



Refugee Council
of Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

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NAURU DECISION ANOTHER SORRY CHAPTER IN AUSTRALIA'S TREATMENT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

Today's decision to send 82 Sri Lankan asylum seekers to Nauru is yet another sorry chapter in the Australian Government's long record of turning its back on people in need of protection, the Refugee Council of Australia says.

Refugee Council president John Gibson said the decision was a deeply regrettable one, showing that the Australian Government was persisting with an asylum policy which was highly discredited.

"The most damning criticism of the policy has come from within the Government's own ranks, from the MPs who expressed strong opposition last August to the possible expansion of offshore processing for all asylum seekers arriving by boat," Mr Gibson said.

"These MPs have expressed what a growing number of Australians feel – that this policy is an outrageously expensive one which robs people in need of protection of basic rights and is rejected by UNHCR and by other governments.

"Those who have their claims for asylum processed on Nauru are denied access to legal advice and independent administrative and judicial review of the decision, basic safeguards necessary to ensure that each claim is given a full and fair hearing.

"Anyone who is aware of the escalation of the civil war in Sri Lanka realises that these asylum seekers are likely to have strong claims for protection.

"But, if these men are able to prove their need for protection even within the limited system Nauru offers, who will take them? How long will they be left in limbo on Nauru? What damage will this do to them?"

Mr Gibson said that the Refugee Council had remained clear in advocating for the Sri Lankans' asylum claims to be processed on Australian soil under the current Australian system.

"Every week, Australia's refugee status determination system deals efficiently with asylum claims of people who arrive in Australia by air," he said. "Between 20 and 30 per cent of those making claims are able to demonstrate a clear need for protection. Those who cannot are returned to their country of origin.

"The sensible, humane and fiscally responsible path is to allow these Sri Lankan asylum seekers to have their claims processed under the Australian system with a minimum of fuss."