Dear Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott,

I have just returned to my office from the Wickham Point and the Blaydin detention centres here in Darwin.

Sadly, I have been involved with detention centres since the creation of the Woomera centre, followed by Baxter and now, over the last six years, with the various and expanding centres here in Darwin.

I experienced once again today, the suffocating frustration of the unnecessary pain we inflict on one another. I celebrated Holy Mass with a large number of Vietnamese families, made up of men, women, children and women waiting to give birth. The celebration was prayerful and wonderful, until the moment of parting.

I was reminded of something a young man said to me during one of my visits to Woomera, all those years ago. I was saying something about freedom.

He replied, "Father, if freedom is all you have known, then you have never known freedom." I sensed the horrible truth of that statement again today.

I was also conscious of that beautiful speech made when the UNHCR accepted the Nobel Prize in 1981. In part it states, "Throughout the history of mankind people have been uprooted against their will. Time and time again, lives and values built from generation to generation have been shattered without warning. But throughout history mankind has also reacted to such upheavals and brought succour to the uprooted. Be it through individual gestures or concerted action and solidarity, those people have been offered help and shelter and a chance to become dignified, free citizens again. Through the ages, the giving of sanctuary had become one of the noblest traditions of human nature. Communities, institutions, cities and nations have generously opened their doors to refugees."

I sit here at my desk with a heavy heart and a deep and abiding sadness, that the leaders of the nation that my father, as an immigrant, taught me to love with a passion, have adopted such a brutal, uncompassionate and immoral stance towards refugees.

I imagine he would be embarrassed and saddened by what has occurred.
It occurred to me today that neither the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition know the story of any one of these people.

Neither do the great Australian community.

I find that it is quite impossible to dismiss these people with all the mindless, well-crafted slogans, when you actually look into their eyes, hold their babies and feel their grief.

There has been a concerted campaign to demonise these people and keep them isolated from the great Australian public. It has been successful in appealing to the less noble aspects of our nation’s soul and that saddens me. I feel no pride in this attitude that leads to such reprehensible policies, on both sides of our political spectrum.

I cringe when people draw my attention to elements of our history like *The White Australia Policy* and the fact that we didn't even count our Indigenous sisters and brothers until the mid 1900's. I cringe and wish those things were not true. It is hard to imagine that we as a nation could have done those things.

I judge the attitude of our political leaders to refugees and asylum seekers to be in the same shameful category as the above mentioned. In years to come, Australians who love this country will be in disbelief that we as a nation could have been so uncharacteristically cruel for short term political advantage.

It seems that nothing will influence your policy in this matter, other than the political imperative, but I could not sit idly by without feeling complicit in a sad and shameful chapter of this country which I have always believed to be better than that.

Sometime I would love to share with you some of the stories I have had the privilege of being part of over the years. I am sure you would be greatly moved. Sadly, for so many, such a moment will be all too late.

Yours Sincerely.

Bishop E. Hurley.