



**WE ARE NOT AT WAR WITH ASYLUM SEEKERS**

UnitingJustice Australia, the social justice policy and advocacy unit of the Uniting Church, is deeply concerned at the reports of shots being fired at a boat carrying 25 asylum seekers off the coast of Indonesia.

National Director of UnitingJustice Rev. Elenie Poulos said that the latest events in the Government's 'war on asylum seekers' are very troubling.

"The level of hostility now employed against men, women and children is completely unacceptable," said Rev. Poulos.

"We are not at war with those seeking refuge. The means by which asylum seekers arriving by boat are forcibly turned around are tools of intimidation and violence which are inappropriate during times of peace.

"The unabated use of the word 'illegal' to describe asylum seekers has seemingly made it acceptable to mistreat those who are entitled and deserving of our protection."

Rev. Poulos also expressed concern over changes that removed liability for the mistreatment of asylum seekers, a move that is normally reserved for activities during war.

"The Government has sought to curtail its responsibilities through legislative amendments and administrative changes. But the rights of asylum seekers are clear and must not be diminished.

"It is not illegal to seek asylum, regardless of the method of arrival. We urge the Government to comply with its responsibilities under the Refugee Convention and offer asylum seekers protection, not further persecution."

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**Contact:** Elenie Poulos 0417 431 853