

Romero Centre
20 April 2009

The tragic deaths and injuries suffered last week by asylum seekers aboard the 'SIEV-36' highlights the terrible risk people are prepared to take in order to secure their lives and a safer future.

Staff and volunteers at the Romero Centre offer sympathy and condolences to the families of these individuals, and to members of the Afghan community in Brisbane who have been deeply affected by this traumatic event.

We applaud the efficient crisis coordination demonstrated by emergency units, and the care shown by medical staff, in responding to the burns victims.

We are aware that some of the injured are receiving intensive medical care at a hospital in Brisbane. The Romero Centre will continue to liaise with members of the Afghan community, and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, to ensure that the burns victims have access to appropriate support during their recovery and beyond.

Now is the time for the Rudd Government to show robust political leadership on refugee policy. The excision of the migration zone for offshore processing is not a long term solution for a nation claiming leadership in democracy and human rights in the South East Asian region. We encourage an alignment of immigration policies with Australia's obligations to the International Refugee Convention*, in the interests of the safety of asylum seekers and Australian's pursuit of Human Rights.

**Asylum seekers fleeing dangerous situations exercise a fundamental human right to seek protection, through a fair assessment of their refugee status. This is not an issue that Australia deals with alone; it is a global issue.*

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), last year the USA and Canada registered 85,900 asylum seeker applications, and the EU registered 289,000. Compare this to approximately 4,700 asylum seeker applications in Australia during 2008, and only 179 boat arrivals.

See also Amnesty International's statement on the Siev 36 incident:
<http://www.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/20804/>
