



Refugee Council
of Australia

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HUMANITARIAN NEED MUST TAKE PRIORITY IN REFUGEE PROGRAM

The Refugee Council of Australia has called on the Federal Government to maintain its commitment to giving priority to those in greatest humanitarian need, as it begins to develop plans for the 2007-08 refugee and humanitarian intake.

Responding to weekend press speculation that Cabinet may consider plans to reduce the refugee intake from Sudan and the Horn of Africa in response to perceived settlement problems, Refugee Council CEO Paul Power said government policy should not be swayed by scare-mongering or sensationalist media coverage.

“The Australian Government has much to be proud of in the way it has developed and conducted the resettlement of refugees from sub-Saharan Africa,” Mr Power said.

“Our country has worked very constructively with UNHCR to settle refugees in great need and to support them as they adjust to life in a new land, where they can live free from the risk of persecution.

“The overwhelming majority of refugees resettled from Africa have given much back to Australia, moving quickly into education, employment and active roles in community life. We should not allow this positive work to be undone by a handful of people who have committed serious crimes.”

Mr Power said recent media coverage of a small number of crimes committed by Sudanese refugees should not be allowed to obscure the contribution of the 30,000-strong Sudanese Australian community.

“Every section of Australian society, every suburb or town and every profession or trade has small numbers of people who commit serious crimes. No group or community deserves to have its reputation and its future put in jeopardy because of the worst actions of small numbers of people,” Mr Power said.

“There is no evidence that crime rates among people from Sudan or the Horn of Africa are higher than the community average, a point emphasised by senior police in several states.

“Over the past three years, the Department of Immigration has removed no-one from Sudan or the Horn of Africa on character grounds, with the bulk of such removals being of citizens of English-speaking countries.”

Mr Power said the Refugee Council hoped the new Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews, would express his support for the valuable contribution of African-born Australians and would work to set the record straight about the many successes of the nation’s refugee resettlement program.

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The Refugee Council of Australia represents
non-government organisations and
individuals working with and for refugees
in Australia and around the world