

Clearing up some of the myths on asylum seekers coming to Australia

Phil Glendenning spoke at the WATAC Conference in May about his commitment to asylum seekers coming to Australia. Recently he sent this informative article to help us keep in touch with the present situation re asylum seekers. WATAC is very grateful to Phil for his work and for taking the time to write for us.

In recent months there has been an increase in debate about the number of asylum seekers coming to Australia by boat. Once again we have heard our politicians and some media commentators referring to these people as ‘illegal immigrants’ and ‘queue jumpers’, ignoring the facts that it is perfectly legal to ask for asylum in Australia under our law no matter how you arrive, and that there is no ‘queue’ in war-torn places like Afghanistan and the Taliban held areas of Pakistan.

Still the rhetoric escalates. As Liberal Senator Judith Troeth said recently in the Parliament words like ‘flood’, ‘panic’ and ‘hundreds of thousands of people arriving on our shores’ are used all too often. What is in danger of being lost in all of this are the plain and simple facts of the matter. In her speech in the Senate on September 8 Judith Troeth put some simple facts on the record.

“The most recent report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, shows that the number of individual claims for asylum worldwide rose for the second year in a row by 28 per cent to 839,000 people.

Developed countries like Australia do attract asylum seekers, but the fact is that 80 per cent of the world’s refugees are hosted by developing countries—Pakistan, Syria, Iran and Jordan.

Among the developed countries, the US received 49,600 applications for asylum; France, 35,400; Canada, 34,800; the UK, 30,500; and Italy, 30,000. Australia received—and this is taken together, both boat people and plane arrivals—4,500 asylum claims. That is 0.05 per cent of the worldwide total, and almost all of them did not arrive by boat”.

In fact of that 0.05% only 4% arrive by boat. 96% come mainly through Sydney Airport, yet there are no demands to annex Mascot from the Australian mainland. Even given the 1,500 who have arrived by boat over the past 14 months, these are tiny figures when compared to the rest of the world.

The vast majority of those who have arrived by boat recently come primarily from three countries – Afghanistan and Pakistan where the Taliban are again on the rise and the war is escalating, and from Sri Lanka, which has been the scene of one of the world’s most brutal civil wars and where peace is yet to be established.

There has been no opening of floodgates. What has happened is that right across the world the numbers of asylum seekers have increased because war has escalated and humans caught in its midst need to get out and find peace and security.

You can check out the Edmund Rice Centre at this weblink
<http://www.erc.org.au/>