



Refugee Council of Australia

24 June, 2009

Refugee Council calls for a strengthened humanitarian response to ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has today called upon the Australian Government to swiftly adopt a range of measures to augment its existing humanitarian response to the severe and ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka.

RCOA President John Gibson said, "While the protracted and devastating armed conflict between the Sri Lankan military and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam officially ended on May 18, it is unequivocally recognised by reputable international bodies, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, that the situation in Sri Lanka remains dire."

Specific immediate concerns cited by international monitors relate to the ongoing detention of an estimated 280 000 displaced civilians, severe and largely unmonitored conditions in the established camps, and the recent disbanding of the Sri Lankan government's Commission of Inquiry into serious violations of human rights committed by both parties to the conflict since 2006.

In light of the severity of the situation in Sri Lanka, RCOA has recommended that the Australian Government:

- Expedite the processing of Family Reunion visa applications by members of the Australian Tamil and other Sri Lankan community members with heightened family concerns;
- Allocate additional settlement places for Tamil and other Sri Lankans of particular humanitarian concern under the 2009-10 intake (through a reactivation of the In-country Special Humanitarian visa sub-class 201);
- Refrain from removing Sri Lankan asylum seekers until conditions have demonstrably improved in-country;
- Allocate additional financial assistance to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for the specific purpose of supporting its activities within Sri Lanka; and
- Join other countries in seeking to encourage the Sri Lankan government to:
 - allow UNHCR and other international agencies with protection and humanitarian assistance mandates unrestricted access to all IDP camps;
 - release, or expedite trials for, all detained civilians against whom charges have not been laid; and
 - release the findings of its inquiry into serious human rights abuses and prosecute individuals who have authorised, carried out or been complicit in extra-judicial executions, disappearances and other human rights atrocities.

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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