

UPDATED REFUGEE POLICY

By Resolution proposed & adopted at the 17 September 2013 Plenum of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies

The Plenum of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies:

REAFFIRMS the Board's existing policy calling for the compassionate treatment of refugees by the Australian Government, and in light of recent events updates that policy as follows:

1. The NSW Jewish Community reaffirms its support for a humane refugee admission program in Australia, and notes that the Convention on the Status of Refugees grew out of the need to assist Jews seeking new homes after the Shoah.

1.1. We recall with pride the efforts of many Jewish advocates in developing the Convention, and, the important contribution that refugees, and in particular Jewish refugees, have made to the development of Australia.

1.2. It is essential that in a developed nation such as Australia, which takes such pride in its multiculturalism and respect for human rights, refugee policy respects these ideals.

2. While the Australian Government has the right to establish and maintain its own immigration policy and to screen all potential immigrants, the admission of asylum seekers is a humanitarian act that differs from other aspects of immigration policy, and successive Australian Governments (both Labor and Coalition) have accepted that this engages Australia's international obligations.

3. Asylum seekers whether they are unauthorised maritime arrivals, or people waiting in camps in Africa and Asia who have applied to come to Australia via the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, should be regarded as individual human beings who have hopes and aspirations and dreams and feel the same pain and suffer the same grief as each of us, and should not be subject to non-reviewable detention.

4. The Australian Government should:

4.1. allocate Australia's refugee and humanitarian intakes in a way that is fair, compassionate and manageable, and preferably without partisanship;

4.2. ensure civilised and well-informed public discourse on issues relating to refugees and immigration, including an end to the application of dehumanising labels to asylum seekers and refugees;

4.3. not adopt any policy which arbitrarily limits or excludes from refugee protection any category of people with a genuine and well-founded fear of persecution in their homeland;

4.4. work constructively with other governments, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and appropriate non-government organisations to:

- (i) implement Australia's important legal and moral obligations with respect to refugees;
- (ii) ameliorate the plight of refugees in our region, around the world as well as in Australia,
- (iii) act to prevent the loss of innocent lives at sea;
- (iv) encourage each of our regional neighbours not yet party to the Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol to become parties;
- (v) process applications by persons seeking asylum as expeditiously as possible and in a spirit of compassion, whether or not those applications are made through the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees;
- (vi) ensure that those persons are safe from violence and from discrimination, and that their human rights, including the right to adequate health, education and other services and to the extent practicable to work, are properly accommodated, and that they are effectively protected against return to a place where they are at risk of persecution; and
- (vii) treat any application for reunion with family in Australia on its individual merits in line with existing family reunion policies and as an ordinary immigration application rather than as an application for refugee status.

5. Those who are entitled to protection as refugees should be admitted without having to face further discrimination, and those who are not entitled to refugee status should be dealt with in accordance with existing immigration laws.

6. We also take this opportunity to acknowledge again the great benefits that multiculturalism, aided by immigration, has created for Australian society as a whole. The Jewish community of New South Wales respects all ethnic and religious communities and looks forward to continuing harmonious relationships with them long into the future.

17 September 2013