

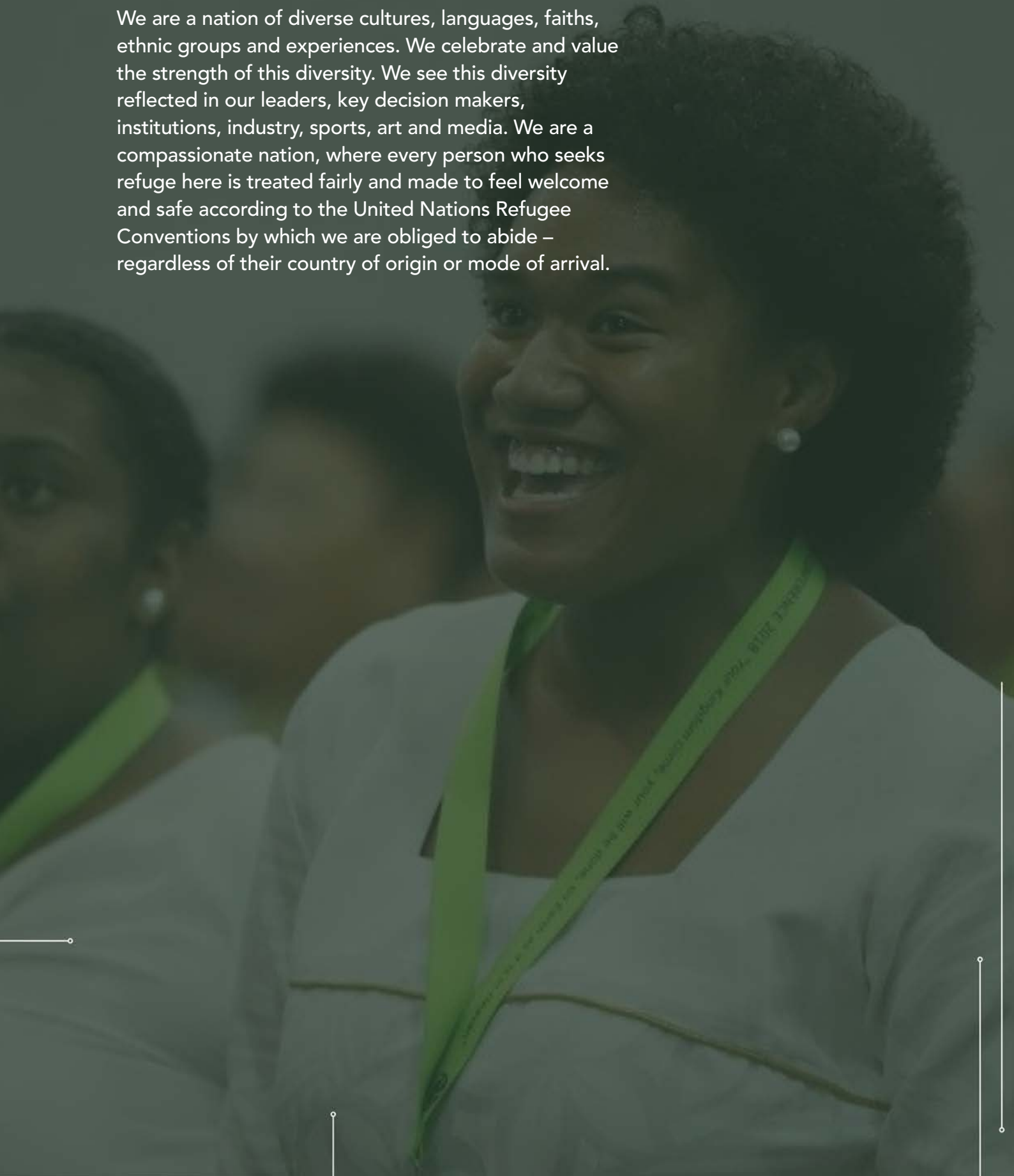


**A WELCOMING,  
COMPASSIONATE  
AND DIVERSE  
NATION**

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# 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, art and media. We are a compassionate nation, where every person who seeks refuge here is treated fairly and made to feel welcome and safe according to the United Nations Refugee Conventions by which we are obliged to abide – regardless of their country of origin or mode of arrival.



## OUR HOPES

- All people experience the same rights, free from preconceptions, stereotypes and discrimination.
- A person's race, religion, ability 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 and Anti-Racism strategies are adopted to counter the experience of increasing racism by many Australians.
- People who come to Australia – either as migrants, refugees or people seeking asylum – are treated equally and fairly, and their contributions to Australia appreciated and celebrated.
- 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 for those that do not pose a serious risk to public health or safety.
- People found to be refugees are granted permanent visas with access to Government support and family reunion without delay.
- Our humanitarian intake is generous and responsive to global needs.
- Our leaders set an example by showing fairness and compassion and enacting policy that is humane.
- Migrants, refugees and people seeking asylum are given access to basic government services and supports like Medicare, Centrelink and other public services without restriction or waiting periods.
- Disability is not used as the basis for excluding people from resettlement.

## RACISM IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

- The UCA strongly supports the principles which the Race Relations Commissioner suggests could guide a National Framework. A national framework should build on shared values of equality, freedom, fairness and a 'fair go'.
- It should recognise and acknowledge Australia's:
  - Ancient Indigenous heritage and the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.
  - Historical British heritage, brought to the colonies by the early settlers.
  - Diverse multicultural heritage, with increasing waves of migrants from different parts of the world.
- A national framework should also acknowledge Australia's geo-political location in the Asia-Pacific region in the 'Asian century' as well as being capable of embracing the history and circumstances of Australia's diverse diaspora communities.
- We also believe that the Framework should be informed by Australia's human rights obligations, which are often ignored by our Federal government, despite Australia being a signatory.

## THE STATE OF THE NATION

### People seeking asylum are detained indefinitely in offshore detention

- Despite the release of children from detention, there remain over 200 refugees who were transferred offshore to PNG and Nauru. The current dispute between Australia and PNG about responsibility for the welfare of these people has resulted in homelessness and destitution for stateless refugees who are not permitted to work or receive income support.

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

- The current 'fast-track' process for assessing

people's claims for protection has created a complex system that is difficult for people in the community to navigate. Delays of years in assessing their claims leaves these people totally dependent on charities for financial support. We appreciate the abolition of fast-track policy and Immigration Assessment Authority, and introducing the Administrative Review Tribunal.

- 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 reapply for their visas every three or five years, potentially for the rest of their lives. We appreciate the introduction to Resolution of Status (RoS) Visa to 19,000 applicants.
- Those on a TPV or any other similar visas given to the recent arrivals from countries like Palestine, Ukraine and Afghanistan 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.

## Migration Amendment Bill 2024

- The Uniting Church in Australia believes that the recent Migration Amendment Bill 2024 passed by the Australian Parliament on 28 November 2024 fails to meet the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees.
- Parliament passed three controversial migration bills, increasing powers to deport non-citizens, reverse refugee protection, enact travel bans and enforce strict detention measures, including confiscating phones.
- The UCA endorses the views in the submission on the Bill from the Australian Human Rights Commission<sup>1</sup>.

## People seeking asylum in the Asia-Pacific region are not provided with adequate pathways to protection

- The UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that in 2020 there were over 4 million refugees in the Asia-Pacific region, which does not include people internally displaced in their own country. Including both refugees and people seeking asylum the two largest sources in our region were 2.6

million people from Afghanistan and 1.1 million from Myanmar.

- Australia's annual refugee intake has been reduced since the pandemic, with the reduction in numbers continuing, as a result of the recent decisions regarding all migrant intakes from 2024 onwards.
- People are vilified, abused and discriminated against for being different.
- 18 percent of people in Australia say they have experienced discrimination because of skin colour, ethnic origin or religion (2023)<sup>2</sup>.
- Around one in three (33%) of recent migrants said they faced hurdles in finding their first job (2019)<sup>3</sup>.
- Australian Muslim women who ventured out on their own were almost three times more likely to face harassment of an Islamophobic nature.
- The Government's recent appointment of Special Envoys to counter Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia has been a response to the rise of obvious discrimination against two groups, but many other minorities have provided evidence of discrimination yet to be acknowledged and addressed. See AHRC campaign Racism: It Stops with Me.

## Waiting periods for migrants to access services

- There is an increasing trend toward excluding migrants (including expanded and extended waiting periods for new permanent residents) from social security and basic social protections afforded to other residents and citizens. This includes access to social security and family payments, childcare subsidies, paid parental leave, subsidised education, etc. This discrimination risks creating a two-tier society, in which one class of residents are denied the basic supports and protections that citizens and other residents take for granted.

## 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, & Matthew 25:31-46).
- The early church and the writers of the New Testament strongly picked up this theme of care for people in need in the lives of their community and in their own teaching (Acts 2: 44 – 45; 4: 32 – 35; Hebrews 13: 1 – 3; James 1: 27; 1 John 4: 19 – 21).

## WHAT THE UCA AFFIRMS

### 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.

This policy arises from the Uniting Church in Australia's belief in the inherent dignity of all people. The principles it expresses reflect the Church's commitment to work for justice and to oppose all forms of discrimination. These principles should underpin Australia's policies, legislation and practices toward asylum seekers, refugees and humanitarian entrants."

### 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."

### Shelter from the Storm (2015)

This major statement describes 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.
- 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.

## OUR ASKS

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 of refugees.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

You may like to select one or two of these questions to put to MPs or community leaders

3. An end to the policy of indefinite, mandatory detention for people seeking asylum, starting with an end to offshore processing with all asylum seekers brought onshore.
  4. Introduction of a revised, and affordable Refugee Sponsorship Program that would enable individuals and community groups to more easily sponsor refugees to settle in Australia, in addition to the existing humanitarian intake.
  5. A fair, robust and timely process for assessing the protection claims of people seeking asylum.
  6. Those found to be refugees are granted permanent protection so they can begin to rebuild their lives and contribute to Australian society.
  7. Legislative safeguards are enacted to protect against arbitrary and indefinite detention in Australia, including for refugees whose visas are cancelled but cannot return to their country of origin due to the risk of persecution or refusal of states to readmit them.
  8. A review of the Migration Amendment Bill 2024 must be initiated early in 2025 to allow adequate submissions regarding the impact this reaction to the recent High Court decisions on immigration.
  9. In addition, the UCA calls on the Australian Government to develop and promote human rights education, in order to “foster mutual understanding, healthy and harmonious communities, and justice and peace.”
  10. Explore and implement strategies which address racial and religious discrimination in Australia and build harmony among diverse communities.
  11. New permanent residents should be eligible for social security and other basic protections immediately upon having their permanency granted.
  12. All asylum seekers awaiting determination of their applications for refugee status should be entitled to basic support while their cases are considered.
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 can Australia take in the Asia-Pacific region to respond to the unprecedented movement of people in our region and globally?
  4. What will your party or organisation 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?
  6. What is your policy regarding extended waiting periods for new permanent residents from social security and basic social protections afforded to other residents and citizens?
  7. Will you support the request to the Government to review the Migration Amendment Act 2024?
  8. Will you support the Anti-Racism Framework developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission which is informed by Australia’s human rights obligations?

### References:

1. [https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/submission\\_25\\_-\\_migration\\_amendment\\_bill\\_2024\\_ahrc\\_submission\\_2\\_0.pdf](https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/submission_25_-_migration_amendment_bill_2024_ahrc_submission_2_0.pdf)
2. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/measuring-what-matters/measuring-what-matters-themes-and-indicators/cohesive/experience-discrimination>
3. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/characteristics-recent-migrants/latest-release>