

Inverbrackie

On the 18th of October 2010 the Australian Government announced that it would be establishing a community based detention centre at the Inverbrackie army barracks. This announcement came as a surprise to the community of the Adelaide Hills, generating much debate and discussion. It was some time before answers to the community's questions began to flow and now after several information sessions have been held our understanding of what will be happening at Inverbrackie is becoming clearer. From December 20th 2010, up to 400 people from families seeking asylum, mostly from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, will be moved from Christmas Island to Inverbrackie. All of these families are considered low risk to the community.

What does the Church have to say?

On the 1st of December the Christian Church Community of the Adelaide Hills released a statement about the Inverbrackie Detention Centre which highlighted that "as Christians who believe all humans are created in God's image and given the biblical mandate to love one another as God has loved us, we cannot in good conscience ignore the plight of refugees". Furthermore, "The detention centre will go ahead and we, the Christian Churches of the Adelaide Hills, want to use our combined resources to help the detainees wherever possible" (for a full copy of this statement please ask your church or contact Baptist Care (SA) Inc on the details on the following page).

Jesus the Refugee

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas lets remember that Jesus, our "reason for the season", was himself a refugee! Born in a cattle shed because there was no room in the Inn. Then his family fled to Egypt because of the threat he posed to Herod and the persecution that erupted (Matthew 2:13-23). Perhaps considering and responding to refugees this Christmas will bring us closer to our Lord who identified and responded to strangers and those in need.

What does the Bible have to say?

Throughout the Bible God expresses his love and concern for the alien and commands his people to care for the stranger. "He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt" Deuteronomy 10: 18-19 "The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow." Psalm 146:9 Jesus' parable of the good Samaritan teaches that the stranger is our neighbour. Following Jesus involves loving asylum seekers, refugees and new arrivals to Australia.

Refugees in South Australia

Australia is a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (and its 1967 Protocol) which defines a refugee as:

"Any 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/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself 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.."

The important parts of this definition are:

- that the person has to be outside their country of origin
- the reason for their flight has to be a fear of persecution
- this fear of persecution has to be well founded (i.e. they have to have experienced or be likely to experience persecution if they return)
- the persecution has to result from one or more of the five grounds listed in the definition
- they have to be unwilling or unable to seek the protection of their country



Refugees in our community

Last year, over 1200 refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma, Ethiopia and Liberia settled in South Australia. Newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers have a great deal of adjustments to make. They are separated by language and cultural differences and often have limited knowledge of the wider community.

Some of the other issues and difficulties that refugees face after arriving in Australia include:

- separation from family members
- grief and depression
- forming local connections
- finding employment and accommodation

Rarely do refugees have the chance to plan for their departure or choose where they find refuge. Some have to flee with no notice, taking with them only the clothes on their backs. Others have to keep their plans a secret from all around them in case they are discovered.

Refugees often have little idea about where they are going. They are running *away*, not running *to*. Those who come to Australia often have little understanding about our country and the nature of society here. They have had no opportunity to prepare themselves physically or psychologically for their new life in Australia (*Refugee Council of Australia*).

What's the difference between an Asylum Seeker and a Refugee?

An asylum seeker is a person whose application for asylum or refugee status is pending. It is legal to seek asylum. Asylum seekers usually come from regions where there are no avenues to apply for refugee status, hence they escape any way they can. The process of applying for refugee status can vary depending on both the country you are in and from, as well as the formal avenues available. For example, applying for refugee status can be very different for someone from Iran as opposed to someone from Sudan.

On the 10th Day of Christmas...

10 days before Christmas a boat carrying up to 80 Iraqi and Iranian Asylum seekers headed to Christmas Island crashed into rocks killing an estimated 30 people, including children. It's a heartbreaking event which reminds us of the vulnerability and risk associated with those fleeing already terrible circumstances, in their search for somewhere safe to live. The lives of the men, women and children on these boats are precious to God and we mourn their loss.

Get involved at Inverbrackie!

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), along with Serco, the group managing the detention centre, are keen to have community involvement to help support those being detained at Inverbrackie. DIAC are inviting any groups or individuals keen to offer support to contact them at inverbrackie@immi.gov.au. At Baptist Care (SA) we look forward to offering support to detainees when and as needed. At this stage the nature of our involvement will become clearer as refugees arrive.

Get involved at home!

Baptist Care (SA) Inc. offers a variety of programs supporting people from refugee backgrounds who are settling in Adelaide. We have had over 200 volunteers involved in supporting refugees over the past 5 years and are always looking for more! Mentoring is one of the key opportunities which exist and involves people from all walks of life befriending and supporting our newest community members. Please give us a call if you feel friendship is something you could offer. For more information you can check us out on You Tube at the link listed on the following page.



