



Refugee Council  
of Australia

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## **SCAREMONGERING ABOUT ASYLUM SEEKERS WILL ACHIEVE NOTHING: REFUGEE COUNCIL**

Political scaremongering and grasping for hardline deterrents will do nothing to resolve the complexities associated with asylum seekers seeking protection in Australia, the Refugee Council of Australia says.

Refugee Council president John Gibson said the recent debate about asylum seekers arriving by boat had revived memories of past destructive debates which had demonised vulnerable people and diminished Australia's reputation as a just nation.

"A decade ago, the then Australian Government introduced temporary protection visas, expecting that this measure would stop the flow of people escaping persecution in their countries of origin," Mr Gibson said.

"In fact, the policy achieved the opposite, with the three years following the introduction of temporary protection being the three highest years in Australian history for asylum seekers arriving by boat. It beggars belief that Opposition MPs seriously believe that the reintroduction of this policy will result in a different outcome this time around."

Mr Gibson said a far more constructive historic precedent was the experience of the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Australia's political parties worked in a bipartisan manner, under Coalition leadership, to contribute to effective regional solutions for Indochinese refugees fleeing persecution.

"As we learned 30 years ago, international cooperation is critical to responding to large-scale human tragedy," he said.

"We are contending with difficult regional issues, including gross human rights abuses in refugee source countries and complex social and political issues in countries receiving asylum seekers. Rather than backing away from our international responsibilities, Australia could play a significant role in promoting open and transparent cooperation with our neighbours and UNHCR to find durable solutions for the region's refugees.

"Prime Minister Kevin Rudd pointed out in his recent address to UNHCR's Executive Committee that Australia was the sixth country to sign the Refugee Convention and a founding member of UNHCR's Executive Committee. This, too, was the result of bipartisan political action, from Coalition Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, and Labor Opposition Leader, Dr H.V. Evatt.

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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

“As a nation which has championed human rights, it is important that we do not back away from the Refugee Convention, recognising that it is never ‘illegal’ for a person to enter our country to seek protection from persecution.

“Much of the recent debate about asylum seekers has lacked perspective. It is extraordinary that some commentators are engaged in such a shrill public debate about the arrival by boat of 1704 asylum seekers this year, given that nations such as Pakistan and Syria are currently hosting more than one million refugees each.”