



# Safe Pathways to Peace – Refugee Rights

## Context and challenges

**Worldwide, the number of displaced people is unprecedented (over 120 million).**

Conflicts, environmental and political turmoil, financial instability, housing insecurity, climate change and famine impact many countries, and minorities face persecution across the globe. Genocide is being committed in Palestine, and 1.9 million women, men and children are facing constant bombardment and displacement. As a result of all these conditions, the refugee crisis is growing – but instead of a positive global response, the human rights of refugees are under increasing attack. Across North America and Europe, right wing governments are making seeking asylum tougher and utilising harsh detention, deportation and deterrence policies.

Trump is known for his nationalist, anti-immigration, anti-Muslim and deportation rhetoric. His re-election is very likely to impact on US immigration policy and lead to cruelty and promised mass deportations, and potentially racist visa bans as previously touted. Analysts say they will lend credence to and further mainstream the growing hardline anti-immigration stance of many European leaders. The move away from respecting international law and the Refugees Convention, and the normalisation of racism and denigration of asylum seekers as “illegal” and a “threat to national security”, isn’t occurring in a vacuum in the US, UK and Europe. These policies will increase in the severity of impact on the human rights of millions of displaced people worldwide.

Australia has one of “the harshest and most comprehensive anti-asylum system in the western world”<sup>1</sup> and as such it has been a leader worldwide in the development of anti-asylum approaches. Australia’s cruel and inhumane detention practices have laid the foundations for other oppressive practices around the world. This year is an election year in Australia with Labor seeking a second term while the Coalition led by Peter Dutton hopes to pull off a Trump style victory, by tapping into community anxieties about immigration and promoting racist narratives, that will disproportionately harm refugees and people seeking asylum further compounding their vulnerabilities.

Australia’s treatment of people seeking protection is unequal – we do not provide the same access to safety for everyone that applies. The recent passage of three brutal migration bills in late November 2024 – decried by legal experts as some of the most draconian anti-migrant legislation since the advent of offshore detention in the 90s – demonstrated that cruelty to refugees is a bipartisan issue in Australia. The Bills passed by a deal between Albanese and Dutton, with Labor agreeing to Coalition amendments to make seeking protection even tougher than before.



## The urgency

Whilst there is clearly much to do in the area, we believe that there are two key vulnerable communities who need our help urgently and that Australians can easily welcome and give safe pathways to peace.

### 1. Palestinians need a safe future away from genocide

Australia must help Palestinians trying to flee genocide in Gaza and seek safety. We can provide Palestinians safe passage out, and permanent protection in Australia. Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians. 1.9 million women, men and children are facing constant bombardment and have been repeatedly displaced. Starvation is being used as a weapon of war while humanitarian aid is severely restricted.

Meanwhile, the only visas the Australian Government has provided for Palestinians fleeing genocide are tourist visas, which are totally inadequate and have cruelly been denied to 70% of applications. As a signatory to the 1951 Refugees Convention, as well as international human rights conventions against genocide, Australia is failing to meet its human rights obligations under international law.

Australia has a visa it could easily offer to help Palestinians get to safety. It was issued to evacuate Afghans from the Taliban; and during conflict in Kosovo and East Timor. It's time we offer these humanitarian visas again, and provide Palestinians a safe pathway to peace

### 2. People failed by 'Fast Track' need permanent safety, not more torture

Over 7,100 people have been living in Australia for more than a decade on temporary bridging visas, which they must renew every six months. They live in uncertainty, with no right to apply for permanent protection or other visas, or to reunite with family.

They cannot access Medicare or support, and many do not have the right to work or study. Human rights and legal groups universally condemn this treatment as procedurally unfair and deliberately cruel. These people are treated this way because they were unlucky enough to fall into the now abolished Fast Track system, designed to deter asylum seekers from arriving by boat.

Although this deliberately cruel and tortuous processing system is no longer in operation, those affected are still subject to the poor decisions that were made and have no resolution. These people fear being sent back to persecution, significant harm or human rights abuses.

Living in uncertainty for so long has severely impacted the mental health of so many of the people failed by fast Track. There have been incidents of self-harm and tragically, suicides. Australians can't let this go on for any longer. It's time we stop the torturous treatment of people failed by Fast Track. We must give them a pathway to permanent safety.

Australia is one of the few countries with the power and ability to give some of the world's most vulnerable children and families a permanent home and safety. We've done this before, and we can do it again. We just need Australians to tell their government that it's time for us to step in again and give some of the world's most vulnerable people the safe future that we all deserve.



## Campaign objectives

The campaign will achieve a permanent future in Australia for two key vulnerable groups: people failed by Fast Track, and people fleeing conflict and genocide in Gaza and the region. Australia has the power and ability to give some of the world's most vulnerable families a pathway to peace; a home and the safe future we all deserve.

We are campaigning to achieve

- Safe pathways to Australia for Palestinians fleeing genocide and war in Gaza/the broader region.
- Long-term security for Palestinians - plan to convert temporary humanitarian visas to permanency.
- Permanent visas for those failed by the Fast Track system.

To get there we are calling for

- Palestinians (especially those with family in Australia) urgently assisted with a safe pathway through the use of evacuation visas as in previous conflicts, relaxing of visitor visa criteria, or other;
- All Palestinians arriving in Australia offered supports and assistance;
- Palestinians on temporary humanitarian visas offered permanency after 3 years, as Ukrainians were.
- People failed by Fast Track begin to be moved onto permanent visa types;
- The majority of people Failed by Fast Track provided permanency within 3 years;
- Immediate evacuation of refugees from PNG and Nauru.

## Why Amnesty?

**AIA is in a unique position to campaign boldly on refugee rights.**

It is an issue that resonates strongly with the movement and supporters both here and internationally. AIA has worked hard to develop strong partnerships with diaspora groups, refugee communities and other organisations focusing on this issue and is seen as a vital player in this community with a proven track record for success. What makes us unique in this community is our ability to organise and mobilise a supporter base

As we head into a federal election, we should all be deeply concerned that the respect for international law and in this instance the refugee convention is being eroded. It would be safe to assume that the racist rhetoric and denigration of asylum seekers as “illegal” and a “threat to national security” will rear its head again over this election period. So, it is critical that we draw on our point of difference as an organisation and work with activists and our partners to secure a commitment from major parties, Independents and the Greens to act by providing safe pathways to permanency for people failed by Fast Track and for Palestinian refugees.



## What We've Learned

We have learnt that we need to work in partnership and coalition to achieve our goals in this area and that we need to ensure we are working with and centering the voices of people with lived experience. Consultation and co design with those we work with and the activist on the ground is critical to ensure that we are developing new campaign tactics that resonate with those we need to act with us. As such our commitment for our safe pathways to peace campaign is to set up a working group of people with lived experience to co-design Amnesty's community consultation approach. Led by the working group we will consult with the sector, people impacted by the issue and AIA activists to test the applicability of campaign tactics in 2026-27.

We have also learnt that we cannot continue to rely on those who already support refugees to make Australia home and improved policy in this area. We must attract new and diverse voices and motivate them to act including ensuring we are designing tactics and approaches to reach those who are yet to act or support refugee rights.