

13 January 2015

Minister for Immigration
Attention Peter Dutton
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600



Dear Peter Dutton

At our Yearly Meeting 2015 held last week, members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) discussed the Australian Government's policy and practice concerning people seeking asylum in Australia. We believe that any such policy should treat these persons with respect and compassion. We consider any other approach to be inhumane and unacceptable, and potentially in breach of international law.

We also believe that our present treatment of asylum seekers is alienating us from our neighbours and is counter-productive for safety, wellbeing and peace in our region. The disparity between our nation's stability and that of neighbouring countries results in many people wishing to come to Australia. This calls for a positive long-term solution, not the present unpredictable and often brutal policy. The cost of Australia's onshore and offshore detention system is the equivalent of over half of the entire budget of UNHCR for all its projects. The UNHCR spends AUD 5.8 billion each year to support 51.2 million people of concern worldwide, while Australia spends over AUD 3.3 billion on the detention of several thousand asylum seekers. The current Australian policy is not only inhumane, but is financially unsustainable in the light of the present pressing financial situation of Australia.

We have read the recommendations from the November 2014 Australia 21 round table report *Beyond the Boats*, and ask that their findings be implemented. The report states that Australia's three-fold goals should be:

1. To retain appropriate order and control over the immigration program by tackling the problem of people smuggling and preventing deaths caused by unsafe journeys at sea;
2. To be sensitive to the regional implications of our policy choices; and
3. To manage the cross border movement of people in a way that respects the human rights of asylum seekers and is consistent with international legal obligations towards refugees and others at risk of harm.

We look forward to your reply.

In peace

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julian Robertson".

Julian Robertson
Presiding Clerk