

AUSTRALIA

Intervention

UNGA High Level Meeting on large movements of refugees and migrants (19 September 2016)

Australia is one of the most successful multicultural societies in the world. Our's is an immigration nation.

More than a quarter of our people were born overseas. Almost every UN member state is represented in our population.

Australians are not defined by religion or race; we are defined by a common commitment to shared political values, democracy, freedom and the rule of law, underpinned by mutual respect.

These values drive our approach to migration. We invite 190,000 migrants each year to join our nation of 24 million people. And our commitment to refugees is longstanding – our humanitarian resettlement program dates back to 1947.

This has made Australians truly global citizens, connected by family, culture and language to people across the globe. These links drive economic development, trade and innovation.

Australians are enriched by the cultural diversity of our community - we regard our people as our greatest assets and our unity in diversity one of our greatest strengths.

This is not a recent development, as one example there is SBS, founded nearly forty years ago the public broadcaster, not only broadcasts in dozens of languages but interprets and celebrates our multicultural society and the values of mutual respect to the whole society.

Diversity is an investment against marginalisation and extremism. It helps our community unite against extremism, rather than be divided by it.

At a time when global concern around immigration and border control is rising, the need to build community support for migration has never been clearer.

Australia's experience bears this out.

Addressing irregular migration, through secure borders, has been essential in creating confidence that the Government can manage migration in a way that mitigates risks and focuses humanitarian assistance on those who need it the most.

This has had a direct impact on our ability to provide generous and effective support to refugees.

Without this confidence, we would not have been able to increase our intake of refugees – the world's third largest permanent resettlement program – by more than 35 per cent.

And we would not have been able to commit to welcoming 12,000 additional Syrian and Iraqi refugees, on top of this.

Of course not every country is an island. And each country needs to institute policies that suit its own circumstances.

But the reality of people smuggling is one of profit from, and exploitation of, some of the most vulnerable people on earth. And we are all too familiar with the tragedy of lives lost at sea.

The unregulated movement of people globally is growing fast. We need measures to create order out of the resulting chaos if we are to provide safe pathways for refugees and target those who are most in need.

These are challenges that cannot be addressed without strong international cooperation.

We need to work together to facilitate safe and regular migration for refugees and migrants and, above all, ensure that those who are able can return to their homes in safety as quickly as possible.

And we need to support, rather than duplicate, the important work of the International Organization for Migration and UNCHR.

We also need to act regionally. And Australia is proud to co-chair with Indonesia the Bali Process - A Process that has greatly strengthened cooperation among its 45 members to protect migrants and refugees, and to counter people trafficking and smuggling.

Australia welcomes the momentum we are seeing in the UN system and internationally.

There is now stronger recognition that the international community must better share responsibility for helping those forced to leave their homes. All countries have a role to play.

And Australia is committed to playing a role that provides resettlement options to genuine refugees, that sees our multicultural society grow from strength to strength, and that supports international efforts to help the most vulnerable.