



When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Eternal am your God.

-Leviticus 19:33-34

The Assembly of Rabbis and Cantors (ARC) and the Union for Progressive Judaism (UPJ) affirm the policy of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) concerning the issue of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, whose text follows in full. We note with sadness that the policies and actions of the Australian Government and its agencies currently fall far short of achieving the goals called for in the ECAJ policy:

Nearly 13,000 asylum seekers on bridging visas continue to wait to have their claims for refugee status assessed. Many have waited more than a year.

Even those who have been assessed as genuine refugees are only given temporary visas and thus continue to live with the threat of being sent back to the countries from which they fled;

Around 120 asylum seekers who have been transferred from offshore detention with very real and pressing medical needs continue to be held in detention in hotels, although 46 people were recently released from detention in a Melbourne hotel after more than a year in Australia under medevac laws.;

As of 31 January 2021, there were 137 people still in PNG and 123 on Nauru, who can never resettle in Australia, even if they are genuine refugees

The members of the Assembly of Rabbis and Cantors are inspired by the sacred text of our Torah which calls us to care for the strangers in our midst. We are distressed by the treatment meted out by the Australian government to our fellow human beings, people fleeing persecution who have accessed their rights to seek asylum under the International Convention on the Status of Refugees. We call on the Australian government to promptly implement all policy recommendations made by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry.

This [Executive] Council [of Australian Jewry]:

- 7.1 NOTES with grave concern the increase in the number of people around the world who have been made refugees as a result of war and civil conflict;
- 7.2 RECOGNISES the difficulties faced by successive Australian Governments in balancing the Government's obligations to its citizens to carry out proper screening (including health and security checks) on all potential new entrants to Australia, in particular unauthorised arrivals, and the Government's humanitarian obligations under the International Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951) (the Refugee Convention) and the 1967 Protocol to the Refugee Convention, as well as under customary international law;
- 7.3 RECALLS WITH SHAME that especially prior to, but also during and immediately after, World War II many thousands of Jewish refugees attempting to flee persecution in Europe were denied entry into other countries or forced to engage "smugglers" to try to escape to freedom;

- 7.4 RECALLS that the Refugee Convention came into existence in belated recognition by the international community of the great wrong that had been done by ostensibly civilised nations in refusing to grant asylum to Jewish refugees fleeing from Europe prior to and during World War II, and as a principled and compassionate response to the moral imperative of assisting European Jews in seeking new homes after the Holocaust;
- 7.5 NOTES the important and positive contribution that Jewish and other refugees, from many countries, have made to Australian society and the development of Australia;
- 7.6 NOTES that in the past, after proper processing of their claims by Australian officials, the vast majority of those seeking asylum in Australia have been found to be genuine refugees who had fled their country of usual residence because of a well-founded fear of persecution;
- 7.7 NOTES:
that asylum seekers, whether they are unauthorised maritime arrivals, or people waiting in camps in Africa and Asia who have applied to come to Australia via the UNHCR, should be regarded as individual human beings who have hopes and aspirations and dreams and feel the same pain and suffer the same grief as each of us;
that the admission of asylum seekers is a humanitarian act, and successive Australian Governments (both Labor and Coalition) have accepted that this engages Australia's international obligations;
the importance of dealing with policy concerning the admission of asylum seekers in a fair, humane and appropriate way preferably without partisanship; and
the regrettable absence, after many years of public debate and shifts in public opinion and government policy, of an overall policy that is widely accepted as the morally correct one.
- 7.8 ACCORDINGLY CALLS UPON the Australian Government:
--to process applications by persons seeking asylum in Australia as expeditiously as possible and in a spirit of compassion, regardless of whether those applications are made through the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;
--to work constructively with other governments and appropriate non-government organisations, to ameliorate the plight of refugees around the world and in Australia;
--to encourage each of our regional neighbours not yet party to the Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol to become parties;
--to implement in good faith and with humanity, Australia's important legal and moral obligations with respect to refugees;
--not to hold women and children asylum seekers in mandatory detention while their applications for recognition of their refugee status are processed;
--to desist from actions that are likely to result in persons who seek asylum in Australia being sent to countries which are not parties to the Refugee Convention;
--to recognise that all asylum seekers are entitled to:
have their individual claims and circumstances assessed fairly and within a reasonable time;
not be subjected to unsafe or harsh conditions while that is occurring;
not be subject to non-reviewable detention or unsafe or harsh conditions while that is occurring; and be effectively protected against refoulement.
- 7.9 URGES all Australians to engage in discussion of the issues in a considered and respectful manner and without resorting to pejorative generalisations, and preferably without partisanship.