



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

### STATEMENT FROM ACBC PRESIDENT ARCHBISHOP MARK COLERIDGE

Our elected representatives have returned home for Christmas without resolving the offshore detention crisis that confronts our country. It would seem that a majority in both houses of our Parliament favour laws and policies that will bring to an end the five-year saga of refugees and asylum-seekers who have had to put their lives on hold on Nauru and Manus Island.

A wealthy country with a robust rule of law and multicultural tolerance, Australia is an attractive place to live and to find peace and security. It is no surprise that courageous and resourceful people fleeing persecution anywhere in the world would be happy to make a home here – just as they did after the wars in Europe and in southeast Asia.

Our politicians are rightly committed to maintaining secure borders and an orderly migration program. We always need to be asking if we Australians could be more generous in the number of people in humanitarian need we receive each year as part of our orderly migration program.

Both sides of Parliament are committed to police, military and diplomatic measures aimed at stopping unauthorised boats coming, especially from Indonesia. We should only turn back boats by means that are legal, transparent, and safe. We should always ensure that anyone on such a boat is not directly fleeing persecution in Indonesia.

Both sides of Parliament remain committed to offshore processing and third-country resettlement for asylum-seekers arriving in Australia by boat without authorisation. But even if such arrangements are left in place, it has always been accepted that there is a need for prompt resettlement of those proven to be refugees.

After five years, we have to ask: If our Government is unable to find a home for these people in another country, should we not provide them with a home in Australia or New Zealand (which has generously offered places) while at the same time strengthening the police, military and diplomatic measures to ensure that boats remain stopped? Then should we not do more to co-operate with our regional neighbours to care for those seeking processing and security in our region, and to provide a permanent home for more of these persons who are fleeing inhumane conditions in their home countries?

This Christmas, we ask our politicians to consider a fresh return to Canberra in the new year, intent on putting an end to the intolerable situation on Nauru and Manus Island endured by asylum-seekers whose plight continues to be our responsibility. We cannot afford to have the plight of these people made even worse by making their futures the subject of bitter electoral disputation in the year ahead.

Enough is enough. Let's find them a home.

*December 18, 2018*