

**Open letter to The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull & The Hon. Peter Dutton, The Hon. Bill Shorten
& The Hon. Richard Marles, Senator Richard Di Natale & Senator Sarah Hanson Young**

In a recent statement, *A Vote For The Voiceless: a statement by the Catholic Bishops of Australia on the election*, the Catholic Bishops of Australia listed the treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum as their number one issue of concern, stating these people are 'often seen as a problem to be solved rather than as human beings in need of our help'.

In line with this statement, I write to you now on behalf of the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum – a national initiative to influence hearts and minds in the Catholic community towards a more just, compassionate and humane welcome of people seeking asylum.

CAPSA was formed in response to intense concern about the conditions for people seeking asylum in Australia, in stark contrast to the core Gospel-teachings and recent messages of Pope Francis.

These are the principles and policy positions that we, the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum, hold:

1. Offshore, mandatory and indefinite detention are wrong.
2. The principle of deterrence, by which people who have already tried to come to Australia to seek protection are treated harshly in order to stop others doing the same, cannot be justified morally.
3. People seeking asylum in Australia should live in the Australian community. Those sent to Nauru and Manus Island should be returned to Australia
4. Those living in the community should have the right to work, access to basic services, and to some financial support if they cannot find work.
5. Children should not be held in detention anywhere, but be housed in the Australian community with the full range of services necessary for their welfare.
6. In the Catholic tradition, if people are to live with dignity their family ties are essential. People should have the opportunity to be reunited with separated close family members promptly once they are found to be refugees.

Pope Francis has named this the Year of Mercy. We want our politicians to take responsibility for the harshness of the treatment of people seeking protection here, and to exercise mercy and compassion. We want change.

Voters approach you and indeed assess you and other candidates by the positions you take on a wide variety of issues.

One of the most pressing issues in Australia from an ethical and moral perspective is the treatment of people seeking protection in Australia. We, as members of the Catholic community, in schools, parishes, hospitals and other organisations, are very concerned. Although interdiction has stopped more people coming by boat to Australian territory, those who have tried are still being punished and denied any hope of finding a new life in Australia. This is despite their doing only what is legal and reasonable given their circumstances.

We wish to inform you that in the lead up to this election, we are actively urging voters in our communities to consider the voiceless people trapped in the harsh conditions of Australia's immigration processes. We are encouraging Catholics to consider what policies need to be in place to ensure a more humane outcome for both those on Nauru and Manus Island, and those waiting in the Australian community.

We urge you to consider this and work, as quickly as possible, to show compassion for those vulnerable people seeking protection on our shores. As Catholics, we believe fundamentally in the dignity of each human person. At present, we do not see this being upheld in our political system.

Yours sincerely,



Julie Edwards
Chair
Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum