



**Media Release
May 17, 2006**

Catholic Bishops write to Prime Minister urging him to reconsider changes to asylum processing laws

Australia's Catholic Bishops have written to Prime Minister John Howard urging him to reconsider proposed legislation to process all boatpeople asylum claims offshore.

The Bishops resolved to send the letter to Mr Howard during their Plenary Meeting in Sydney last week.

Bishop Joseph Grech, the bishop who has responsibility for refugees and migrants under the Bishops Committee for Pastoral Life, said the letter acknowledged the government's need to safeguard national security.

But it urged the government not to sacrifice compassion for those who are in genuine need of help and asylum.

"The letter expresses our concern about the decision to process refugee claims of boat people at detention centres beyond Australia's shores, where they will have no access to proper legal advice or the human support they need," he said.

"We are especially concerned that women and children may again be held in detention for an unspecified period of time.

"We have urged the Prime Minister to reconsider the proposed legislation."

For more information contact Monsignor John Murphy on 02 6201 9848 or 0418 224 524.