



Immediate Sanctuary Required for Refugees fleeing Syria and Iraq

The Uniting Church in Australia is today calling on the Government to commit to a significant increase in Australia's refugee intake as a response to the crisis in Syria.

"While we welcome the Federal Government's commitment to increase our refugee intake from Syria, the scale of this crisis requires a much greater response," said Uniting Church President Mr Stuart McMillan.

"I am pleased that politicians and political parties across the country are recognising that Australia has a moral duty to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis.

"We have seen the human face of this tragedy and we can no longer turn our backs.

"As one of the wealthiest and most secure countries in the world, we have an obligation to respond generously," said Mr McMillan.

National Director of UnitingJustice, the Uniting Church's justice and advocacy agency, Rev. Elenie Poulos says that while the Government response is a start, it still fails the generosity test.

"The recommendation from the Federal Opposition to accept 10,000 Syrian refugees without reducing our current intake is a step in the right direction.

"We can do even better. We believe that Australia should offer 15,000 to 20,000 refugees protection as a matter of urgency.

"Refugees fleeing the violence in Syria and Iraq should be given permanent visas with work rights and supported to access appropriate healthcare and education in Australia. A substantial increase in Australia's current funding commitment to the UNHCR is also required."

The Uniting Church has long argued that all asylum seekers should be allowed to live in the community while their claims for protection are determined.

"Any Syrians or Iraqis or others from the region who are currently imprisoned in our detention centres, here or on Manus Island or Nauru should also be released. They too should be allowed to live in the community with work rights and access to services while their claims are processed," said Rev. Poulos.

President McMillan has also cautioned the Federal Government about military intervention in Syria that would worsen the situation for vulnerable civilians.

Mr McMillan said, "We must take some responsibility for our own contribution to instability in this region. We cannot commit to more military action while ignoring the victims of this conflict."

"Countries like Germany are taking in hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing from a conflict. Now is the time Australia must face the reality of the global refugee crisis. It's time to reopen our hearts and our borders."

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