

JUST BECAUSE



Advocate M
explains ho
world a bet

Leaders consider refugees out of sight and out of mind

IT HAS been so long since I've written about people coming to Australia by boat and claiming asylum that I've almost forgotten how — but here we go again ...

After the Tampa and children overboard fiascos — it's October again — another boat comes over the horizon and our leaders allow national hysteria to set in.

What is it about boats that sets the public temperature rising?

Is it because historically the majority of us have ancestors that came across the seas?

The Rudd Labor government would have us believe that they are tough but humane when it comes to boat people as opposed to the nasty policies of the previous Coalition government.

It's true that Labor has dispensed with the cruel temporary protection visa and children living behind the razor wire on mainland detention centres, but the ALP fan club have no reason to feel smug.

They have taken a leaf out of the Howard text book and magnified it to the nth degree.

The basic premise is out of sight, out of mind.

Let's do all we can to keep the misery offshore; away from the media glare and those bleeding heart lawyers who bang on about human rights and such nonsense.

And now it appears that we are outsourcing our misery.

Yours and my tax dollar is funding a detention centre in Indonesia where asylum seekers are "warehoused" in conditions that no Australian would countenance on the mainland.

We talk about fair play but the aim of the game is to make sure that asylum seekers get nowhere near a referee who can make a



A Sri Lankan asylum seeker stands next to signs on a boat moored at Merak seaport in Serang District on Indonesia's Java island after he and more than 200 other refugees were stopped by Indonesian authorities on their way to Australia.

PICTURE: AFP PHOTO

decision on the merits of their case.

Mr Rudd labels people smugglers as "scum of the earth" and the "vilest form of people on the planet".

Demonising a group of people taking advantage of others vulnerability works for a media bite but doesn't further out understanding.

Of course people smugglers ploughing the waters off Indonesia aren't in it for the warm inner glow, but painting them as the face of evil doesn't address the factors that bring people to our shores.

Boat people are not illegal.

It is a fundamental human right to claim asylum in another country.

More than 96 per cent of asylum seekers arriving in Australia step off planes, not boats.

What's more, the overwhelming majority of those who actually make it here by boat are found to be refugees.

Stop and think about it for a minute.

You are a Sri Lankan from the Tamil minority.

You have endured unspeakable human rights abuses and there is no future for you or your family.

Why would you pay \$15,000 for a life threatening, risky boat trip after weeks of treacherous travel in tropical jungles when you could get a plane fare from Colombo to Sydney for less than \$2000?

The answer is simple: you are a prisoner in your own country.

You are not free to move freely within your country or indeed to another country.

Refugees who arrive here by boat are not criminals or evil "queue jumpers".

There is no queue.

These people represent some of the most amazing courage and spirit that humanity is capable of.

We should be honouring our

proud tradition of protecting human rights and giving people a fair go.

In fact we should be going one further and taking on a suggestion a mate of mine gave me a few years back.

January 26 should be renamed International Boat People's Day.

A day to celebrate the incredible courage of everybody who has overcome great odds to get to this great place.

For those who've come across the seas we've boundless plains to share — at least that's what I thought our national anthem says.

So please don't fill the vacuum of national leadership with myths and misinformation regarding asylum seekers and refugees.

To find out more about the reality of this human story go to the myths and facts page of www.ajustaustralia.com