

1977

Statement

On Refugees

Australian Episcopal Conference

21 May 1977

On 1st September 1976 we made a statement calling on the Australian Government [2877] to make a more substantial effort in admitting refugees into Australia and pointed out the call which refugees in camps in Thailand have on our country. Recent information indicates that there are some 1,300 refugees from the former Portuguese colony of Timor now in camps in Portugal under conditions which give no promise of resettlement in that country or of return to their former country.

The Australian Government has issued a “green paper” which deals, among other things, with refugees. We welcome this statement and trust that the discussion on this will lead speedily to a firm and generous refugee policy from the Australian Government. [2878]

Particularly we welcome that section in the “green paper” which reads: [2879]
“Unfortunately, it can be expected that crises causing substantial numbers of people to be displaced and imperiled will continue to occur. If, for humanitarian reasons, Australia is to continue to provide resettlement opportunities to refugees under a broader definition than that in the United Nations Convention, then entry criteria applied to such people should reflect a humanitarian response.”

While some argue that refugees chosen for entry to Australia should be those most likely to settle successfully here, this would very often mean that those most in need of help would be denied entry to this country. [2880]

We have no hesitation in stating that Australia is in a position where it can give the training for employment, social welfare and accommodation assistance needed for these people to be satisfactorily settled into Australian society. As well as this we state quite categorically that Australia has an undoubted moral obligation to assist such people, [2881]

For these reasons we call on the Australian Government to take immediate action to bring 10,000 refugees from the camps in Thailand and other parts of South East Asia where refugees from the Indo China conflict are still waiting resettlement, and from the refugee camps in Portugal where some 1,500 Timorese refugees are now living with very little prospect for their future. [2882]

We pledge Church resources to assist in refugee reception and resettlement programmes and call on our people to show their willingness to welcome in every possible way these people. We are grateful to the St. Vincent de Paul Society and [2883]

Australian Catholic Relief who have offered to make available the maximum resources possible in assisting the Catholic community to respond to this challenge.

Source: Archives of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO), Canberra, Australia.
