



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Teens reject Australia's treatment of refugees at UN

Two students from Parramatta Marist High School will address the 47th session of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations (UN) this week, calling out Australia's approach to climate change, and its treatment of refugees.

Year 11 students, Zain Chaudry and Brendan Pospischil, will speak by video link, providing their statements as representatives of the NGO, *Foundation for Marist Solidarity, International* (FMSI).

FMSI is an Italian registered Marist NGO that holds special consultative status with the UN.

Mr Pospischil's statement will focus on the effects of climate change on older people around the world, and the need for the UN to promote age-inclusive climate action.

"As the generation who will inherit the planet, my fellow classmates and I continue to be concerned by the accelerating and disproportionate impact that climate change is having on the full and effective enjoyment of human rights by older persons," Mr Pospischil said.

"In Australia we saw this firsthand in 2019 and 2020 during the devastating bushfire season.

"People aged 60 and above accounted for half of all lives lost, and thousands more were hospitalised from severe smoke inhalation."

The images strewn across social media during these fires, of younger people having to evacuate their elderly parents and grandparents from their homes was a stark reminder of how climate change effects individuals of all ages.

"It's our job as the next generation to make sure our older persons are cared for," Mr Pospischil said.

The students from Parramatta Marist High School first got involved with FMSI in 2020, after hearing that Australia's human rights record would be under review in January of this year.

They were accompanied and advised by Marist alumni, Bradley Murphy and Patrick Cooke, who had completed a three-month internship with FMSI in Geneva in late 2019. They were able to link the students with a range of UN Human Rights mechanisms and diplomats from Permanent Missions in Geneva.

Brendan and Zain were part of the group of seven students (alongside their classmates James Chaaya, Chris El Hachem, Diedrik Lubbers, Sebastian Sammut and Alexander Walker) who researched and made

recommendations on the human rights issues that *they*, the students, considered to be the most important in Australia - climate change, asylum seekers, refugees, and domestic violence.

Of particular concern was the treatment of asylum seekers in Australia, with many not permitted to work, not able to access Medicare or obtain permanent protection.

The students lobbied diplomats from Geneva based Permanent Missions (Belgium, Fiji, Finland, France, Haiti, Iran, Ireland, Peru, Portugal, Sweden, Uruguay and USA), asking them to include their “next generation voice” in proceedings.

During the proceedings in January 2021, the students’ recommendations were accepted by those 12 nations and on 15 occasions those same recommendations were then included in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Australian government.

Mr Chaudry’s statement to the Human Rights Council on 8 July will reflect on Australia’s human rights record and the outcome of the UPR. He will also ask the Australian government to focus on three commitments:

1. Fully recognise and leverage Australia’s potential to produce and export renewable energy in order to combat climate change,
2. Enact statutory guarantees of equal rights protection for asylum seekers, and ensure they are provided access to Medicare, including the provision of adequate mental health care, and
3. Emphasise and systematise extensive school education programs surrounding domestic violence in the next federal domestic violence policy.

~ ENDS ~

You can watch both of the students statements online:

[Brendan Pospischil](#)

[Zain Chaudry](#)

Spokespersons from the *Foundation for Marist Solidarity, International* (FMSI) are also available for comment.

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