

The Federal Government recently announced harsh changes to the way asylum seekers arriving by boat will be treated in the future. This is a response to the recent granting of protection to 42 Papuans who fled persecution in their homeland, a decision that was supported and welcomed in the Australian community.

We, the undersigned, are alarmed at the prospect of asylum seekers again being sent to offshore detention centres and staying there until a 'third country' will give them refuge. We are also deeply concerned about the proposal to use the Australian Navy to forcibly return boats of asylum seekers to the very places they fled.

These changes breach international human rights law as well as many Australians' personal moral standards and beliefs. These changes mean that children could again face a childhood in detention breaking the government's 2005 promise that "Children shall be detained as a measure of last resort." They mean that refugees could face a lifetime in detention without access to Australian laws and review. They mean that Australia could be responsible for returning refugees to persecution and torture.

We urge our elected representatives to remember that we have an obligation to assist people fleeing persecution. We must not ignore this responsibility or shift it to other countries.

We believe it is in our 'national interest' to uphold human rights. We believe it is in our 'national interest' to welcome refugees fleeing persecution to Australia and support them to become great Australians.

We urge the government to abandon these proposals. If the proposals go ahead we call on all Federal Parliamentarians to oppose them, in Australia's long term national interest.

Add your voice to the list of Australians calling for a more just and humane refugee policy. Go to www.ajustaustralia for more details. To add your name, send an email with subject line "add name to letter" with your name and State.