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Palm Sunday highlights Australia's refugee justice crisis

'Justice for Asylum Seekers and Refugees' rallies will be held on Palm Sunday, 13 April 2025 in various locations across Australia.

Ahead of Palm Sunday, the day on which attention is drawn to the difficult situation for many refugees and people seeking asylum, the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA) calls for urgent intervention from the Federal Government to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all people seeking refuge and asylum in Australia.

"Policies of past and present Federal Governments have undermined the rights, safety and wellbeing of people seeking asylum in this country," says Bishop Vincent Long, representing the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, one of 10 national peak organisations of CAPSA.

'The wellbeing of thousands of people continues to be affected. Seeking refuge for fear of one's safety is a tragedy, not a crime. Legally and morally, Australia has an obligation to welcome asylum seekers, to humanely assess their circumstances and to provide the necessary support.'

CAPSA convenor Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, says, "since Pope Francis was elected in 2013, he has urged host countries to welcome refugees trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace."

"In this year's Lenten message on the theme 'Let us journey together in hope', the Pope asks us to 'compare our daily life with that of migrants or foreigners, to learn how to sympathise with their experiences and in this way discover what God is asking of us.'"

"This sublime and timely message contrasts with the actions of Australian Governments that have a lamentable record when it comes to handling people coming here seeking refuge, particularly those who came by boat," says Bishop Long.

CAPSA brings together Catholic peak organisations in health and education, as well as the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and organisations such as Jesuit Social Services, St Vincent de Paul Society Australia and Jesuit Refugee Service (Australia) who work directly with refugees and people seeking asylum.

CAPSA is urging the Federal Government to end the uncertainty for people seeking asylum by providing fair and timely pathways to permanent residence in Australia.

"We know more than 7,000 people seeking asylum, who've been living in our community for 13 years, are still suffering because of a 'fast track process' declared unfair by the Human Rights Commission. These people, who Australia should be protecting, are now at risk of deportation to the dangerous countries they have fled, despite making valuable contributions to Australian society and in many cases having deep roots in our community and children born here.

“With a Federal Election around the corner, we urge both major parties to commit to humane policies that uphold the rights of people seeking asylum,” says Ms Edwards.

CAPSA also calls on the Federal Government to ensure people seeking asylum have work rights and, if unable to work, access to housing, food and appropriate medical care. Additionally, it urges an end to offshore processing and detention and the timely resettlement of the more than 1,000 people still suffering under the country’s offshore detention regime.

“Palm Sunday is a day for truth telling about refugees, a time to get them back in the news and into the minds and hearts of all Australians, including our political representatives,” Bishop Long said.

“Rallies in centres across Australia will help focus attention on the lengthy mishandling of this crisis by successive governments, much to the detriment of innocent people from a wide variety of countries.”

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