



THE UNAA POSITION ON REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS 16 APRIL 2018

1. The UNAA notes that:

- 1.1. The world is experiencing unprecedented numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) - an estimated 65.6m as at 30 June 2017 (around 22.5m refugees and 43.1m other IDPs). Resolving this global problem is a high priority. Apart from the very real humanitarian necessity to do so, mass displacement affects national and international security and erodes economic growth and prosperity. This significant challenge requires Australia to be both pragmatic and compassionate in its national planning and responses, and to contribute purposefully to regional and global solutions.
- 1.2. The greatest burden of accommodating refugees and asylum seekers falls on developing countries that are compelled to provide sanctuary for those fleeing conflict and/or persecution. Very few displaced persons seek refuge in Australia.
- 1.3. Traditionally, Australia has been generous in its acceptance of migrants, and has a proud history of their successful integration. Australia has also been generous in its acceptance of refugees and asylum seekers, most of whom have contributed positively to our nation's economic development and enriched our multicultural identity
- 1.4. All governments have the right to determine who enters their country within the context of their national immigration framework. Australia needs to have effective border security policies and measures in place, and the Government needs to take all reasonable measures to prevent people smuggling and illegal trafficking of people.
- 1.5. Australia needs to be alert to the threats of international terrorism and transnational crime, and the Government needs to minimise threats to national security or public order.

2. The UNAA believes that:

- 2.1. Effective resolution of the challenges of refugees and asylum seekers will require global perspectives, regional solutions, and local Australian political action
- 2.2. Australia should contribute purposefully to the UN's Global Compact on Refugees. This Compact is required to transform the way the international community prevents and responds to refugee crises. As a major refugee re-settlement country, Australia can and should make a positive contribution to the Global Compact.
- 2.3. Australia should take a leading role in developing regional solutions to displacement that are supportive of the rules-based international order and prevention of people trafficking.

- 2.4. Current policies and measures to prevent refugees and asylum seekers from coming to Australia need to be reviewed. Australia's current policy only shifts the problem to other countries.
- 2.5. Australia's reputation as a welcoming host country and as a responsible global citizen is diminished by our current treatment of asylum seekers and refugees arriving spontaneously, as evidenced by arguments from within the Australian community and from the UNHCR. There are alternatives
- 2.6. Australia's current detention of refugees and asylum seekers compromises Australia's ability to effectively pursue broader regional and global aims in stabilising and supporting people displaced by conflict and civil unrest.
- 2.7. Processing arrivals offshore is not cost-effective. Between 2012 and 2016 the cost to Australia was an estimated \$9.6b. Though costs have reduced as arrivals have decreased, the estimated cost of offshore processing for 2017/18 was \$714m.¹
- 2.8. Effective resolution of the challenges of refugees and asylum seekers requires the Australian Government to fully commit to the principle of international responsibility-sharing, and fully abide by Australia's international legal responsibilities. This includes the proper care and protection of spontaneously arriving refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.
- 2.9. The UNHCR is currently inadequately resourced to deal with the massive caseloads of refugees and asylum seekers worldwide.

3. The UNAA urges the Australian Government to address the following eight critical issues in building a sustainable and comprehensive protection framework globally, regionally and domestically:

- 3.1. To continue to play a positive role in seeking to address the current global crises regarding refugees and asylum seekers.
- 3.2. To fully consult with the Australian community as it continues to develop its position on the Global Compact for Refugees, currently being developed by UN member states.
- 3.3. In consultation with civil society and relevant UN agencies, to continue to forge a strategic dialogue with countries in our region through the Bali Process and initiatives such as the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration in developing feasible regional responses to refugee and asylum seeker problems. These should address respective responsibilities for transit hosting, processing and accepting of refugees and asylum seekers who enter the region.

¹ Figures from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2017/18 Portfolio Budget Statement. The cost of offshore processing was \$1.078b in 2015/16 and \$1.082b in 2016/17. The cost of offshore processing for 2017/18 was estimated at \$714m.

- 3.4. To review the alignment of asylum seeker policies with other foreign policy objectives, and to continue Australia's commitment to a generous and expanded resettlement program for refugees and asylum seekers.
- 3.5. To ensure that Australia maintains robust immigration and border protection mechanisms to prevent the efforts of people traffickers, but treat all refugees and asylum seekers equitably and in accordance with international refugee law and human rights law - thereby reinforcing Australia's steadfast commitment to strengthening the rules-based international order.
- 3.6. To review the refugee protection legislative framework in Australia with a view to reinstating the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees as an important reference point for status determination arrangements, thereby ensuring that the Convention once again serves the purpose intended through Australia's accession to that instrument.
- 3.7. To immediately close the offshore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, ensuring at least temporary protection in Australia of those individuals who cannot yet be repatriated safely or resettled to another country. The UNAA believes this is possible without compromising Australia's strong border protection framework.
- 3.8. To facilitate and support the work of the UNHCR and promote research and educational projects in Australia on international refugee and statelessness issues.

The UNAA welcomes opportunities to work with the Australian Government in addressing these eight initiatives and exploring innovative new approaches to build a sustainable and humane global architecture in supporting displaced people.