

# "Asylum Seekers and a new Australian Government"

*Brief summary of points raised in an online Presentation & QA  
by Sr Brigid Arthur AO, csb, Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project  
St Kevin's Parish Templestowe, Social Justice Action, 29 September 2022*

## **From Introductory Comments by Presentation Chairperson, (John Costa),**

“Under international law which of course the Australian Government follows, seeking Asylum in Australia, or elsewhere, is not illegal. In fact, it's recognised as a basic human right. All people are entitled to protection of their human rights, including the right to seek asylum, regardless of how or where they arrive, in Australia, or in any other complying country. A key issue tonight is how we deal with Asylum Seekers as opposed to Refugees, and what that means for them, and Australia. Because being an Asylum Seeker is even more difficult than being a refugee, it comes with even more constraints and far greater uncertainty.”

## **Chairperson's Summary of Asylum Seeker Comments or Responses by Sr Brigid,**

- Authorities have national interest responsibility and there's a balance to be found between national security and humanitarian response to Asylum Seekers.
- The balance in Australia is heavily skewed towards security at the cost of humanitarianism.
- Serious psychological damage is evident in Asylum Seekers held in detention for periods exceeding 6 months.
- We have many Asylum Seekers who have been in detention for ten years, and one right now already for 11 years.
- Some countries now typically detain asylum seekers for no more than around 1 year
- As there are also destitute Asylum Seekers with acute health problems and no money for rent and other basic necessities there is need for income support for everyone while in Australia no matter at what stage of processing their claims.
- There are myths about the numbers and risks associated with 'Boat People'. We have had 30,000 Boat People, but now there are none.
- Since we've stopped receiving 'Boat People' we continue to receive Asylum Seekers and have since received 100,000 of them by plane (a total of 130,000 Asylum Seekers).
- The current Asylum Seeker system is increasingly being clogged with Asylum Seekers and we don't have the processes to deal with them in reasonable and human time. Everyone is a loser.
- People once feared that 'Boat People' would include terrorists. Not one Australian Asylum Seeker has been found to be a terrorist. Meanwhile Australia has independently produced its own 'home-grown' terrorists.
- There are farmers and towns crying out for workers and community members. There are many Refugees and Asylum Seekers eager to contribute to Australia's well-being in also making a life for themselves.
- The new Government is already working on legislation to improve the management of and sensitivity towards Refugees, for example family reunions. However as far as can be seen this is not likely to improve the situation for Asylum Seekers.

- Public Opinion is improving in relation to the handling of Refugees, and to giving disadvantaged peoples more of a 'fair go'. This differs from earlier perceptions.
- The best way to demystify and remove negative attitudes towards Asylum Seekers is to enable people to meet with them personally, socially. People then are often surprised to discover they are just like you and I!
- It's only when people collectively support a fair approach to Asylum Seekers that improvements can be made, for everyone's benefit.
- There are things that can be done to readily improve the situation of Asylum Seekers but aren't being done.
- The new Government is showing some signs of a more humane approach.
- We urgently now need to implement new, more effective, more human and less costly approaches to processing Asylum Seekers claims.
- One appropriate measure, particularly to those who have already been in detention for far too long, is to offer an amnesty.
- People discussing and expressing their thoughts on such issues can very much help bring about changes that very much serve national interest while showing human sensitivity.



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