

REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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MEDIA RELEASE

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RCOA WELCOMES INCREASE IN REFUGEE NUMBERS

The Refugee Council of Australia welcomes Minister Vanstone's announcement of an increase in the size of the humanitarian program from 12,000 to 13,000 places. "This is the first real shift in the program since the current government came into office in 1996 and it is an important and timely step in the right direction" said David Bitel, RCOA President in response to the news.

In its submission to the government, which called for an increase in the program size, the Council stressed that the humanitarian program enables Australia to:

- * assist some of the most vulnerable people in the world;
- * share the responsibility of finding solutions for refugee problems;
- * meet the needs of members of the Australian community to assist their family and compatriots;
- * benefit from many strengths and attributes refugees bring to this country.

The most significant aspect of the announcement was the 50% increase in the size of the refugee component of the program from 4,000 to 6,000 places.

Refugees who come under this program are identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as being in especially vulnerable situations in countries of first asylum and as being people for whom resettlement is the only possible solution.

Those who come under the refugee component have their airfares and medical costs paid by the government and receive intensive post arrival assistance from specialised refugee support agencies.

“Given the shift in the program to Africa, where entrants come from very different cultural backgrounds, often from years of deprivation in camps, the additional assistance that they will receive when they come under the refugee program is critical to their prospects for successful settlement” said Mr Bitel.

“The increase in allocation to the refugee program indicates the government understands the importance to the entrants and to the emerging refugee communities of sharing the responsibilities for helping highly traumatised refugees make new lives in Australia” he continued.

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