

JUST IN TIME

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What's being done in your name?

With a full-scale media blackout on asylum seeker policy, it's near impossible know exactly how the Australian government is treating the people who come to our country seeking safety.

“MORE SECRETIVE THAN ASIO”

Scott Morrison's office is enforcing an information blackout on asylum seeker policy, with the result that ***we don't know exactly what's going on or how much it costs.***

Journalists are banned from offshore facilities, which makes it difficult to assess ***claims of violence and mistreatment*** being made by asylum seekers. While a few journalists did visit as part of a human rights inquiry, this inquiry is in danger of being shut down.

NO LEGAL AID

In March, Scott Morrison announced that asylum seekers would ***no longer be given support to access essential immigration advice*** or lodge appeals.

NO RIGHT TO WORK

Recent policy changes deny many asylum seekers the fundamental right to work, based on their time and mode of arrival in Australia. ***This is already creating serious poverty.***

CHILDREN IN DETENTION

As of October 2013, there were 1,045 children in Australian detention centres, with unaccompanied minors on both Nauru and Manus Island.

FIGHTING WORDS

Despite the fact that ***asylum seekers have not broken any law***, our Government increasingly adopts the rhetoric of warfare in its policy.

Operation Sovereign Borders puts us on a war footing, adopting the cloak of a military campaign to justify high levels of secrecy surrounding the treatment and management of boat arrivals.

CODE OF CONDUCT

This year, a new Code of Behaviour for asylum seekers living in the community ***quietly*** came into force. The code stipulates that settled asylum seekers ***must not bully, spread rumours, spit or swear in public, or persistently “irritate” anyone.*** If the code (or any Australian law) is breached, income support may be stopped, an existing bridging visa may be cancelled and an asylum seeker may be detained or transferred to an offshore detention centre. This effectively means that ***a person settled in Australia could be sent to Manus Island by their neighbour or coworker simply for letting a swear word slip.***

“100 DAYS WITHOUT BOATS”?

Before accepting the Prime Minister's announcement that Australia has had no boat arrivals for over 100 days, we should remember that ***we have no information about how many boats have been turned back by our navy.***

Boundless plains to share.

Despite the very negative political rhetoric, there are people in the community taking action to welcome refugees and asylum seekers.

THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

Earlier this year, a group of asylum seekers living in Western Sydney were meeting to play soccer under the unofficial title 'Auburn United'. However being on bridging visas and **prevented from working for a living, these men were without the means to register their team** in the local competition or buy boots or equipment.

After their story was told by the Herald and ABC Radio, **the men received a flood of support and enough donations to get on the playing field.**

Now given homes by the Newington Gunners and the Holroyd Rangers, these teams and their stories remind us of the positivity and solidarity that can grow from a simple welcoming attitude.



The Newington Gunners' formidable team of asylum seekers, sponsored generously by community members and local businesses. Image from www.sydneywestphysio.com

“ *It's been a wonderful journey, a reaffirmation of what a lot of us know - that Australians are generous and good-hearted people ... and don't judge people because of what type of visa they have.* ”

- Violet Roumeliotis, chief executive of Settlement Services International, which co-ordinated the financial support for the soccer teams. Quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald, 19 April 2014.

ACCOR REFUGEE PROGRAM

International hospitality group Accor was recognised last month for their initiative to recruit and train at least 100 refugees over a six month period, providing good employment prospects to some of the most vulnerable people in Australia. One of the project's chief aims is to **extend a warm welcome to those who are choosing to call Australia home.**

REFLECTION

“Being disciples of the Lamb means not living as if we were a ‘besieged citadel,’ but as a city set on a mountain, open, welcoming and supportive. It means not assuming an attitude of closure, but bringing the Gospel to all , bearing witness with our lives that following Jesus makes us freer and more joyful,”

- Pope Francis on welcoming refugees and asylum seekers
International Migrant Day, 19 January 2014.

Just in Time is an occasional publication of the Conference of Leaders in Religious Institutes in NSW.

TO-DO LIST

- **Find out** if there are any initiatives to offer support to refugees and asylum seekers in your local area. Start by looking at www.welcometoaustralia.com.au and www.refugeecouncil.org.au
- **Do some mythbusting** - a lot of people still misunderstand the situation of asylum seekers in Australia. Have a look at the 10 most common myths at www.thehotpotato.com.au/#conversation and discuss these facts with family and friends.
- **Follow** the Social Justice Committee of CLRI (NSW) on Twitter for news and opportunities for action: www.twitter.com/clrinsw