



A Day of Great Moral Failure

The Uniting Church in Australia has expressed its dismay at changes passed to the Migration and Maritime Powers Acts which will cause greater suffering for those vulnerable people seeking refuge in Australia.

“Today is a day of great moral failure for Australia,” said Uniting Church President, Rev. Prof. Andrew Dutney, in response to legislation that passed the Senate in the early hours of this morning.

“The Federal Government has now made it legal to punish the strangers that Jesus called Christians to welcome, simply for seeking our protection.”

“These measures will only cause more suffering for refugees who have already suffered so much,” said Rev. Prof. Dutney.

The Uniting Church has long-standing concerns about the policies of successive governments which aim to punish and deter rather than protect people in need.

The legislation passed by the Senate grants unprecedented powers to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, placing the Minister’s decisions out of reach of the courts and giving him permission to act contrary to international law.

Rev. Elenie Poulos, National Director of UnitingJustice Australia says these changes will not protect refugees.

“A genuine regional solution founded on the principles of protection was the right way to stop people boarding dangerous boats. This legislation is the wrong way. The Minister will now be unaccountable to the public and the culture of secrecy will continue unchallenged.”

“This Bill was sold as the only way to help those currently stuck in our immigration centres but over the years asylum seekers have been released into the community without leaving them in limbo for years on Temporary Protection Visas.

“By making it legal for Australia to breach international law and removing references to the Refugee Convention from the Migration Act, Australia has declared to the world that we have little respect for human rights.

“Any calls we now care to make on other countries to improve the protection of people’s human rights will surely fall on deaf ears.

“This legislation sends a message to the rest of the world that the complex global problem of refugees fleeing violence and persecution is no longer Australia’s problem. It is a dark day for democracy and a dark day for human rights in this country,” said Rev. Poulos.

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