

CAPSA Federal Election Statement

Over this election period the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) calls for a commitment from all sides of party politics to language and policies that reflect a compassionate and humane Australian society.

This election is an opportunity to bring a change in the way we see, treat and live together with people seeking asylum. The Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum calls upon the incoming Federal Government to legislate and make policies that are fair and compassionate. Discriminatory treatment towards people seeking asylum who have arrived by boat to Australia is unnecessary for the security of our borders. It is possible to be both fair and kind.

We call on the incoming Federal Parliament to provide a fair process for people seeking asylum. This means a system where:

- Protection visa applications are processed promptly and transparently
- There is adequate support for people while they wait for their application to be processed
- We process people seeking asylum while they live in the community, in Australia
- There is provision for families to promptly be reunited in Australia.

Fundamentally, we need to heed the words of Pope John Paul II *“to see Christ in every brother and sister in need, to proclaim and defend the dignity of every migrant, every displaced person and every refugee. In this way, assistance given will not be considered an alms from the goodness of our heart, but an act of justice due to them”*.

This is a challenge for all of us, including our political leaders and policy makers, to use language and to act in a way that consistently acknowledges the human dignity and preciousness of each person who seeks asylum. Australia, as the first country from the Pacific region to serve on the UN Human Rights Council, on many different levels must re-work the way we comply with our international obligations and the personal needs of those who seek asylum.

Australia’s current policies and processes relating to those seeking asylum, with distinctive discrimination against those who arrived by boat, cannot be characterised as fair – nor can the large sums of money spent on detention centres, both onshore and offshore.

The Catholic community serves, assists and journeys with people seeking asylum and refugees across the health, education, pastoral, and social spheres. This assistance, which requires significant time, energy and finances, should ideally enhance the work of government-facilitated settlement and processing for people who apply, and are accepted under, Australia’s protection. Instead, this assistance is currently most often a lifeline. Our efforts and resources, which could be put towards joyful integration, inclusion and welcome, have instead been turned to crisis relief and advocacy for the most basic considerations of people seeking asylum. The Catholic communities’ efforts in this regard are both made necessary and consistently thwarted by punitive policies enacted by Government.

The current situation is untenable for people seeking asylum, in both Nauru and Manus, in our prison-like onshore detention facilities, in our systems of appeal and even in our communities where thousands of vulnerable individuals and families are at risk and suffering destitution due to Government support being removed and no longer offered.

The Catholic community stands ready to continue our work of welcome. Our political leaders must introduce and champion policies that complement the wonderful work that so many Catholic parishes, schools, organisations and congregations do to welcome and accompany people newly arrived to this country.