

Gillard and Abbott locked in race to the bottom - Greens

The Australian Greens warn both major parties are participating in a race to the bottom on asylum seekers, with the Greens the sole voice of compassion and fairness following announcements from Prime Minister Gillard and Opposition Leader Abbott today.

"Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott may differ on some things, but on this issue they are both backing a return to Howard's Australia," said the Greens' Immigration Spokesperson, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young.

"If voters believe in preserving the Australian fair-go, looking after the little guy and the need for compassion for our fellow human beings, it is clearer than ever that they need a strong Green voice in Parliament."

"Julia Gillard has made it clear she wants a policy that will be harder on refugees, more harmful to children in detention and harsher towards the world's most vulnerable people."

"The Greens recognise the small number of people who arrive by boat seeking protection deserve to have their case heard and be treated humanely."

"Onshore mainland processing of asylum applications provides the most humane and efficient way to determine who is a genuine refugee and who is not."

"Julia Gillard's continued suspension of processing of Afghan applications is cruel and her East Timor "Pacific Solution" is unfair. It is simply unfair to expect the poorest nation in our region, East Timor, to carry the humanitarian load of a nation as lucky and wealthy as Australia."

"No 'regional partnership' will be effective in offering protection to those genuinely in need, unless the Government increases the numbers of refugees to be resettled in Australia. Without an increase to the humanitarian intake, refugees will be trapped in detention centres in other countries while Australia washes its hands of responsibility."

"Rather than assessing people's need for protection at the source, the Gillard 'pacific solution' will simply ship people off to another country, out of sight out of mind. This might be a political fix for the Government, but it will only compound the suffering of innocent people."

"While it was good to see the Prime Minister finally put the facts on the table, it was heartless not to back these up with policy," said Senator Hanson-Young.

Senator Hanson-Young also expressed dismay at the Coalition's policy:

"Mr Abbott's response is more of the same cruel policies of the Howard years. Lots of tough talk, without an ounce of reality - beating up on the little guy."

"Tony Abbott's announcement in relation to asylum seekers' papers and his plan to turn boats around show he has no comprehension of the circumstances under which refugees flee persecution or the responsibilities we have to protect them," Senator Hanson-Young concluded.

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