MacKellar reassures the public that the **"boat people"** are not **"illegal immigrants"**.

1975

1977

The Migration Legislation Amendment Act is introduced by the Hawke Government to intimidate **"illegal entrants"**. This harsh legislation is a step backward, forcing asylum seekers to pay for their own detention.

1978

Mandatory detention is introduced under the Howard government for those who arrive to Australia without a visa.



1989

Temporary Protection Visas are introduced, subjecting refugees to an ongoing state of limbo and exclusion from basic welfare. Australia is the only country to introduce TPVs for genuine refugees as a form of penalty. This damages our international reputation.

1992

Protests occur at detention centres across Australia over slow processing and poor conditions, including hunger strikes and lip sewing. Examples surface of detainees with severe psychological trauma.

1999

The Tampa Crisis occurs, in which 439 Afghan refugees are rescued by a Norwegian ship and then refused entry to Australian waters, sparking a dispute between Australia, Norway and Indonesia.

2000

A series of **parochial measures** introduced by the Liberal government formalise the **Pacific Solution** of offshore processing.

2001

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees expresses **concerns about the vilification of refugees in Australia**.

2002

A UN Report on Mandatory Detention argues that Australia's practices contravene human rights agreements.

The ALP Government abolishes the **Pacific Solution**.

2007

Christmas Island detention facility becomes operational, and includes measures for the long-term detainment of children.

The government abolishes **Temporary Protection Visas**, on the grounds that they are ineffective and inhumane.

2008

Prime Minister Gillard announces the intention to work towards a **regional protection framework in the Asia-Pacific**.

Australia stops charging refugees for their time spent in detention. Refugees were previously charged up to \$100 a day for their own detainment.

2009

SIEV 221 crashes on Christmas Island, 50 asylum seekers are believed to have died.



New arrangements in the Asia-Pacific region result in **offshore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island**, raising concerns due to the human rights commitments of these states.

2010

Protests, hunger strikes and unrest in many detention centres, as well as five deaths in just over six months.

2011

20th anniversary of mandatory detention.

2012

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA?

2013?

Make an informed choice in this election year.