



Refugee Council
of Australia

November 8, 2009

RESETTLEMENT OPTIONS CRITICAL TO RESOLVING OCEANIC VIKING IMPASSE: REFUGEE COUNCIL

Prompt resettlement options for refugees aboard the Oceanic Viking are crucial to finding a humanitarian resolution to the current impasse off Indonesia's Bintan Island, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

"The Australian Government must act urgently to resolve this crisis humanely," RCOA president John Gibson said. "This stalemate is achieving nothing and is, in fact, doing serious damage to efforts to find longer-term answers to the needs of refugees in the region.

"If a negotiated settlement cannot be reached in coming days, Australia must bring the Oceanic Viking to Australian territory to allow the processing of asylum claims to begin and to defuse a crisis which has damaged all concerned.

"The confirmation from UNHCR that those on board the ship include people who have already been recognised as refugees highlights the importance of resettlement, both in resolving this issue and in finding answers for other vulnerable refugees in South-East Asia.

"For years, RCOA has been advocating for Australia and other industrialised countries to expand opportunities for refugee resettlement. It is not acceptable for wealthy nations to seek to close their borders to asylum seekers, while doing too little to share responsibility for refugee support with nations with fewer resources."

Mr Gibson said a resolution of the current impasse would allow Australia to focus again on working with its neighbours to increase options for refugee protection.

"We have heard much from politicians over the years about orderly processes and fairness when asylum seekers have sought to enter Australia but our nation has done too little to promote fair processes and safety for vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees in the Asia-Pacific region," he said.

"Australia is well placed to play a significant role in brokering solutions to the many challenges in our region. These solutions must involve governments, UNHCR and civil society and must address issues relating to the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees in source, transit and destination countries."

A viable regional framework for refugee protection would establish clear principles and include systems for these principles to be monitored, Mr Gibson said.

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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

“An important principle is that reception arrangements for asylum seekers and refugees must meet minimum standards and respect their dignity and human rights.

“Credible systems of refugee status determination must be developed and maintained, with UNHCR supported and given the resources to conduct determination processes in a timely manner. Where people are found not to be in need of protection, a fair system of return should be in place, with safeguards to ensure that people are not returned to situations where their human rights will be violated or in a manner which violates their rights.

“A third and vital principle is that recognised refugees within our region have timely access to durable solutions, including resettlement in Australia and other countries.”

Mr Gibson said a more honest public debate in Australia about refugee issues was long overdue.

“It is time the debate moved beyond simplistic rhetoric and began addressing the complex nature of the problems at hand, looking seriously at the root causes of people fleeing their countries of origin,” he said.

“The current circumstances in Sri Lanka, for instance, are extreme and warrant far greater public discussion and concerted and effective international action.

“Australians are entitled to expect a mature and bipartisan response to this issue from our political leaders. There is a strong historical precedent for this from the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Labor in Opposition supported a Coalition Government’s efforts to contribute to regional solutions for waves of Indochinese refugees.”