

Concerned Catholics Tasmania Inc.

4 October 2022

Senator Anne Urquhart
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Dear Senator Urquhart

Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Thank you for meeting with Susi and me, as representatives of Concerned Catholics Tasmania (CCT), on Wednesday 31 August 2022.

Our understanding is that, since the Federal election, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has been working with a coalition of organisations to encourage the Albanese Government to act promptly on its commitment to grant permanent protection to refugees on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs). We are keen to know how well and how quickly that process is going.

In our conversation, you mentioned the Honourable Andrew Giles, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, and his commitment to addressing the challenging questions regarding asylum seekers and refugees. Catholic social teaching has much to contribute and say about human dignity and the common good. Hence, we welcome Minister Giles' remarks, made in the House of Representatives on 8 August 2022, when he said:

"I am determined to change the tone of debate on these issues.I am determined that no more.....will vulnerable human beings be used as political footballs in this place or more broadly in the political debate in Australia. It has been coarsened for too long. That must end."

We appreciate that the Albanese government needs to focus on the common good. Minister Giles highlighted that when he said they are looking *"at the interests of vulnerable human beings seeking our help, on the one hand, and the broader questions that go to our national interest and maintaining a secure border on the other."*

Nevertheless, Minister Giles did emphasise our concern which is that we need to give thought, not only to the impact on asylum seekers and refugees upon whom suffering

is being inflicted, but also to the impact on Australian citizens who acquiesce in the infliction of pain. He said:

“If we can walk away from the use of these people as political collateral, then that work, that shared responsibility in this place to achieve more durable solutions more quickly, will be so much easier. We will be better as a parliament for that, and we will be so much better as a community.”

and

“I started my remarks by talking about the tone of this debate. It is a debate that has coarsened us as a nation. I think we have to reflect on that.”

Minister Giles went on to conclude with these remarks on a way forward:

“the frame for this has got to be in the terms the Prime Minister has so often set out: we can maintain strong borders without abandoning our humanity. I'd put it slightly stronger than that: we can only maintain strong borders if we elevate our compassion and humanity.”

We welcome Minister Giles' remarks and the Albanese government's emphasis on common good and human dignity.

Concerned Catholics Tasmania supports the RCOA initiatives and the following proposals:

- 1 Expanding the Refugee and Humanitarian Program;
- 2 Reorienting that Program towards humanitarian needs and a focus on UNHCR priorities;
- 3 Conducting a formal review of family reunion options, to be conducted in a co-designed process with communities;
- 4 Expanding and extending the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement;
- 5 Replacing the CSP with a genuine community sponsorship model;
- 6 Ending the link between the offshore and onshore protection programs and abolishing the cap on onshore places; and
- 7 Building a Humanitarian Program which works effectively to support solutions for refugees in the Asia-Pacific region.

We would be pleased if you would take these matters up with the relevant Ministers and provide us with a progress report together with our government's intentions regarding those proposals.

Yours sincerely

Kim Chen

Chair - Concerned Catholics Tasmania