

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs  
Mr Phillip Ruddock

1 November 2001

Dear Mr Ruddock

Australia's policy towards asylum seekers has been raised by the Uniting Church in Australia at its triennial Assembly in 2000 and at the 2001 meetings of the Western Australian, South Australian, Victorian, Queensland and NSW Synods. The State Synods took place in September and October.

The recent meeting of the NSW Synod resolved to write to both Government and Opposition to express our deep concern at Australia's policy regarding asylum seekers.

The NSW Synod is concerned that Australia is not meeting its obligations under the United Nations Convention on Refugees (1951). In particular we are concerned that the recent legislation amending the Migration Act limits Australia's obligations and is not in alignment with either the letter or the spirit of the Convention.

Whilst acknowledging the complexity of refugee and displaced person migration around the world, the Synod nevertheless believes that respect for human rights, justice and compassion should underlie our response to on-shore asylum seekers. We therefore call on the Australian Parliament to

- Accord asylum seekers immediate access to legal advice on arrival in Australia
- Reverse the *Migration Amendment (Excision from Migration Zone) Bill (2001)* *Border Protection (Validation and enforcement Powers) Bill 2001* and *Migration Amendment (excision from Migration Zone)(Consequential Provisions) Bill (2001)*,
- Review the mandatory detention of asylum seekers, in particular for children and families
- Reverse the current policy of sending asylum seekers to other poorer nations in our region
- Demonstrate its international responsibility toward the protection of vulnerable people through realistic and more generous intake numbers

NSW Synod also urged the pursuit at a diplomatic level of possible solutions for the prevention of people smuggling. We strongly encourage the continuation of work already begun in collaboration with our South East Asian neighbours.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Reeson

Moderator