



Refugee Council
of Australia

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MINISTER UNDERMINES REFUGEE PROGRAM WITH COMMENTS ON AFRICAN INTAKE

The Refugee Council of Australia has expressed dismay at today's comments by Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews linking this year's cut in the African refugee and humanitarian intake with settlement issues faced by the Sudanese community.

Refugee Council chief executive officer Paul Power said Mr Andrews' comments on Melbourne radio station 3AW undermined the Government's refugee and humanitarian program and were particularly damaging to the Sudanese community in Australia.

"Mr Andrews has linked ability to settle in Australia to a person's race, rather than his or her individual circumstances," Mr Power said. "Such a sweeping generalisation about an entire racial or national group is unjustifiable – and far more dangerous than the Minister realises."

"Within every ethnic and cultural group represented in the Australian people, there are people who thrive and others who struggle to overcome the barriers they face.

"It is inevitable that people who have survived persecution, war and great trauma will experience difficulties in adjusting to life in a new country. This has been the case throughout the 60 years of Australian post-war immigration.

"But, given the barriers people face, the reality is far more positive than the Australian public is often led to believe.

"Mr Andrews' comments detract from the efforts and achievements of the many Sudanese-born people who have put past traumas behind them and are now working, studying and making valuable contributions to Australian life."

Mr Power said the Minister was undermining the Government's own program, raising questions about the basis of the decision on the 2007-08 refugee and humanitarian intake.

"It is quite valid for the Government to decide to shift its refugee intake to include more people from very needy circumstances in parts of Asia and the Middle East," Mr Power said. "That is a judgement a government is entitled to make, having reviewed current global needs.

"But, through his comments today, the Minister has raised questions about whether responding to humanitarian need remains the core objective of the Government's refugee program."