



ACSJC

AUSTRALIAN ♦ CATHOLIC ♦ SOCIAL ♦ JUSTICE ♦ COUNCIL

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New detention centre a hard-hearted response: Bishop

The announcement of the construction of a 1500-bed detention centre on the outskirts of Darwin reveals once more Australia's 'hard-hearted' response to asylum seekers, says the Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC).

Following a meeting of the ACSJC in Sydney, Bishop Christopher Saunders said, 'The matter of concern surrounding the decision to build the new detention centre is not, as suggested by some politicians, that the government has failed to "stop the boats" but rather that the Australian Government continues to incarcerate desperate people who have fled violence and persecution.

'The \$9 million to be spent constructing a new detention centre and \$74 million over three years for leasing the land will be in addition to the hundreds of millions spent on the detention of just over 6,650 asylum seekers in mainland and offshore centres.

'Our prolonged detention of asylum seekers who come to Australia by boat is simply adding further trauma to the lives of vulnerable individuals and families – at great cost to the Australian tax-payer. The Government has useful alternatives to detention including working bridging visas which allow asylum seekers to contribute to society and be self-reliant.

'In 2008, this Government committed to using detention for the shortest possible time and only then to establish that asylum seekers posed no health or security risk. Those posing no danger to the community would be able to remain in the community while their visa status was resolved. It is time for the Government to keep that promise.

'The Department of Immigration and Citizenship reports that 5,235 asylum seekers – 79% – have been in detention for longer than three months. These people are in need of compassion and security. The appallingly long time it takes to process their claims is a sad condemnation of our moral worth as a people who pride ourselves in always preserving a spirit of fairness,' Bishop Saunders concluded.

For further information:

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