

Submission

To the

Alternative Select Committee process

On the

Refugee quota review

Migrants and refugees are not pawns on the chessboard of humanity. They are children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more.

Pope Francis: Message for the world day of migrants and refugees, 2014

Summary of main points

- New Zealand can and should increase the number of refugees we welcome
- The world is facing an unprecedented global humanitarian refugee crisis. There is a support and commitment from the Catholic and wider community for the resettlement of an increased number of refugees.
- Caritas supports an increase in the refugee quota, but we also need to consider other channels of immigration policy, rather than focusing on the refugee quota alone.
- Increasing the intake through the Refugee family support category, relaxing eligibility criteria around normal family policy and considering programmes used by other countries are important to supporting refugee families here can help their relatives to leave emergency situations. This contributes to good resettlement outcomes for both families.
- We need to continue to invest in the New Zealand resettlement strategy, to ensure that both current residents and new arrivals have what we all need for a dignified and peaceful life.
- Only a very tiny minority of displaced people will ever be resettled to a third country. We also need to continue humanitarian support for displaced people within their own countries and in neighbouring host countries.

Introduction

1. Caritas welcomes this Alternative Select Committee process, and thanks Hon Peter Dunne and Amnesty International for making the opportunity available for public comment on the government's review of the refugee quota.
2. In the face of the global humanitarian crisis, with unprecedented numbers of people currently displaced by conflict, we believe New Zealand can take more refugees than we do at present.

We would like to see this through a number of channels, including a permanent increase in the refugee quota, and also making greater provision for refugee family reunification through existing Immigration channels. We would also like to see serious consideration given to other potential forms of entry as recommended by UNHCR.

3. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand responds to the global refugee humanitarian crisis through our humanitarian, development, advocacy and education work. As part of the global Caritas Internationalis confederation of 165 Caritas organisations, we support our local member organisations and work with communities to support humanitarian and development programmes. We advocate on issues affecting refugees and migrants, both in New Zealand and internationally. We work to build awareness of refugee issues, through building local relationships with refugee and migrant groups, and through our international partnerships responding to the needs of displaced people. This year Social Justice Week in the Catholic Church in September will focus on the theme of migration.

Definition of a refugee

4. Public policy debates about refugees often do not have as a starting point a good common understanding of the basic definitions – for example, in previous public policy discussions around New Zealand’s potential response to the arrival of asylum seekers, they have been characterized as illegal migrants or queue jumpers rather than being understood to be refugees. Caritas has produced a leaflet, which we are updating this year, on refugee myths and realities: <http://www.caritas.org.nz/resources/publications/refugee-myths-and-realities>
5. The formal, internationally recognized, definition of a refugee is set out in the **United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees**, which established the rights of people seeking asylum in a country other than their own and the responsibilities of countries that grant asylum. Approved at a United Nations conference in 1951 and brought into force in 1954, the convention initially sought to codify the rights of refugees in post-war Europe. In 1967, the convention was amended to include a protocol that broadened its geographical reach. There are currently 147 countries that have ratified the convention, the protocol or both.

A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

New Zealand was one of the first signatories to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) in 1951 and we have historically been a strong defender of it.

The current humanitarian crisis

6. UNHCR estimated that in 2015 there were 59 million displaced people throughout the world, a number unprecedented in recorded human history. The IDMC Global Overview 2015 reported that the majority of the increase in new displacement was the result of protracted crises in

Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria. These five countries accounted for 60 per cent of new displacement worldwide.

7. A significant number of the people on the move are coming from Syria, where the conflict is generating one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. Half the country's pre-war population — more than 11 million people — have been killed or forced to flee their homes. UNHCR estimates that 9 million Syrians have fled their homes since the outbreak of civil war in March 2011, taking refuge in neighbouring countries or within Syria itself. Families are struggling to survive inside Syria, or make a new home in neighbouring countries. Others are risking their lives to seek asylum in Europe or further afield, hoping to find acceptance.

The Caritas response

8. The global Caritas Internationalis confederation is responding to the Middle East refugee crisis, particularly through the leadership of the most affected countries – Caritas Syria, Caritas Iraq, Caritas Lebanon, Caritas Jordan and Caritas Turkey. Most refugees and displaced people are continuing to be cared for within these countries – only a minority are in a position to seek asylum abroad, and of these, only a very tiny minority will be resettled to third countries like New Zealand. We need to ensure the continued humanitarian response required in the Middle East.
9. In 2015, Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand worked with Caritas Lebanon to help cater to more than a million Syrian refugees who were now living in the country through healthcare, emergency supplies and shelter to refugees, as well as support for host communities under stress. Caritas is committed to continuing to respond to this crisis in 2016 through supporting a programme in Jordan that focuses on providing healthcare for refugees and support for the host communities.

The position of the New Zealand Catholic bishops

10. The Catholic Bishops in New Zealand have expressed support for increasing the refugee quota, and have urged the Government to also consider the following options:
 - That the Refugee Quota Programme includes provision for 150 of the total 750 to be “transferees” from Australian detention centres. Given that there are people within our own region, on the island of Nauru with proven refugee status, the 150 places could be treated as outside the quota, which would mean that 150 places could be given to people from other parts of the world.
 - Increasing the number of people who enter New Zealand under the family reunification category would help both the refugees already settled here and their relatives, especially those who are in camps in places like Lebanon and Turkey.
 - An extraordinary allocation of places outside the quota to deal with the extraordinary situation in the Middle East.
11. Caritas supports and endorses the Bishops recommendations and adds some additional comment about policy options. Since the Bishops' call for an increase in the numbers of refugees being resettled in New Zealand, and their offer of Church support for their resettlement, hundreds of Catholics have attended meetings around New Zealand to offer

support and welcome for the new arrivals of refugees. The Catholic Diocese of Dunedin has been among groups working to make Dunedin a new resettlement centre.

Additional options for increasing New Zealand's intake of refugees

12. There is a huge public groundswell of support for doubling New Zealand's refugee quota. While this is important and we support a rise in the refugee quota numbers, the refugee quota is only one of the immigration paths available to enable greater entry of refugees into New Zealand.
13. We also need to ensure there are adequate points of entry for refugees under other immigration categories, especially for family reunification. There are New Zealand families who are desperate to find ways to reunite with family members in emergency situations, and many are in a good position to be able support this directly themselves, if there were adequate immigration channels under paths other than the refugee quota. If all our efforts are channeled into the refugee quota programme, there may be insufficient attention given to assisting people who will have good resettlement prospects but currently face significant difficulties applying under regular immigration policy, because they are in emergency situations.
14. Two of the categories which deserve attention:
 - The Refugee Family Sponsored Category: this category assists refugees already resettled in New Zealand to bring key family members to New Zealand. This equally presents the opportunity to bring people from emergency humanitarian situations to New Zealand, while at the same time assisting to overcome isolation for refugees already here. Where this is able to happen, it usually will be with the financial, logistical and resettlement support of the New Zealand based family members and supporting groups in the community. There are already thousands of applications queued under this category which have not been addressed. The existing systems and staff processes are in place to process these applications – all that would be required would be to lift the numbers accepted under this category.
 - Normal family policy – there are a smaller number of families from refugee backgrounds or in emergency situations who will meet the higher thresholds for the usual family policy. However, some are well placed through qualifications, employment history and family support to have very good settlement prospects, but are unable to meet some of the criteria – such as an offer of employment – because they are living in an emergency situation. We would like see consideration of waiving some specific requirements under this category for family members coming from emergency situations.
15. We are aware also that the UNHCR has recommended a range of other temporary and permanent forms of immigration to ease the burden of host-communities and ensure good long term prospects for people currently living in camps or temporary shelter. This includes the category of “community sponsorship” currently being used in Canada.
16. We would like to comment on this category in particular, as there may be some merit in considering it. There may be a few groups within the New Zealand community who have the capacity to support the full costs of a family's relocation, as well as income, health, housing and educational support. However, our assessment is that in general, there is not the capacity to do

this in the church and community sector. While there is a great deal of energy for supporting resettlement, this is primarily in the form of assisting with elements like furniture and food, supporting English language learning and helping families adjust to life in New Zealand. Few, if any, Catholic communities would have the resources to support the full costs of relocation, as envisaged in the Canadian community sponsorship model.

17. We met last year with the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Council, who were involved with some extensive considerations of this model within the Australian context, where some groups do potentially have the capacity to meet the full costs of relocation and support of a family. They offered the following cautions:
 - Any allocation under a community sponsorship model must be in addition to the quota, not as a subset of it, otherwise the government is merely passing the costs of relocation to the community sector
 - It is very important that any such initiatives must be interfaith, to overcome the suspicion that Christians are only interested in helping Christians. We understand there has been dissatisfaction by host countries in the Middle East when community sponsorship programmes have resulted in disproportionate requests for people of one particular faith. We would not support a community sponsorship programme in which a host community could specify the faith of a non-related family they were interested in sponsoring – however, this would not be the case in situations of family reunification.
18. Other models, such as temporary work entry, have been explored in Europe, but we do not consider these to be suitable models in the New Zealand context, where people are unable to return to their home communities at the end of a temporary work scheme.

Support for resettlement programme

19. We recognise the challenge to combine the welcome due to every person, especially when they are in need, with the need also to ensure that both local inhabitants and new arrivals have what they need to live a dignified and peaceful life. There is an important tension between increasing the quota and ensuring adequate investment in support for refugees so they can establish themselves well in New Zealand, especially in the light of the current housing crisis.
20. The New Zealand resettlement strategy provides a great framework for the ongoing work of refugee resettlement in New Zealand. Any increase in the refugee quota needs to be matched with continued investment in our resettlement programme.

Conclusion

21. In conclusion, beyond doubt, our Catholic community has a strong desire to practically participate in welcoming more refugees to New Zealand. We would like to see an increase in the refugee quota, and also consideration of other immigration options that will enable New Zealand to take more refugees.