

Refugee speech or talking points for activists: We can have a better plan

Today is an incredibly important day to pay our respects to those who have tragically lost their lives because of the Australian government's abusive offshore detention regime on Nauru and Manus.

It's an important day to reflect on the preventable suffering that consecutive Australian governments have inflicted upon more than two thousand men, women and children - and who are still suffering as we stand here.

It's also an important day for all of us here at these vigils, to be strengthened by what unites us. And what unites us is our compassion, our commonsense and our welcome to people who just need a safe place to rebuild their lives.

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Lets draw energy from the fact there are thousands and thousands of people all around Australia standing with the people trapped on Manus and Nauru - because they all care and believe that all people should be provided safety and their humanity and dignity respected.

And lets use our energy to continue urging both the major parties to pursue humane alternative refugee policies. An alternative refugee system that does not lock people up in remote islands or involve hazardous boat pushbacks or lets people live in limbo on temporary visas. There are better, humane alternatives - the only thing that is missing is the political will.

Instead of locking people up on Nauru or Manus Island, we should first evacuate people from these detention centres and bring all those people to safety to Australia immediately.

Instead of spending almost 5 billion dollars since 2012 on offshore detention, our government should instead be helping our neighbouring countries give real choices to refugees. For example there are many people who are seeking asylum or who are refugees currently in Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia. The Australian government could be funding programs in these

countries which allow these people to work, send their kids to school, and live in safety. By having real choices, people are not then forced to undertake a dangerous journey by boat, and instead can get on with their lives.

Instead of corporates like the Australian company Broadspectrum and the Spanish multinational Ferrovial earning millions of dollars off the back of two thousand people's suffering, we should be putting people before profits and end these contracts immediately.

Instead of letting just 10 of the world's 193 countries host more than half the globe's refugees, Australia could offer more people a home - Amnesty is calling for at least 30,000 per year through the current humanitarian program. Also, our government could be investing in private sponsorship models like what Canada is doing now so successfully. Our government could also include refugees in existing visa programs such as student, work & family reunion visas.

The problem is not the number of refugees, it is that many of the world's wealthiest nations host the fewest and do the least.

Sharing responsibility is what will solve the current global refugee challenge. Instead, Australia is shirking its responsibility and paying billions of dollars to other governments and companies to abuse two thousand men, women and children.

Some politicians want to use fear as a tool to divide our community. But lets make sure we show our Members of Parliament and Senators that we are united, and we united by compassion and commonsense. But politicians will only change if we tell them - not once, but again and again and again, that there are better, more humane alternatives.

Together as a community we can make a better world - where children can play, where we can feel safe, where we all have a home.

We can do this together and we can do this now. Thank you.