



ACSJC

AUSTRALIAN ♦ CATHOLIC ♦ SOCIAL ♦ JUSTICE ♦ COUNCIL

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20 January 2011

Bishop alarmed about safety of asylum seekers

“The Federal Government must ease the suffering of asylum seekers in remote facilities waiting for their claims to be assessed,” said Bishop Christopher Saunders. The Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council says that now is the time for the Government to act on commitments it made when it came to power to improve conditions and speed up processing.

The call comes as hundreds of asylum seekers at the Curtin Detention Centre protest over delays of their claims and the possibility of being deported to danger.

“It is hard to imagine the frustration and fear these men are experiencing. The pastoral work of the Church shows how the crowded conditions in detention for long periods simply adds to the trauma of being forced to flee persecution and danger in their homelands. At the end of the day, the facilities at Curtin are still barbed-wire encampments set in the midst of an inhospitable environment. At its best it represents a punitive response to a global social problem involving millions of displaced people,” Bishop Saunders said.

In 2008, the Rudd Government announced that detention centres would be used as a last resort, for the shortest practicable time, and that people posing no danger could remain in the community while their visa status was resolved. This year the Gillard Government announced a more efficient and streamlined process to ensure claims are assessed without excessive time in detention.

Bishop Saunders said, “While these are welcome undertakings, the situation at Curtin highlights the need to put the measures into effect now. Out of a basic sense of compassion we need to address two of the most damaging elements of the refugee migration system – prolonged immigration detention and the fear of being repatriated to circumstances of extreme danger.

“Asylum seekers at Curtin have not been informed of how the new Memorandum of Understanding with Afghanistan will impact on their claims. It is now time for the Minister and Departmental officials to meet with the detainees and explain how their real concerns for their future safety are being taken into account.”

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