

REFUGEE COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA

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Letter to the Editor April 13, 2006

The Government's hasty abandonment of providing protection in Australia for any future West Papuans fleeing persecution is appalling.

The Australian navy will be instructed to intercept West Papuans who arrive in our territorial waters and transfer them to Nauru or be placed in a position of assisting Indonesian forces to turn them back.

If transferred to Nauru, it seems they will be denied assistance to apply for asylum and will simply be assessed by Australian officials whose decisions will not be subject to independent scrutiny.

If they are found to be refugees, Australia will accept no obligation to do other than see whether another country will take them. They will be left in limbo indefinitely.

The decision has been taken despite our detailed knowledge of just how mentally and physically destructive long-term detention on Nauru can be.

This runs directly counter to the major improvements in the treatment of detainees in Australia which has occurred in recent months.

Australia should not try to appease Indonesian anger over the grant of protection to the 42 West Papuans a few weeks ago by adopting such harsh measures to deter any future arrivals.

We should not bow to external pressure to compromise our commitment to protecting the human rights of vulnerable people.

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