



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Reaction to Detention Centre Protests highly questionable: Fr Maurizio Pettena CS Media Release 17 March, 2011

Protests by asylum seekers at Christmas Island are an “understandable reflection of the conditions of detention”, said Fr Maurizio Pettena CS, Director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office in a statement today.

“The frustration involved with been locked up for the duration of the application process is immense and we need to consider more appropriate and humane responses to this issue.”

“The use of tear gas and bean bag rounds, fired by shotguns is a highly inappropriate method for managing this situation”, he said.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Australian Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International all report on overcrowded conditions, lack of health and legal services, insufficiently qualified government and contractor staff, insufficient interpreter services, isolation, depression, hopelessness, despair, anxiety, self harm, suicide and attempted suicide in Australian immigration detention centres.

“Proper management should include effective legal representation, sufficient mental health and medical care, and expedient processing of claims”, Fr Maurizio said.

“The Catholic Church will never accept mandatory detention, in particular prolonged, offshore and remote detention of asylum seekers and refugees.

Detention is for criminals. Asylum seekers and refugees are *not* criminals.

“Asylum seekers are people created in the likeness of God, deserving of dignity, and due to circumstances beyond their control are now in search of a sustainable life. Political demands should never prevail over the value of the human person”, he said.

“Mandatory detention of asylum seekers is not necessary for the protection of Australians. We do not need to lock up such small numbers of people who arrived without a valid visa to send a message to others.”

For Media Enquiries, Please contact Beth Doherty (0407 081 256) or Fr Maurizio Pettena CS. The Full Statement is available at www.catholic.org.au.