

Welcome to Australia party for refugees

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Uniting Church justice worker Reverend Sarah Williamson says it is important for Australians to embrace new arrivals

Picture: Chris Mangan

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REFUGEES should be treated as people and not used to score political points, the Uniting Church says.

The church, which has joined in hosting a Welcome to Australia party - a national event for people who have come from overseas to make a new start - wants the issue of refugees and asylum seekers to become humanitarian and not political.

Uniting Church SA minister Tim Hein said the church's congregation was frustrated by the tone of conversation on the subject.

"We recognise the issue has been hyped out of all proportion and are aghast at how the issue is being politicised," he said. "It should be solved out of humanitarian concern. It needs to be pulled out of the political discourse."

Uniting Church Australia has written to all Federal Labor parliamentarians expressing its shock at the "cruel and punitive" plan to swap refugees with Malaysia.

On Thursday The Advertiser revealed the Port Augusta immigration facility had received 40 detainees - all unaccompanied children - from Christmas Island as part of a transfer of 135 people.

Human rights group Amnesty International met with the Immigration Department to voice concerns over the refugee swap.

Uniting Church solidarity and justice worker Reverend Sarah Williamson said the welcome party was a great opportunity to embrace new arrivals.

"The multiculturalism of Australia defines who we are as a nation," she said. "All non-indigenous people have come across the seas ... it makes sense to be generous and welcoming as a nation."

Welcome to Australia founder Brad Chilcott said people who believed in compassion, kindness, justice and a fair go showed traits of what it meant to be Australian.

"No matter where you have come from or how you have arrived, every person who shares our common home should be given a warm, positive welcome and treated with dignity and respect," Mr Chilcott said.