

Humanitarian refugees?

Sent to: SMH/editor (letters@smh.com.au)

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It is called the Humanitarian Program for a reason.

It gives a new life to suffering human beings who need permanent protection from persecution. Humanitarian refugee settlers, not immigrants selected “in the national economic interest”.

Sadly, in Australia today you have to be a ‘good refugee’, chosen from a UNHCR pool of refugees waiting patiently “over there” for resettlement, and only in the small number allocated annually by Cabinet, as part of the Migration Program of around 200 000 people pa.

How politically inconvenient therefore, that ‘bad refugees’, who come direct, self funded and by boat, turn out to be mostly “genuine” refugees who did flee persecution and cannot - in international law - be sent home. It is legal to seek asylum. As a deterrent to others, Australia puts boat arriving refugees in “harm’s way”, simply because officials did not select them. In our name they are tortured with indefinite detention, indefinite separation from loved ones. It is as if many Australians fail to comprehend what persecution actually means and are indifferent to human suffering.

A truly humanitarian policy would welcome and care for the desperate, yet enterprising men women and children who make their own way here. Their claims of persecution would be processed as quickly as possible. Causes behind the perilous refugee journeys would be tackled. International cooperation would fund and deliver peace and reconstruction programs and enable people to stay home.

For those who prove to be refugees, or have compassionate and compelling humanitarian circumstances, there is place for you in this diverse society which has personal links to just about every other nation on earth.

You will help to make this nation even greater.

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