

UNAA Statement on Refugees and Asylum Seekers November 2019

The United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) believes Australia needs to be both pragmatic and compassionate in its national planning and responses to the current unprecedented numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons around the world, and to contribute purposefully to regional and global solutions.

The UN Global Compact on Refugees was endorsed in 2018 by all UN Member States, except the United States. The Compact is intended to serve as a blueprint for fairer, more predictable and sustainable international cooperation. The Compact contains a number of recommendations for states to consider, including the development of regional and national action plans. Australia should engage actively, positively and in a timely way with this effort.

The UNAA notes:

- The UNHCR reported an average of one person displaced every two seconds in 2019. There are approximately 70.8 million displaced persons in the world, including 25.9 million refugees, 41.3 million internally displaced persons and 3.5 million asylum-seekers. In addition, there are currently approximately 3.9 million stateless people.
- All governments have the right to determine who enters their country within the context of their national immigration framework and their obligations under international law. Australia needs effective border security policies and measures in place, and the Government should take reasonable measures to prevent people smuggling and the illegal trafficking of people.
- Australia needs to be alert to the threats of international terrorism and transnational crime. These objectives are not compromised, but rather, are enhanced by immigration and asylum policies which respect international norms and the rule of law.
- Over 25% of Australia's population were born overseas, while 49% of the population were born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas. Modern Australia was built on migration and migrants have and continue to make a significant contribution to economic development and enrich our multicultural identity.

The UNAA urges all political parties to:

- Continue to play a positive role in seeking to address the current global crises regarding refugees and asylum seekers.
- Consult with the Australian community as it continues to develop its position on the Global Compact for Refugees.
- In consultation with civil society and relevant UN agencies, continue to forge a strategic dialogue with countries in our region to develop feasible regional responses to refugee and asylum seeker problems. These should address respective responsibilities for transit hosting, processing and resettling refugees and asylum seekers who enter the region.

- Review the alignment of asylum seeker policies with other foreign policy objectives and continue Australia's commitment to an expanded resettlement program for refugees and asylum seekers.
- Ensure Australia maintains robust immigration and border protection mechanisms to prevent the efforts of people traffickers, while treating all refugees and asylum seekers equitably and in accordance with international law and human rights law. This would reinforce Australia's steadfast commitment to the maintenance and strengthening of the rules-based international order.
- 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.
- Immediately close the offshore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island, ensuring at least temporary protection in Australia of those individuals who cannot yet be repatriated safely or resettled to another country. This is possible without compromising Australia's strong border protection framework.
- 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 current and future Australian Governments and Members of Parliament in addressing these initiatives and exploring innovative new approaches to building a sustainable and humane global architecture to support displaced peoples.

