



Uniting Church in Australia Assembly

Media Release

UNITING CHURCH CONDEMNS ESCALATING ABUSE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Uniting Church in Australia has today strongly condemned the continuing and systematic abuse of asylum seekers trying to reach Australia by boat and those being held indefinitely in unsuitable offshore detention centres.

The President of the Uniting Church in Australia, Rev. Prof. Andrew Dutney said that the Government's inhumane treatment of 157 Tamil asylum seekers had plumbed new depths of cruelty.

"The revelations about what happened to the Tamil asylum seekers while they were detained on a Customs vessel are truly shocking," said Rev. Prof. Dutney.

"Capturing people on the high seas, detaining them in harsh conditions and then threatening to set them to sea without experienced navigators or sailors, demonstrates a level of hysteria on the part of the Government that is extremely disturbing.

"In its single-minded efforts to 'stop the boats', this Government has lost its moral compass. What started badly enough as using asylum seekers for political point-scoring has degenerated into a callous disregard for the value of human life."

The revelations about the 157 asylum seekers come as more horror stories emerge from the Australian Human Rights Commission Inquiry into Children in Detention.

Rev. Elenie Poulos, the National Director of UnitingJustice Australia said such abuse of children in Australian Government care was inexcusable.

"According to children's health specialists, Sarah Mares and Karen Zwi (*The Guardian*, 12 May 2014), the drawings done by the children on Christmas Island clearly demonstrate that these children are 'scared, sad and disillusioned'. They are suffering and this is a direct result of the Government's policies," said Rev. Poulos.

"It is beyond comprehension that the Government believes it is acceptable to deliberately subject children to such clearly harmful treatment. That it shows no willingness to immediately adjust its policies to ensure the wellbeing of children demonstrates a callousness unbefitting of our democracy and our nation's leaders," said Rev. Poulos.

The Uniting Church in Australia's long-standing position is that the detention centres on Manus and Nauru should be closed and that asylum seekers' claims for protection must be processed promptly, fairly and humanely with appropriate legal support on the Australian mainland.

"Families and unaccompanied minors must be immediately released into the community with appropriate care and support. The Uniting Church stands ready to help provide that support," said Rev. Prof. Dutney.

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