



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Fr Maurizio Pettena offers reflection on Malaysia deal
Media Release
26 May, 2011

Director of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office Fr Maurizio Pettena has challenged the Australian government to consider the dignity of human life when dealing with issues of irregular migration.

Reflecting today on the phenomenon of Global Migration, Fr Pettena questioned the Malaysia deal and challenged the government to increase its humanitarian intake.

“It remains essential for Australia to hear asylum seekers when they knock at our door. Concern for the welfare of asylum seekers must not stop at our border”, he said.

“We acknowledge that the policy of sending the next 800 boat arrivals to Malaysia might appear a deterrent for further boat arrivals, however we cannot condone this policy, as essentially “swapping human life” goes against the moral teaching of the Church.”

“While Malaysia appears willing to uphold the key aspect of the Refugee Convention to not return asylum seekers to the origin of danger; this alone does not afford asylum seekers the opportunity of a sustainable life”, said Fr Pettena.

“The burden of irregular migration flows is one which needs to be shared more equally between countries based on their capacity to care for asylum seekers”, he said.

The ACMRO also argued that Australia has one of the most successful resettlement programs in the world and that the number of refugees under this program be increased. They expressed concern too about countries in the region which are not signatory to the Refugee Convention.

“The negotiations between Australia and Malaysia represent a bilateral agreement and a step towards a regional framework for managing and protecting forced migrants. Any regional framework is likely to include countries that are not signatory to the Refugee Convention. What is not negotiable is the welfare, dignity and respect of migrants both forced and voluntary.”

The ACMRO reason that the people smuggler business model is diminished by increasing Australia’s humanitarian intake.

“By providing desperate people with a valid pathway into Australia they are then less likely to risk their lives on a boat. Irregular flows of forced migrants do not continue indefinitely; but how we respond as a nation will be remembered”, said Fr Pettena.

Please contact Beth Doherty (0407 081 256) to arrange an interview with Fr Maurizio Pettena CS.