



Jesuit Refugee Service Australia

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MEDIA RELEASE

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JRS Australia calls for a fairer system of asylum

On the occasion of refugee week, Jesuit Refugee Service Australia calls upon the Federal Government to develop a fairer system of refugee assessment for those claiming asylum in Australia.

This can be achieved by extending the legal definition of refugee to encompass the full range of international human rights obligations to which Australia is party.

JRS Australia works with asylum seekers in the community, many of whom are denied the right to work. Its director, Fr David Holdcroft SJ, says, "These people are placed in the ludicrous situation of expecting to fail every stage of refugee assessment before they can appeal directly to the minister. At this stage they often cannot work as a condition of their visa and have to rely completely on the kindness of others to survive.

"They are often from refugee-like situations which do not qualify them for the status of refugee under the Refugee Convention.

"Immigration Minister Chris Evans has said that he feels too much power is vested in his office to make these so-called discretionary decisions. The process is potentially unpredictable and hugely burdensome for everyone involved."

While Australia is a signatory to instruments such as the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, there is no legal avenue which encompasses this when asylum seekers make claims, apart from direct appeal to the minister.

"The present government has made several steps in the right direction with the abolition of the Pacific Solution and Temporary Protection Visas, and the review of the system of detention. It is important that it extends these reforms to all aspects of refugee policy," says Fr Holdcroft.

"Australia has a proven capacity to absorb large numbers of refugees who have, as a result, made important contributions to the nation. Over 700 000

refugees have settled here since World War II. The time is opportune to ensure that our system is fair to all who seek protection here."

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