



DEBUNKING THE MYTHS ON REFUGEES

As the Federal Government and Opposition create another “Tampa election”, demonising desperate refugees fleeing war and persecution, it is important to know the facts.

MYTH: Australia is being flooded by asylum seekers coming by boat and has lost control of its borders

FACT • In the last 34 years a total of 23,024 people have come by boat to Australia seeking asylum - an average of 677 per year.

- At this rate it would take 149 years to fill the MCG
- Even the small increase this year, with about 4,000 boat arrivals, is just 2% of annual immigration

MYTH: Australia is one of the world’s most generous countries in accepting refugees

FACT • Australia’s intake of 13,750 refugees is just 0.03% of the world’s refugees, and compares to Pakistan (1,800,000), Syria (1,100,000) and Iran (980,000).

- Refugee/humanitarian entrants make up just 6.6% of the places in our overall permanent immigration program in 2010 - the lowest proportion since 1975.

MYTH: Asylum seekers who arrive by boat are entering illegally or jumping the queue

FACT • There is no queue. People fleeing for their lives do not have time to apply through official channels—in war zones there is no real access to embassies or UNHCR offices. For this reason there is a right under Australian law, in accordance with the international Refugee Convention, for people fleeing war or persecution to seek asylum in Australia whether they arrive by boat or plane, with documents or undocumented.

MYTH: Using a people smuggler to reach Australia is the wrong way to come

FACT • Asylum seekers are forced to turn to whoever will get them out of desperate situations. Some pay criminal syndicates their life savings to reach safety. Other people smugglers have been celebrated as heroes—people like Oskar Schindler saved tens of thousands of Jews by smuggling them out of Nazi Germany.

MYTH: The Federal ALP Government has considerably reduced the use of detention

FACT • Australia has as many asylum seekers in detention now as under the Howard Government - at May 21 2010 3,621 people were in detention, including 427 children.

MYTH: Asylum seekers don’t need to come all the way to Australia, they could stop in another country along the way

FACT • Very few countries on the way to Australia from Sri Lanka or Afghanistan are signatories to the Refugee Convention, meaning there is no right of asylum there.

MYTH: More boats are coming because of a “softening” of asylum seeker policy in Australia

FACT • The number of asylum seekers in our region has increased in the last year due to the violence in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. This has led to an increase in asylum seekers worldwide. Last year Afghan asylum seekers in Germany increased five fold and in Hungary ten fold.

MYTH: Asylum Seekers in the community receive special benefits

FACT • No asylum seekers are eligible for Centrelink payments of any kind. The small percentage of asylum seekers that get access to Red Cross Assistance receive 89% of a Newstart Allowance. Permanent refugees can only access the same benefits as any other citizen.

MYTH: The ALP Government has ended the Howard Government’s Pacific Solution

FACT • Whilst the ALP Government closed Nauru and Manus Island, over 4,000 islands remain excised from Australia’s migration zone, denying rights to asylum seekers who arrive. Boat arrivals have continued to be processed offshore on Christmas Island. The ALP is now promoting the “Timor Solution” to again build a detention centre offshore and push Australia’s responsibilities onto a poor neighbour.

[Abridged with thanks from material by Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and other sources - see RAC website for sources for all information.]

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