

REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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MEDIA RELEASE

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ANNOUNCEMENT WELCOME BUT FAILS TO ADDRESS FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS of TPVs

“We welcome this decision as one which will potentially benefit a large number of refugees, in particular unaccompanied minors who may be able to apply for close-ties visas establishing they have spent their formative years living in Australia,” said Mr. David Bitel, President of the Refugee Council.

In a positive step, the Government is now acknowledging the remarkable contribution made by refugees, particularly in rural and regional areas and is also recognising the strong links refugees have made in our local communities. Appropriately, the Government is now exploring broader options to convert the temporary status of these refugees to one of permanency.

“It is hoped that many refugees will be eligible for a broad range of these mainstream migration visas that will finally allow them the opportunity to rebuild their lives,” said Mr. Bitel.

However, today’s announcement detailed in Minister Vanstone’s press release fails to address the fundamental problems of the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) regime to which the Refugee Council remains deeply opposed.

The current TPV regime, which remains unchanged:

1. does not allow refugees access to the majority of federally funded settlement services;
2. denies refugees the ability to be reunited with their families and event to travel overseas to visit loved ones; and
3. causes ongoing anxiety, depression and uncertainty for refugees who are unable to begin the process of healing from past trauma.

The Refugee Council remains deeply opposed to the TPV regime and calls for this punitive and unnecessary policy to be repealed.

“The Council considers that the real reason for a decline in unauthorised arrivals seeking our protection is not related to the harsh mandatory detention or TPV policies, but rather a change in many of the push-factors that have driven large movements from refugee-producing regions in the past,” said Mr. Bitel.

“If the Australian Government is serious about its protection obligations to refugees then it should seek to abolish the TPV as a matter of urgency”, continued Mr. Bitel.

Another component of today’s announcement, the introduction of an 18-month return-pending visa, Mr. Bitel continued, “does not acknowledge the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran from where the majority of refugees on TPVs have fled. Current information does not indicate a fundamental, durable and stable change in any of these countries which would justify a decision that the circumstances which caused most of the TPV holders to be accorded refugee status had ceased.”

The long-held view of the Council is that it is not acceptable to grant Temporary Protection Visas to people determined to be refugees. “Australia remains out of step with accepted international practice and remains the only country in the world to make recognised refugees prove again that they are refugees,” Mr. Bitel concluded.

For further information or to obtain a copy of the Council’s submission, contact
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