

REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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MEDIA RELEASE

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COMMITMENT OF TROOPS TO IRAQ

In the face of much public opposition, the Howard Government has committed Australia to the "Coalition of the Willing" that will soon attack Iraq.

"Irrespective of the reasons the Prime Minister has made this decision, and the legitimacy of this decision under law, he must recognise that there are obligations that attach to this action" said David Bitel, RCOA President. "War will inevitably mean 'collateral damage', a euphemism for the death of innocent civilians and the displacement of possibly hundreds of thousands of people.

"The decision to take an active part in the conflict must be accompanied by an equally resolute decision to take action to address the consequences, in particular to support those forced from their homes and displaced internally or who take refuge in neighbouring states" Mr Bitel continued. On behalf of the Refugee Council he called on the Australian Government to:

- take every effort to urge states bordering Iraq to open their borders to Iraqi refugees and to keep their borders open;
- commit substantial funds to the agencies responsible for humanitarian relief, in particular OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEF and the Red Cross Movement, to enable them to provide support and protection to effected populations;
- process requests from Iraqi nationals for resettlement expeditiously;
- give all former and current Iraqi asylum seekers in Australia and on Nauru humanitarian visas that will allow them to live legally in the community until the situation in their homeland is resolved;
- redouble efforts to promote tolerance and harmony within the Australian community; and
- if the need arises, provide resettlement places for any large number of Iraqi refugees over and above the annual allocation.