



10 May 2009

The Hon Tony Abbott MP  
Leader of the Opposition  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Abbott,

The organisations listed below are writing to you on behalf of the growing number of Australians who are deeply concerned at both the government and the coalition's approach to asylum seekers.

As a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention, Australia has committed to providing adequate protection for refugees and asylum seekers.

We are calling on both the government and the coalition to show leadership and engage in calm and rational debate on this complex issue. It is unacceptable that both sides of politics have engaged in fear mongering around the issue of 'unauthorised maritime arrivals'.

The opposition's core policy of returning to the system of Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs), albeit with a different name, fails to meet Australia's legal obligations towards asylum seekers. Reinstating this visa would be a step backwards for the recognition of refugees' human rights and damaging to Australia's international reputation.

There has never been evidence that TPVs succeeded in deterring asylum seekers from attempting to reach Australia by boat. In the two years following the introduction of these visas under the previous government, the number of boat arrivals actually increased, and 90 per cent of those asylum seekers in Australia on TPVs were ultimately granted permanent protection visas.

We are deeply concerned at the Coalition's suggestion that if elected it would turn boats back. This would breach people's fundamental right to seek asylum as well as directly breach Australia's *non-refoulement* obligations.

We are reminding all parties that the UN Refugee Convention is the cornerstone of international protection for refugees and is designed to ensure the rights of individuals fleeing persecution and seeking asylum are protected. Australia committed to upholding these principles and they should therefore be at the forefront of any political party's policy framework.

Kind regards,

Claire Mallinson, National Director, Amnesty International Australia

Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia

Elenie Poulos, National Director, UnitingJustice Australia, Uniting Church in Australia

Simon Sheikh, National Director, GetUp!

Michael Pearce SC, President, Liberty Victoria

Caz Coleman, Director, Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project

Kon Karapanagiotidis, Director, Asylum Seekers Resource Centre

Philip Lynch, Director and Principal Solicitor, Human Rights Law Resource Centre

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