



Celebrating 100 years
MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST. COLUMBAN
Sharing Gospel Joy

Columban Mission Centre
PO Box 752
Niddrie VIC 3042

Telephone: 03 9375 9475
Facsimile: 03 9379 6040
Email: info@columban.org.au
Website: www.columban.org.au



18 June 2018

Hon. Malcolm Turnbull
Prime Minister
House of Representatives
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Mr. Turnbull,

Refugee Week – Reconsider the cutting of financial support to asylum seekers

Refugee Week reminds us what it is to be a refugee – someone who “has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.” Happily Australia was one of the first signatories to the Convention on Refugees. It obliged our nation to accept and protect people who flee to safety on our shores asking for asylum.

Australia seems to be forgetting this basic responsibility to accept and protect. Harshly it is banishing asylum seekers to off-shore islands for unendurable lengths of time; preventing genuine refugees coming to Australia from Manus Island and Nauru; subjecting asylum seekers to long periods of processing that leaves asylum seekers in a state of suspension.

In recent months Minister Dutton announced the cutting of financial support (two thirds of Newstart) to asylum seekers resident in Australia. Despite the best will in the world the asylum seeker NGOs, along with support services, community mental health teams and the police, will be unable to assist all of the estimated 7-12,000 people left without funds or shelter - destined to be at the bottom of the employment pile. This makes them vulnerable to exploitative work, in danger of homelessness and generally at risk.

What has happened to “the land of the fair go”, the Australia that welcomed thousands of refugees from post-war Europe, Vietnam, East Timor, El Salvador, Bosnia and many other countries? As a member of the Missionary Society of St Columban, with its long experience working with refugees and concerned for the future of our country, **I ask that you re-reconsider these harsh penalties.** Please begin regarding asylum seekers as vulnerable human beings. If welcomed, they could make a great contribution to Australia like those in the past.

Yours sincerely,

Peter O'Neill

Rev. Fr Peter O'Neill
Peace, Ecology & Justice Coordinator

