

Portland OR  
Nov. 14, 2001

The Right Honourable John Howard  
Prime Minister of Australia  
3-5 National Circuit  
Barton ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

Congratulations on your re-election.

I'd like to remind you, now that the hurly-burly of the campaign has finished, of the matter of the refugees attempting to reach Australia by boat.

The Commonwealth of Australia is signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1954 Convention on Stateless Persons, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the 1967 Protocol on Refugees.

Accordingly, your policy of forcibly intercepting refugees and preventing them from disembarking at either Christmas Island or Ashmore Reef, is illegal. Removing Christmas Island and Ashmore Reef from Australia's migration zone, retroactively, in order to justify boat-people intercepts in early September, does not make this policy legal.

Or humane.

Not only have the refugees fled fundamentalist oppression, war, and poverty in Afghanistan, you are now sending the Australian Navy to divert them into political uncertainty in yet another Third World economy.

Australia has in the past gladly accepted known war criminals and disguised their histories to allow them to settle and stay. Meanwhile you malign all these refugees with the the snide assertion that you 'cannot guarantee' that one of them isn't a terrorist.

This behaviour is fit for the time and novels of Dickens.

Australian policy must allow these boat-people their refugee status, and the comfort and support which that status entitles them to.

Your current policy makes it abundantly clear that to be Australian, now, at the turn of another century, is to be aggressively racist, militarized, isolationist, bullying and smug. Your actions leave me ashamed to say I am an Australian citizen.

Only your resolution to honour the four conventions the Commonwealth of Australia is legally, now, at this moment, obliged to honour, can convert smugness to self-respect and restore Australia's former standing in Southeast Asia.

Yours faithfully

Moira McAuliffe