



Australian Council of Trade Unions

MEDIA RELEASE

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Time to show our humanity and allow asylum seekers to come to Australia: unions

Unions are calling for the Federal Government to allow a group of 78 Sri Lankan asylum seekers aboard a Customs ship to be taken to Australian territory.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said it is time for Australians to show our humanity and end the stand-off aboard the *Oceanic Viking*.

“The Government should demonstrate Australians’ strong humanitarian values by stepping in and bringing these people to Australia,” Ms Burrow said.

“Everyone deserves a fair go. These unfortunate people have been through enough. Their ordeal should be brought to an end and they should be given immediate shelter and proper care by Australian authorities.

“We should deal with their claims for refugee status under Australian laws in accordance with our international obligations and not allow them to become pawns in a political game.

“Working Australians will respect strong political leadership that shows a humane response rather than a blind adherence to hardline border security policy.”

Australian unions have today placed a half page statement in *The Australian* newspaper which says it is “time to show our humanity”.

The statement expresses deep disappointment with the use of rhetoric to demonise asylum seekers for political gain, and calls for Australia to meet its international obligations towards refugees.

It calls for strong leadership from all sides of politics to ensure there is a humane approach to asylum seekers, and that their rights are respected.

It also reaffirms unions’ belief that fair, permanent migration benefits the whole community, contributes significantly to economic growth, and enriches our culture and society.

With reports of many more asylum seekers fleeing Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and the Middle East, Ms Burrow said the Rudd Government should work with other leaders in the region to establish humane facilities for people seeking safety from conflict zones.

“There also needs to be international action to deal with the push factors that cause people to seek asylum. Australia can play an international leadership role by working towards peace, equitable development and decent work for all.

“Australian unions are longstanding supporters of multiculturalism and the role of immigration in Australia’s development,” said Ms Burrow.

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