

***Communiqué from the meeting of
Premier of South Australia The Hon Jay Weatherill MP
And
The Leaders of Christian Churches SA***

Friday 18th September 2015

The Premier and the Leaders of the Christian Churches in South Australia have today met to discuss issues of mutual concern, including the current Syrian refugee crisis.

“The scale of this crisis requires a significant response from all of us,” Mr Weatherill said.

Today the State Government and the Leaders of Christian Churches SA have expressed a willingness to ensure South Australia plays its role in addressing the crisis.

“We recognise our moral obligation as Australians to respond - not only by increasing Australia’s refugee intake, but by giving generously to those affected,” Dr Deidre Palmer, Moderator, Uniting Church in SA said.

The positive move of our national leaders by agreeing to permanently resettle, on top of our existing quotas, over 12,000 refugees fleeing the ongoing conflict in Syria was acknowledged.

“The UNHCR says there are over four million registered refugees fleeing Syria, and Germany alone is expected to receive 800,000 asylum seekers in the course of this year. There is still much more we in Australia need to do for the world’s most vulnerable people,” said Rev David Altus, Bishop of the Lutheran Church in SA.

Today’s meeting recognised that many Christians in the Middle East have been targeted for persecution. However, like the Good Samaritan, the human need compels us to respond quickly and generously to all people seeking asylum, and offer practical support and friendship, irrespective of their faith or culture.

It is important to remember that people of all faiths have suffered enormous fear, trauma and loss, and that is why they have had to flee their homes and their country

“We have seen the human face of this tragedy and we must not turn our backs,” Rev Dr Greg Elsdon, State Minister of Churches of Christ in SA said.

Premier Jay Weatherill indicated that the Minister for Communities and Social Inclusion, Zoe Bettison MP would be responsible for coordinating the State Government’s efforts to support Syrian and Iraqi refugees arriving in South Australia.

“We have be inundated with offers of support and a willingness to provide new homes for people whose livelihoods have been destroyed by conflict” Premier Weatherill said.

“We are putting in place a process to coordinate these offers of support, and the Red Cross will be leading these efforts”

Awareness of the ongoing domestic violence crisis in Australia was also discussed.

“Safe accommodation and freedom from conflict and fear are the needs of too many women and children,” said Pastor Bill Vasilakis, National Chairman of CRC International, & Chairperson of Leaders of Christian Churches SA.

While such violence occurs across all types of relationships, the majority is violence against women.

The Premier and Church Leaders urge one another and all men in SA to contribute to a culture of respect, by being positive role models at all times and by speaking out against every form of violence against women.

The Premier and Church Leaders also discussed the harm caused by problem gambling and shared an objective to strengthen harm minimisation measures and to reduce the Government’s reliance on gambling revenue.

“It was also acknowledged that the emergence of online gambling has made the challenge of dealing with problem gambling even harder” Mr Weatherill said.

Leaders of Christian Churches SA participating in this meeting

- Australian Christian Churches SA - Pastor John Cullen
- Baptist Churches of SA - Rev Mike Mills, State Executive Minister
- Churches of Christ in South Australia - Rev Dr Greg Elsdon, State Minister
- CRC Churches International - Pastor Bill Vasilakis, National Chairman, & Chairperson of Leaders of Christian Churches SA, and Pastor Hans Voortman, Chairman in SA, WA and the NT
- Lutheran Church Of Australia SA & NT District - Rev David Altus, Bishop
- Uniting Church In Australia - Synod of South Australia - Dr Deidre Palmer, Moderator

South Australian Government participants included:

- Premier of South Australia – the Hon Jay Weatherill MP
- Treasurer of South Australia – the Hon Tom Koutsantonis
- Minister for Communities and Social Inclusion – The Hon Zoe Bettison MP