



Refugee Council
of Australia

July 29, 2008

DETENTION CHANGES HELP TO RESTORE AUSTRALIA'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

The Federal Government's announcement that it will work to restrict indefinite and non-reviewable immigration detention is an important step towards ensuring that Australia respects the right of highly vulnerable people, the Refugee Council of Australia says.

This announcement is among a series of changes to immigration detention policy announced today by Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans.

Refugee Council CEO Paul Power said that Senator Evans' announcements continued a process of reform to immigration detention which began in 2005 after the Palmer and Comrie inquiries.

"Over the past three years, the number of people in immigration detention has dropped from around 1100 to 368," Mr Power said. "Today's announcement that detention will be used only as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time will see this number drop further.

"While we are disappointed that the Rudd Government is retaining its policies of mandatory detention and the excision of offshore islands from the migration zone, we welcome the practical changes aimed at reducing the human cost of these policies.

"We accept that there is a practical need to detain people who arrive without authorisation while health, identity and security checks are conducted. We encourage the Government to speed up this process so that people who pose no risk to the Australian public can be released quickly into community care arrangements while their visa status is resolved.

"We welcome the Minister's announcement that asylum seekers held on Christmas Island will have access to legal advice and independent review and that the refugee status determination process on Christmas Island will be subject to review by the Immigration Ombudsman.

"These are valuable steps forward to improving the fairness of the process for asylum seekers who arrive by boat. However, we have reiterated our view to the Minister that there is no practical reason why all asylum seekers on Australian soil are not subject to the same refugee status determination process.

"By removing the punitive nature of previous detention arrangements for asylum seekers and giving higher priority to maintaining our nation's treaty obligations, today's announcements will help in the restoration of Australia's reputation as a nation which respects human rights."

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The Refugee Council of Australia represents
non-government organisations and
individuals working with and for refugees
in Australia and around the world