

# REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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## MEDIA RELEASE

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AUSTRALIA TURNS ITS BACK ON THOSE IN NEED – AGAIN

“Australia can no longer call itself the land of the ‘fair go’ – or even profess to be a country where common humanity and the rule of law are held in high regard,” said Refugee Council President, David Bitel, in response to the Government’s refusal to allow the Norwegian cargo vessel to land on Australian territory.

This is just the latest in a long list of actions being taken by the Government in an effort to make Australia so unpalatable that no one seeking asylum will consider coming here. The Government has already tried:

- mandatory non-reviewable detention – a regime unparalleled elsewhere that has come under heavy criticism from UN agencies and human rights groups;
- an extra-territorial interception agreement between Australia, Indonesia, UNHCR and IOM, which sees people on route to Australia detected, detained and processed, but does not offer the same vital procedural safeguards as we see in Australia in the status determination process;
- efforts to limit access to the courts, making this the only area of administrative law with such limitations despite the fact that it is also the only area of law where an incorrect decision can cost people’s lives;
- unilateral efforts to limit obligations under the Refugee Convention;
- refusing to cooperate with UN human rights monitoring bodies;
- visa conditions for refugees which make their lives a misery.

It is as if the Australian Government were engaging in a game to see just what new and obscure means they can dream up to abrogate responsibility for those who have fled persecution. But it is not a game. People’s lives are at stake – people who there is a very real chance will be determined to be refugees.

At the same time we hear nothing from our political leaders about commitment to address the conditions in the Middle East that have compelled these and the other recent boat arrivals to place their lives in the hands of

smugglers. We are simply pushing the problem on to someone else rather than taking the lead in the search for durable solutions.

It is not about numbers. It is not about costs. It is about having the political will to do that which is right and moral. Clearly our political leaders do not have this will. Australia is a lesser place as a result," concluded David Bitel.