



Discussion Paper – Australia’s Humanitarian Program 2018-19

Introduction

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) is the permanent institution of the Catholic Church in Australia acting as the national body for the Bishops of Australia on issues of national significance. The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) was established by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference on 1 July 1995. The work of the ACMRO is to advise and serve the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference at both a national and international level on migrant and refugee issues, including the development of Church policy. The ACMRO acts as an official Church voice as approved by the Bishops' Conference on issues relating to migrants and refugees.

The Catholic Church in Australia contributes in a wide variety of ways across the spectrum of Australian society. As an integral part of its core mission, the Church seeks to assist people experience the fullness of life. It is concerned with all that impacts on human wellbeing. The Catholic Church, through its various entities, provides pastoral care to migrants coming to Australia as tourists, short term visitors, students, refugees, temporary residents, and permanent residents.

The ACMRO administers the Catholic Church’s labour agreements for Specialist Managers nec, Ministers of Religion, and Religious Assistants. The ACMRO also works with Dioceses and Congregations in applications for seminarians, priests, and religious to minister to the Australian community.

Summary

The ACMRO commends the current Government for its support and commitment to the Australian Humanitarian Programme.

There are, however, concerns that need to be addressed within this programme. These will be discussed throughout this submission and are outlined as such;

- To continue to increase the Humanitarian program.



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- To consider a second special additional number of Humanitarian Program places, similar to the 12,000 announced in 2015.
- To consider places within the Humanitarian Program for the increase of persecuted Christian in areas of conflict.
- To expand the Community Support Program

To continue the increase in the Humanitarian program

The ACMRO has welcomed the increase to the Humanitarian Program announced by the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, announced in 2016. This announcement and its successful implementation over 2017-18 shows that an increase in the program is possible. We foresee that the 2018-19 intake will be just as successful.

The continued increase in the Humanitarian Program is possible. A further steady increase, beyond 2019, over the next 5 years totalling around 30,000 in 2024-25 is possible. It has been demonstrated that Australia is able and capable of settling a humanitarian intake of around 30,000. We saw this throughout 2015-2017 with the standard humanitarian intake and the additional 12,000 places allocated to the Syria and Iraq conflicts.

To consider a second additional number of Humanitarian Program places

The Catholic Church in Australia, and in particular the Eastern Catholic Eparchies, have received and assisted in the successful settlement of the special intake of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Many parishes around Australia have assisted with the settlement process. Many of these have successfully integrated into the Australia community, mainly due to the assistance the Catholic Church community has provided. Upon the announcement of this special intake, many catholic churches, particularly Eastern Catholic Churches, set up programs for arrival, assistance, and integration. There have been many successful families and individuals who have shared their gratitude and stories of success. This special intake has had a positive benefit to the Australian community and particularly those whom have come under the program.

This special program should be looked at again, assisting to bring out another 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees. The conflict in this region is still ongoing and there are many Christian families caught up in the conflict or forced to leave their ancestral homelands.



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To consider places within the Humanitarian Program for the increase in persecuted Christian in areas of conflict

Christians are an increasingly targeted minority group in many parts of the world. Persecutions of Christians in the Middle East in recent years has been at the forefront of the concern of the Catholic Church in Australia. The Catholic Church is immensely grateful of the special 12,000 places allocated for Syrians and Iraqis fleeing persecution.

However, the “...eradication of Christians, and other minorities, was – and still is – the specific and stated objective of extremist groups at work in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere in the region, including Egypt.”¹ This is especially evident in places in Syria and Iraq. The city of Aleppo in Syria, in 2011, was home to 150,000 Christians, the largest Christian community in Syria. However, by 2017 the number of Christians dropped 75 percent to 35,000. Whilst some of the decrease in numbers is due to the conflict, there is a large disproportion in the numbers of Christians to the overall population. In the same period the overall population of non-Christians fell by around 25 percent.² Similarly in Iraq the number of Christians has dropped from 275,000 in 2015 to below 200,000 in 2017. Some estimates indicate that the number could be as low as 150,000 in 2017.

There is still a pressing need for humanitarian assistance to Christians in the Middle East. Special consideration ought to be granted to these communities under the Humanitarian Program.

More broadly as well, Christians are persecuted in Nigeria and parts of Asia, including China, North Korea, and even the Philippines. In fact “...not only is Christianity still the world’s most oppressed faith community but also that in many cases genocide and other crimes against humanity now mean that the Church in core countries and regions faces the possibility of imminent wipe-out”.³

To expand the Community Support Program

The Government should look at expanding the Community Support Program and increase the numbers available under it. The Catholic Church in Australia has many parishes and organisations both in major cities, but particularly rural areas, able and willing to sponsor refugees. These parish communities have the resources and know-how to successfully integrate refugees within

¹ Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten? A report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2015-17: Executive Summary*, p13

² Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten? A report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2015-17: Executive Summary*, p13

³ Aid to the Church in Need, *Persecuted and Forgotten? A report on Christians oppressed for their Faith 2015-17: Executive Summary*, p30



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their community. The Catholic Church is open to discussions with the Department to further expand this program.

Please note that the Catholic Church is available for further discussion and will actively participate on this very important topic.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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National Director

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office