Micah Australia welcomes Labor promise to commit $500 million to UNHCR over five years

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DAVID ADAMS

Micah Australia has welcomed an announcement from Opposition Leader Bill Shorten that if elected, a Labor Government would commit $500 million in funding to the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees over a five year period.

A funding increase for UNHCR - from $25 million to $100 million a year - had been one of the key issues on which almost 100 Christians had lobbied politicians at Micah's annual Voice for Justice event in Canberra earlier this month.

Tim Costello, executive director of Micah Australia, said the funding pledge was in line with Australia's "values as a compassionate nation and will contribute to giving people waiting to find safety the support that they need during their wait".

He said the increased funding was not just compassionate but strategic with the lack of essential service in displacement contexts adding to the 'push factors' that lead to asylum seekers taking dangerous boat journeys.

"We are a compassionate and generous nation, and we hope to see many more announcements over coming months that reflect the nation we want to be and have the ability to be."

The announcement was made during the ALP's national conference in Adelaide and came on the back of the promise of an additional $30 million to address the humanitarian crises in the Palestinian Territories, Myanmar and Bangladesh, and a commitment to lift the annual number of refugees brought to Australia under the community sponsored refugee program from 1,000, to 5,000. This would take the total refugee intake to 32,000.

The Australian Christian Lobby (http://www.acl.org.au) also weighed in on the announcements, expressing in principle support for the proposed increase to the refugee intake.

Martyn Iles, ACL managing director, said Australia should be a "generous nation when it comes to playing our part in the global crisis of displaced people."

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