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UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA APPLAUDS A STEP FORWARD IN IMMIGRATION POLICY
Church calls for bipartisan support for complementary protection

The Uniting Church in Australia has welcomed the Government's legislation for a system of complementary protection and is calling for bipartisan support to ensure its passage through the parliament.

Rev. Elenie Poulos, the National Director of the Church's justice agency, said, "Not everyone needs protection as defined by the Refugees Convention. Some people seek our protection for other reasons, for example, women at risk of an 'honour killing' or someone at risk of being subjected to the death penalty."

Rev. Poulos said, "Australia has obligations to protect people according to a number of international treaties, for example the Convention against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of the Child".

Uniting Church members have for many years been lobbying their MPs and Senators for such legislation which aims to eliminate needless bureaucratic processes in the visa processing system for people at risk of torture, inhumane treatment or death.

"Under the current system, there's no option for such people other than to be processed as a possible refugee. They have to go through the whole system until finally reaching the stage where they can apply directly to the Minister to intervene in their case on humanitarian grounds. This wastes resources and can add to the trauma already suffered by people", said Rev. Poulos.

"There is nothing new about complementary protection - all this legislation will do is transfer the existing decision-making powers to the beginning of the claim process. It doesn't create new grounds for protection but it will allow for faster processing - a good thing for both the applicant and the government.

"We must leave behind the political game playing which continues to plague the response to asylum seekers in this country. This is a commonsense policy and we urge the Opposition and crossbench members of Parliament to support this important legislation," said Rev. Poulos.



About Rev. Elenie Poulos - Rev. Elenie Poulos is the National Director of UnitingJustice Australia, the Uniting Church's national justice policy and advocacy unit. She is also Chairperson of the international aid and development agency of the National Council of Churches in Australia and a member of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs; one of the four advisory bodies of the World Council of Churches.

ENDS - For media enquiries please contact Gabrielle Lloyd at the Uniting Church National Assembly Communications Unit on 0408 170001.