



# AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

## Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



### Help Boat People by Increasing Settlement Places

#### Media Release

2 November 2011

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office offers condolences to the victims of the terrible tragedy of those who lost their lives off the coast of Indonesia yesterday.

Director of ACMRO, Fr Pettená said “This tragedy heightens the need to provide legal pathways and more space within our humanitarian program. Australia has been content to resettle around 13,500 refugees per a year for over a decade, while this is generous in comparison to many countries; it is simply not enough”.

“If Australia is serious about stopping the boats there needs to be an alternative which alleviates the suffering of those living in exile. By increasing our number of resettlement places it takes pressure off poor countries of first asylum and transit countries” he said.

“The recent trend in boat arrivals to Australia is largely due to the increasingly saturated space available in transit countries such as Malaysia and Thailand. Currently both Malaysia and Thailand are experiencing a substantial protracted inclusion of Burmese refugees. As a result, they have no vacancies available for those fleeing from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Sri Lanka. These compelled migrants have little choice but to move further on” said Fr Pettená.

“There is bipartisan support for an increase in the humanitarian program. There is also a lot of support from the community to increase refugees through an orderly process, increasing our annual intake can achieve this” he said.

“Currently, Australia has by far the most regulated migration program in the world. Our border security is far more effective and efficient than that found in the Americas or Europe. However, boat arrivals are exceptional and chaotic movements and we have to be mindful of that” said Fr Pettená.

“The welfare of boat arrivals should be of top priority and the government has done much to diminish the criminal elements which facilitate these movements. Once again we continue to encourage the government with on-shore processing and in their pursuit of regional collaboration in a humanitarian spirit” he said.

“By 1950 Australia had received over 567,000 post World War II refugees. Economically, we are in a much better position today. The potential number Australia could receive is significantly greater than 13,500” said Fr Pettená.

**For media enquiries or to arrange an interview with Fr Maurizio Pettená CS, please contact Beth Doherty on 0407 081 256**