



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

20 FEB 2002

Dr Bryan Gaensler and co-signatories
Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics
60 Garden Street MS-6
Cambridge MA 02138
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Dear Dr Gaensler and co-signatories

Thank you for your letter of 11 December 2001 to the Prime Minister regarding the government's treatment of unauthorised arrivals. The Prime Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf.

The Australian government maintains a strong commitment to its international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and associated protocol and has taken a lead role in generating international support for increased cooperation in the resettlement of refugees. The Australian government also figures prominently in efforts to increase support for countries of first asylum and to maximise assistance to resolve the underlying causes for the displacement of people.

Australia has a proud humanitarian record and the government remains committed to meeting its humanitarian obligations. In per capita terms, Australia is the second most generous refugee receiving country in the world with almost 600,000 refugees and displaced people being resettled in Australia since the Second World War. Australia is one of only a small number of countries in the world that operates a dedicated offshore resettlement programme that is focused on those with the greatest need for protection and resettlement.

The government will continue to provide permanent humanitarian resettlement opportunities in Australia. In recent times, however, there has been a growing trend for criminal elements to make use of the international protection regime to generate preferred migration outcomes for some individuals. Not only does this undermine the immigration regime within this country, but it reduces the capacity for individuals in need of protection and resettlement to access these services. The most recent action of the Australian government has been targeted at increasing the difficulty for these people smuggling syndicates to continue their operations.

I have also forwarded a copy of your letter and this response to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Philip Ruddock, MP, who has portfolio responsibility for this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Miles Jordana', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Miles Jordana
Senior Adviser (International)