



## Responding to Asylum Seekers & Refugees Some Catholic Resources

### Recent Policy Debates in the Region

The governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea have made an agreement for the refugee status determination and resettlement in Papua New Guinea of asylum seekers who have reached Australia by boat. Civil society organizations have questioned the legality of the agreement while religious groups have questioned its morality.

The Australian Bishops have responded via their agency, the Australian Catholic Migrant & Refugee Office. Their statement on the policy is here: <http://mediablog.catholic.org.au/?p=2194>

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea & the Solomon Islands have also responded through their Social Concerns Commission. Their statement is here:

[http://cbcpngsi.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=273:bishops-conference-deeply-regrets-rudd-oneill-agreement-on-refugees&catid=22:front-page-news](http://cbcpngsi.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=273:bishops-conference-deeply-regrets-rudd-oneill-agreement-on-refugees&catid=22:front-page-news)

The religious orders in Australia have responded through their organization, Catholic Religious Australia. Their statement is here: <http://www.catholicreligiousaustralia.org/index.php/85-website/content/news-a-views/media-releases/1101-asylum-seekers-are-human-beings-not-political-pawns>

### Catholic Social Teaching & People on the Move

Catholic Social Teaching provides a moral and ethical assessment of human mobility issues rather than starting from legal instruments or political agreements. For a general overview of the approach of Catholic Social Teaching to questions of asylum and human mobility, read this article:

<http://www.faithdoingjustice.com.au/docs/PeopleOnTheMoveAndCST.pdf>

Catholic Social Teaching has been addressing these issues for several decades. An indication of the key documents and their concerns is provided in this prezi which was prepared for the Augustinian Symposium on Human Mobility:

[http://prezi.com/4wyk7ibdiuym/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy&rc=ex0share](http://prezi.com/4wyk7ibdiuym/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share)

The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants & Itinerant People issued an *Instruction* in 2004 called *Erga Migrantes Caritas Christi* (The Love of Christ for Migrants). It is the key document that guides the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in this area. The full text is here:

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/migrants/documents/rc\\_pc\\_migrants\\_doc\\_20040514\\_erga-migrantes-caritas-christi\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_erga-migrantes-caritas-christi_en.html)

Pope Francis's first pastoral visit outside of Rome was to the port town of Lampedusa. Many asylum seekers have lost their lives attempting to reach this port. The full text of Pope Francis' homily is here: <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-on-lampedusa-the-globalization-of-indifferenc>

In June this year the *Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrant and Itinerant People* together with the *Pontifical Council Cor Unum* issued *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons*. A discussion guide to these guidelines is available here: <http://social-spirituality.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Discussion-Guide-Refugees-Displaced-Persons-Pastoral-Guidelines.pdf>

The Catholic Church in Australia celebrates *Migrant & Refugee Sunday* on the last Sunday in August. A kit to assist parishes and schools to celebrate this occasion has been produced by the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office. It can be downloaded here:

[http://www.acmro.catholic.org.au/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=34&Itemid=2](http://www.acmro.catholic.org.au/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=34&Itemid=2)

## International Humanitarian Law

In order to engage with the policy debates in this area, we need to understand some of the key concepts used and the international humanitarian law instruments involved.

Do you know the difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee, or the difference between people smuggling and trafficking in persons? This prezi on outlining key concepts used in the area of human mobility was prepared for the missiology course *Perilous Journeys* delivered at the Catholic Institute of Sydney in 2011: <http://prezi.com/qbyf68z0pxjs/key-concepts-in-human-mobility/>

Most people have heard of the Refugee Convention, but there are actually a number of international legal instruments concerning mobility. This prezi, prepared for the *Perilous Journeys* course provides an overview: <http://prezi.com/rdnjwvwxcq/international-legal-instruments-concerning-mobility/>

## What Can We Do?

1. Seek information from reliable sources such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Parliamentary Library Service rather than looking only to the media.
2. Mind your language - frame discussion of the issues in terms of moral and ethical concerns such as the dignity of the human person, human rights, and solidarity rather than national interests and the integrity of borders. Ask first, 'what is happening to people?' and 'what would I do in their position?'
3. Use the *Game of Migrant Life* contained in the ACMRO *Migrant & Refugee Sunday Kit* or UNHCR's *My Life as a Refugee App* to place yourself imaginatively in the shoes of asylum seekers.
4. Volunteer with or donate to community organizations that are assisting asylum seekers living in the community without the right to work or adequate income support. Some examples are: Jesuit Refugee Service, the House of Welcome, and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. The Refugee Council of Australia provides a list of places where you can volunteer: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/g/vol.php](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/g/vol.php)
5. Go to the root causes of displacement - support international development agencies, efforts to mitigate climate change or respond to extreme climatic events, and efforts for human rights and peace building.
6. Pray - for those who are forcibly displaced; for communities which receive asylum seekers or that resettle refugees; for politicians and decision makers.