

REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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RCOA URGES INQUIRY INTO DEATHS OF REJECTED ASYLUM SEEKERS

The Refugee Council of Australia has called on the Australian Government to convene an independent inquiry into allegations that people whose asylum claims were rejected by Australia have been killed since their return to their country of origin.

In a letter to the Immigration Minister, Senator Amanda Vanstone, the Refugee Council of Australia has asked for the Government to establish an independent inquiry to investigate claims by the Edmund Rice Centre in Sydney about the fate of rejected asylum seekers since their removal from Nauru.

The Edmund Rice Centre believes that nine asylum seekers have been killed since being returned to Afghanistan and that others have been attacked and jailed.

President of Refugee Council of Australia, John Gibson, said the Edmund Rice Centre's claims raised serious concerns about the adequacy of the Australian Government's off-shore processing of asylum claims.

"The Refugee Council of Australia has been concerned since the off-shore processing regime began that the asylum seekers detained on Nauru have not been given access to the practical support necessary to put their case clearly and have been denied access to independent administrative review and judicial review," Mr Gibson said.

"Our fear has always been that the absence of these safeguards could result in people with claims for protection being returned to situations of serious risk," he said.

"It is shocking to hear claims now that people who sought protection from our country and were removed have since been killed. The implications for the current regime of off-shore processing of asylum claims, and any proposed regime, are very serious.

"No-one will benefit if the Government's only response is to criticise the Edmund Rice Centre. As it is clear that the Edmund Rice Centre has gathered sufficient evidence which, at the very least, raises serious doubts about the safety of returned asylum seekers, the Government must work with the Centre to investigate the matter fully."