

Asylum seekers – a fair and ethical debate

A statement by Baptcare

As an organisation providing housing and support to asylum seekers living in the Victorian community, Baptcare is appalled by the scapegoating of this vulnerable group in the current election debate. We call on all candidates to demonstrate an ethical stance in debating refugee issues on the basis of fact.

Baptcare rejects the popular view that boat arrivals are economic migrants attempting to bypass Australia's immigration processes. Figures released by the Department of Immigration & Citizenship show that over the past few years 90% of people arriving by boat were found to be genuine refugees. Baptcare believes all people should be judged solely according to the merits of their claim regardless of their mode of transport.

Baptcare believes any attempt to scale back Australia's commitment to the United Nations' Refugee Convention is not appropriate at a time when Australia holds a seat on the UN Security Council. We also urge any future government to maintain the legal rights of asylum seekers already in Australia; to ensure timely and fair assessment of refugee claims; and to maintain access to the appeal avenue of the Refugee Review Tribunal.

We believe most Australians are genuinely appalled at the human rights records of the home countries of many refugees. It is not the Australian-way to return people forcibly to places where they will face torture and death. Baptcare believes our Immigration system should only return people to areas where there is adequate assurance and monitoring of safety and freedom from persecution.

Baptcare opposes mandatory detention – in Australia and overseas. It is not illegal for anyone to seek asylum in a foreign country, therefore no crime has been committed under international or Australian law in arriving on our shores seeking asylum. Also, Baptcare decries the mental health impacts of detention, which are well documented. As a Christian organisation with concern for and work with vulnerable children, Baptcare particularly opposes the detention of children, families, and unaccompanied minors. We urge whoever forms government to scale back the current system of mandatory detention costing billions of dollars and replace it with the far more humane and cost-effective community-based detention.

The majority of asylum seekers currently in Australia will indeed become part of our community. Baptcare is concerned at the level of homelessness, destitution, stress and mental health issues caused by long delays in immigration processing, inadequate income, lack of housing, and the impacts of detention. We call on whoever forms government to ensure that asylum seekers become productive members of our community by providing all with access to English-language classes, education and training, Centrelink and health services, and the right to work.

Having family around helps people settle successfully in Australia. Baptcare calls on whoever forms government to increase the number of humanitarian places available for family reunion and to open these to all new Australians judged to be genuine refugees.

Baptcare calls on whoever forms government to ensure Australia meets its international humanitarian obligations and acts in a way which reflects our Christian heritage of justice, humanity, compassion and generosity, and the Australian value of a fair go.

Baptcare is the welfare and aged care agency of the Baptist Union of Victoria. Baptcare provides supported accommodation to asylum seekers through our Sanctuary programs in Brunswick and Preston.



Graham Dangerfield
Chief Executive



Philip Curtis
Acting Chair

