A Welcoming, Compassionate and Diverse Nation

Our Vision:

We are a nation of diverse cultures, languages, faiths, ethnic groups and experiences. We celebrate and value the strength of this diversity. We see this diversity reflected in our leaders, key decision makers, institutions, industry, sports and media. We are a compassionate nation, where every person who seeks refuge here is treated fairly and made to feel welcome and safe – regardless of their country of origin or mode of arrival.
Our hopes:

- All people experience the same rights and can play the role they wish, free from preconceptions, stereotypes and discrimination.
- A person’s race, religion or cultural background is no barrier to them living, working and participating as an equal member of society.
- Our society’s diversity is celebrated. Racial discrimination and fear are no longer used to win political favour.
- People who come to Australia – either as migrants, refugees or people seeking asylum – are treated equally and fairly.
- Safe resettlement pathways exist in our region for people who seek asylum.
- People who come to Australia seeking asylum are given the opportunity to apply for protection in a safe and timely manner and are provided with appropriate support. Detention is a last resort and length of detention is capped to not more than 90 days.
- Our humanitarian intake is generous and responsive to global needs.
- Our fair and compassionate treatment of people who seek safety on our shores reflects a compassionate and caring nation.
- Our leaders set an example by showing fairness and compassion and enacting policy that is humane.

What the UCA has said

Statement to the Nation (1977)
“We affirm our eagerness to uphold basic Christian values and principles, such as the importance of every human being, the need for integrity in public life, the proclamation of truth and justice, the rights for each citizen to participate in decision-making in the community, religious liberty and personal dignity, and a concern for the welfare of the whole human race.”

Asylum seeker and refugee policy (2002)
“We approach the issue of asylum seekers and refugees in the context of the words of Jesus. He spoke of a new community established on righteousness and love, and based on a fellowship of reconciliation — a community in which all members work together for the good of the whole. In essence, working for this kind of society is our contribution to civil society. When we work for freedom, human rights and the common good of the community we are expressing our faith. It is an outworking of the community of God.”

Dignity in Humanity (2006)
“In Jesus Christ we discern that which is truly human. As we feed the hungry, welcome the stranger and care for the thirsty, the sick and the imprisoned, there is the mysterious possibility that we will discover the life of Christ among us (Matthew 25: 31-46), and share the love of God.”

Witness from the Bible

- The laws of the covenant regularly require Israel to make room for those who come from outside Israel, to provide for their welfare, and to enable them to join the community and be subject to the same covenant—see for example Exodus 12: 48 – 49; Leviticus 18: 26; 19: 9 – 10, 33 – 34.
- The prophets pointed toward a future where those of other nations came to Israel, joining in harmony and worship of God (Isaiah 14:1; Micah 4: 1 – 3).
- They also taught the vital importance of acting with mercy and compassion toward those within Israel who were in need (Isaiah 1: 16 – 17; 3: 13 – 15; 58: 6 – 7), and that God answers the cries of the poor (Isaiah 41: 17; Ezekiel 22: 29 – 31; see also Luke 1: 46 – 55).
- This call to compassion is echoed and indeed strengthened in Jesus’ life and teaching (Matthew 25: 31 – 46; Luke 6: 20 – 25).
Shelter from the Storm (2015)
Principles for Good Policy for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees:

• All people should be treated with respect and accorded the dignity they deserve as human beings.
• As one of the wealthiest, safest and most secure countries in the world, Australia should do its fair share to ease people’s sufferings in the context of what is a global problem. We must not shift our responsibilities to poor and developing countries.
• Australia’s policies relating to asylum seekers should be driven by bipartisan commitments to a humanitarian response focussed on protection needs and to upholding our obligations under international law.
• Australia’s policies relating to asylum seekers should be driven by bipartisan commitments to a humanitarian response focussed on protection needs and to upholding our obligations under international law.
• The Australian Government must be transparent in the implementation of its policies, open to scrutiny by the courts and the media and to critique and advocacy from civil society.
• The media should not demonise or inflame prejudice against asylum seekers and refugees by deliberately promoting misunderstanding.

No fair process and permanent protection for people seeking safety in Australia

• The current ‘fast-track’ process for assessing people’s claims for protection deliberately discriminates against people who came to Australia by boat. It’s created a complex system that’s incredibly difficult for people in the community to navigate.21
• Since 2014, people who arrive by boat and do not have a valid visa have no right to meaningful, independent review of their case.22 As a result of this process, many more people seeking asylum are being denied protection and face a greater risk of being sent back to danger.
• Around 15,000 people, including children, are currently in the community waiting for their claims to be processed under ‘fast track’ or are having the outcome for their claim reviewed.
• Those found to be refugees are currently placed on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for three years or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) for five years. They must repeatedly for their visas every three or five years for the rest of their lives.
• Those on a TPV or SHEV live in a state of limbo – they do not have the same access to family reunion, services, support, education and employment as those with a Permanent Protection Visa.

The State of the Nation

People seeking asylum are detained indefinitely in offshore detention

• Despite the release of children from detention, there remains a large number of refugees held in offshore facilities.
• There have been numerous cases of deteriorating mental and physical health, self-harm and suicide among adults and children detained on Manus Island and Nauru. From February to November 2015, 239 detainees were assessed as being at ‘high imminent’ risk of suicide or self-harm.20

Key Actions:

1. An end to the policy of indefinite, mandatory detention for people seeking asylum, starting with an end to offshore processing.
2. Adults and children seeking asylum can live in the Australian community with access to essential services, while their refugee status is processed in a timely manner.
People seeking asylum in the Asia-Pacific region are not provided with adequate pathways to protection

- There were some 9.5 million persons of concern to UNHCR in Asia and the Pacific, including 3.7 million refugees, 2.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 1.6 million stateless persons – according to the UNHCR 2017 Regional Update.23
- Current policies of the Australian Government undermine a sustainable global approach to managing the global crisis of displacement of people.

**Key Actions:**
1. Australia should work proactively with nations in Asia-Pacific and with agencies working on the ground to ensure that refugees and people seeking asylum moving through the region are safe, have access to services, have their claims assessed and can begin to rebuild their lives.
2. Increase Australia’s humanitarian intake.

People are vilified, abused and discriminated against for being different.

- 18 per cent of Australians say they have experienced discrimination because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion.24
- Around one in three (35 per cent) of recent migrants said they faced hurdles in finding their first job.25
- The Federation of Community Legal Centres reported a 50% increase in racist attacks in Victoria in areas with high migrant populations.26
- Australian muslim women who ventured out on their own were almost three times more likely to face harassment of an Islamophobic nature.27

**Key Actions:**
Explore and implement strategies which address racial and religious discrimination in Australia and build harmony among diverse communities.

---

**Discussion Starters or Questions for Candidates**

You may like to ask one or more of the following questions in a small group discussion or select one or more to put to a candidate before the election.

1. What are your policies to support the fair treatment and processing of people seeking asylum?
2. What will you do to create a more responsive humanitarian intake program?
3. What leadership will you take in Asia-Pacific to respond to the unprecedented movement of people in our region and globally?
4. What will your party do to combat racial and religious discrimination and promote social cohesion and harmony in the community?
5. What initiatives are currently in place or could be used within your local community to make it a place of welcome and support for refugees?
References

1. https://www.referendumbcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF

2. Minutes of the National Congress Executive held Tuesday 15 August 2017


5. https://www.referendumbcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF

6. Reconciliation Australia 2018 Reconciliation Barometer

7. Reconciliation Australia 2018 Reconciliation Barometer

8. Department of Environment and Energy website Climate Change Impacts in Australia


10. Australian Government Department of the Environment and Energy, Quarterly Update of Australia's National Greenhouse Gas Inventory: March 2018

11. Climate Council: Weather Gone Wild, Climate Change Fuelled Extreme Weather in 2018

12. Climate Council, What you need to know about fossil fuel divestment, 17/05/17

13. Over 2 million Australian households now have solar panels: Clean Energy Council, Number of Australian Homes with Rooftop Solar tops 2 million... and counting, 03/12/18

14. Over 2 million Australian households now have solar panels: Clean Energy Council

15. McLoughlin, Chris, Solar panels not benefiting poor who can't afford them, SACOSS, ABC News


17. Ibid


20. Refugee Council of Australia, State of the Nation 2017, Refugees and People Seeking Asylum in Australia


23. UNHCR Regional Update Asia and Pacific


25. Australian Human Rights Commission Face the Facts: Cultural Diversity

26. Statement from the Federation of Community Legal Centres

27. Islamophobia in Australia 2014-2016, Dr Derya Iner

28. Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) Poverty

29. Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) Raise the Rate

30. Homelessness Australia, Homelessness Statistics

31. Poverty, Social Exclusion and Disadvantage in Australia, UnitingCare report, 2018


34. Three charts on: disability discrimination in the workplace, The Conversation, 12/10/17

35. (Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University, 2010)

36. Family, Domestic and sexual violence in Australia, 2018 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare


38. Family, Domestic and sexual violence in Australia, 2018 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare


41. Alcohol and drug use exacerbate family violence and can be dealt with, The Conversation, 15/12/16

Thanks go to…

This document is a UnitingJustice project – a collaboration of those engaged in the justice work of the Uniting Church coordinated by the Assembly Resourcing Unit.

We thank the following contributors:

UnitingCare Australia
UnitingWorld
VIC/TAS Synod
Uniting (VIC/TAS)
Synod of WA
Presbytery and Synod of SA
Uniting Communities
Queensland Synod
UnitingCare Queensland
Uniting (NSW/ACT)

See also
http://unitingearthweb.org.au/

In developing this document, we drew on the excellent work already done in Australia Remade by the A24 Alliance, a collection of individuals and diverse organisation with a shared commitment to put people and planet first. We also considered some of the excellent work being done in the Australian National Development Index (ANDI) Project. Uniting Church members are encouraged to visit the websites of all the above groups to further explore the issues and questions that arise as we consider what it means to live and act justly.