



**UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA  
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

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**SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND JUSTICE**

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**Instead of sniping and criticising let us seek solutions .**

A world wide refugee population of 23 million is not going to disappear because Australia has adopted the so called Pacific solution. Only a systematic international and deliberate strategy will relieve the unfair burden poor countries carry, and allow the world to seek a reasonable and economic solution.

In many ways this is another example of a disproportionate burden off loaded by the rich world on to the poor world which already has the weight of the refugee population. These countries have little or no resources and often limited support from the UN and wealthier countries.

So let us have the discussion Mr Ruddock wants to have. Let us have it now after the election. Let us have a sensible, thoughtful and considered discussion about how Australia, with limited resources, can contribute to a solution in partnership with the UN and other wealthy countries.

It is obscene that Australia spends such an enormous amount detaining, and turning away, asylum seekers, when the same money could be better used for a compassionate and reasonable response to the plight of people. The Uniting Church in its refugee policy paper suggested some positive alternatives. Broadly they involve treating onshore refugees with compassion and actively engaging in seeking international solutions, so the problem is addressed at the source as well as at the end result.

Perhaps we could try to relieve the situation by employing more staff at embassies in countries of first asylum. Perhaps we could second a significant number of staff from Department of Immigration & Multicultural Affairs to UNHCR. Perhaps we could seek alliances with other countries alerted to the plight of refugees. Perhaps we could then bring our best minds to addressing the need for a response to this most significant human tragedy.

Perhaps Australia could redeem its international reputation by providing the lead and impetus for a new and honest look at refugees and displaced persons throughout the world.

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