



Social Justice Commission

Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba

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Bishop Urges Compassion and Respect for Dignity of the Human Person in Asylum Seeker Debate

Bishop William Morris of the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba has urged community leaders to show compassion and respect for the dignity of the human person in the recent debate over relocation of asylum seekers in regional centres. A number of news reports have named the town of Dalby as one possible location for asylum seekers to be relocated to.

“I would join with the mayor and local federal member in calling for full consultation with local authorities,” stated Bishop Morris.

“We need to ensure that proper support services are available and that the wider community has a clear understanding of plans regarding the accommodation of people from Christmas Island.”

The Bishop has urged the same leaders not to create a culture of fear. “In the past few days it is disappointing that some local leaders have used language which creates fear and suspicion of “the other”” stated Bishop Morris.

“We need to remember that it is not illegal to claim asylum in Australia. Our nation is a proud signatory of the UN Convention on refugees. There is nothing in this convention that mentions the method of transport. Whether you arrive by boat or plane you have a right to have your claim for asylum to be heard. Indeed generations of boat people have made a very valuable and important contribution to the Australian community.”

In the past ten years our Diocese through the wonderful work of agencies such as St Vincent de Paul and Centacare’s Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Centre has welcomed hundreds of refugees into this region. Our primary concern has been for the welfare and dignity of those who have fled persecution and violence seeking a life for themselves and their families. “Unfounded links of asylum seekers with terrorism only play on peoples fears and do not do our region credit,” stated Bishop Morris.

“A centre such as Dalby may have better access to services than the Curtin Detention centre in the Kimberley region of Northern Australia. At this stage it is difficult to comment on any proposal but we should use language that is measured and reflects compassion and welcome rather than fear and suspicion.”

For more information contact Mark Copland on 0428130895 or email justice@twb.catholic.org.au

“Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel.” **Justice in the World: Synod of Bishops, 1971**