

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

Uniting Church SA



**October 30 2010**

### **Uniting Church calls for end to Mandatory Detention**

The Uniting Church SA has called on the Prime Minister to put an end to the use of Mandatory Detention.

It has called on the government to reconsider detaining people seeking asylum in Australia who are unable to obtain any form of Visa to come to Australia, other than for the brief period required for security and health checks.

At a full meeting of the Synod, around 200 members voted unanimously in favour of the proposal that was brought by two of the church's refugee advocates, Andrew Clarke and Rev Adam Tretheway.

The Moderator Rev Rob Williams will write to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship and the three independent Members of the House of Representatives, asking each of them to end the use of Mandatory Detention.

**The background paper and resolution passed by the Uniting Church are attached.**



## Call for End to Mandatory Detention

### **Background *Rationale*:**

Since 1996 Australia has maintained mandatory detention policies to deal with those who are unable to seek asylum through United Nations procedures or by waiting in recognised refugee camps until decisions can be made by Australian Embassy staff. Throughout this period such people have been demonised and denigrated as “illegals” or “boat people” who allegedly threaten the safety of Australia. These policies were begun by the Keating government and hardened by the Howard government. They have not been ameliorated by the Rudd and Gillard governments. Allied to the former policy of Temporary Protection Visas they left people in serious doubt about their long term future. The decision to place detention centres in remote areas has also contributed to the extreme sense of isolation detainees experience.

It is encouraging that the system of Temporary Protection Visas is no longer in place. The uncertainty of the outcome, in what was for many a hazardous situation, has led to outbreaks of violence and endemic mental illness. Many of these people, now Australian citizens, experience exacerbation of mental illness whenever these issues are aired negatively in the media. They are rarely raised positively. Because the general public rarely differentiate between asylum seekers and humanitarian refugees, many who have come to Australia as humanitarian refugees experience discrimination based on the fears which are developed as a result of these policies.

Since 1996 90% of the people who have experienced detention have proved to be genuine refugees. Only 30% of those who come to Australia by air and seek asylum prove to be genuine refugees, yet this group remain in the general community once they have passed security and medical tests.

If those who arrive by boat were treated in the same way, the general savings, both through the cost of detention and through the provision of needed mental health services would be considerable. Such a policy would also demonstrate that Australia takes its United Nations obligations seriously.

### **Decision of the 2010 Presbytery and Synod meeting:**

Called upon the Moderator to write to the Honourable Prime Minister, the Honourable Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, and the three independent Members of the House of Representatives, asking each of them to end the use of Mandatory Detention for people seeking asylum in Australia who are unable to obtain any form of Visa to come to Australia, other than for the brief period required for security and health checks.