

Wednesday December 4th 2013 the Australian Government announced the suspension of the granting of permanent visas for asylum seekers till at least July 2014

What does this mean?

33,000 asylum seekers who arrived prior to the election of the new Australian Government in August 2013 will now either continue to be held in detention or remain in the community on a Bridging visa.

Past Government statistics show that the vast majority of these asylum seekers are likely to be refugees in need of Australia's protection.

If on a Bridging visa asylum seekers will not be allowed to work and they will receive a living allowance which is the equivalent of 89% of the Newstart Allowance.

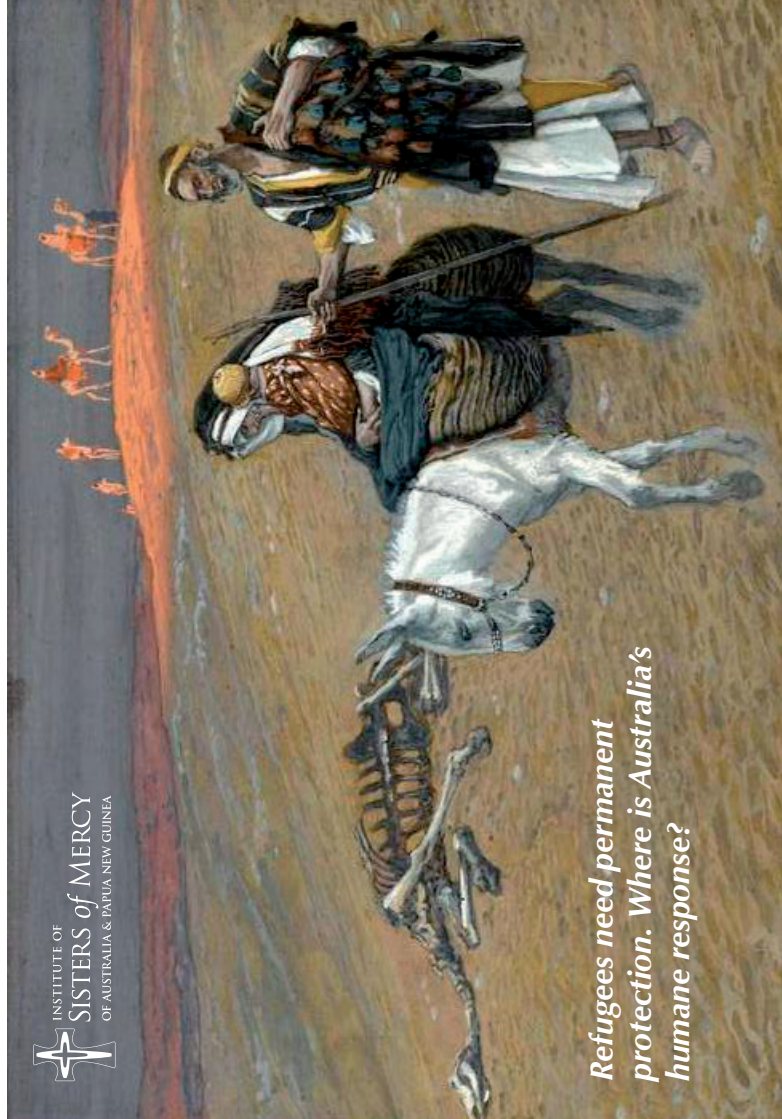
- Experience and research shows that under these conditions the asylum seekers' physical and mental health will be affected
- Many children and families will be held in prolonged detention
- The families of the asylum seekers in troubled countries will be unable to join them and will struggle without their significant family members
- For an Australian citizen even 100% of Newstart is very difficult to live on
- Asylum seekers in the community on bridging visas will struggle to find suitable rental accommodation in the community
- Without work or education opportunities many asylum seekers will languish and find it difficult to engage with the Australian community now or in the future
- Australian welfare agencies will be overwhelmed with requests for assistance

We recognise that protection and a sense of stability are fundamental building blocks for establishing a new life and contributing to Australian society. We ask that Australia meet its international obligations in a humane and just manner reflecting the aspirations that we have for our nation.

ACTION: At this time of Christmas we invite you and others you know to let our political leaders know how you feel about the negative manner in which asylum seekers are portrayed and the cruel way in which they are being treated by Australia's political environment. Please affix a stamp and post this card to our Prime Minister.



Refugees need permanent protection. Where is Australia's humane response?





INSTITUTE OF
SISTERS of MERCY
OF AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Affix
Stamp
Here

Dear Prime Minister Tony Abbott,
Asylum seekers come to Australia requesting our protection. We are very concerned that the Australian Government has decided to suspend the granting of permanent visas to those refugees found in need of this protection.
Please take this issue out of the political arena and work across Government to ensure that asylum seekers are not subjected to prolonged detention, destitution and uncertainty, and other forms of punishment.

Yours truly,

Prime Minister Tony Abbott
P.O. Box 450,
Manly NSW 2095

Photo: Brooklyn Museum, 2008, 00.1.59.35_P52.jpg



Epiphany reflection

The feast of the Epiphany brings to the forefront of our awareness that the birth of the child Jesus celebrated at Christmas took place in a volatile political realm similar to many in our world today. The visitors from the East have to escape from Herod by an alternate route, and Joseph and his family (Mary and the infant Jesus) are warned to seek asylum in Egypt. They were political refugees fleeing for their very lives in the face of an angered Herod, experiencing the dislocation of the millions of displaced peoples in our world today who likewise must 'choose' asylum away from their native home for the safety and future lives of their families.

We are invited to bring the story in Matt 2: 13-14 into dialogue with the information provided in this card. What did it mean for the family to flee their home and all they loved and to seek asylum elsewhere? What type of reception by the Egyptians would be in accord with the mind and heart of God for this family and for every other asylum seeking family then and now?

The return of the family in Matt 2:15 is not an enforced removal or return; it is freely undertaken when Joseph learns that the tyrant, Herod, has died. On reaching Bethlehem, however, Joseph and Mary are confronted with another decision. They cannot settle in their ancestral hometown as the child's life is just as much at risk there from Herod's son and successor, Archelaus. Fear of persecution, even death, is the catalyst for their move to the tiny town of Nazareth in Lower Galilee. While they remain permanently displaced, they are able to find a home among the people of Nazareth.

Hospitality characterizes the people of Nazareth and draws us deeper into reflection on the extravagant hospitality that characterizes our Mercy commitment. What actions does such hospitality call forth from us today?

There is also another note that permeates this story and it is that of lament embodied in Rachel weeping for her displaced children down through the ages.

The plight of asylum seekers in Australia today draws forth lament in our hearts and prompts us to act. It is a critical lament that refuses to be consoled while injustice persists. It remains in our heart sharpening our awareness and spills over into action such as that suggested in this card.