



Refugee Council
of Australia

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SIMPLISTIC POLITICAL RHETORIC UNDERMINES EFFORTS TO PROTECT VICTIMS OF PERSECUTION

Simplistic political rhetoric in Australia about turning back boats is damaging Australia's reputation and undermining regional efforts to improve protection for people fleeing persecution and torture, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

RCOA president John Gibson said the current political and media debate about asylum seekers arriving by boat was promoting an image of our country as one with little regard for human rights and no concern for the challenges being faced by neighbouring countries.

"Turning back boats of asylum seekers would only weaken the international refugee protection system and increase regional resentment towards Australia," Mr Gibson said.

"It is nonsensical for us to be having such a divisive debate about the arrival by boat last year of 2727 asylum seekers when our neighbours in South East Asia are trying to respond to the needs of 3.8 million refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people.

"The current debate in Australia illustrates how little many politicians and commentators understand the human tragedy of refugee flows and the many difficulties faced by people trying to seek asylum in countries without the resources or infrastructure to respond adequately to their needs. Australians are entitled to expect more of our political representatives than ignorant and arrogant statements which pose simplistic answers to complex problems.

"The focus of the debate in Australia should instead be on how our country can work constructively with our neighbours to increase options for refugee protection, so that asylum seekers have more constructive alternatives than paying exorbitant prices for boat passages to Australia.

"We should be exploring opportunities to improve access to refugee status determination processes and living conditions for asylum seekers and refugees while solutions which provide refugees with security and permanency are found. Australia is well-placed to assist in brokering resettlement options, working cooperatively with countries in Asia-Pacific, the Americas and Europe.

"In seeking answers, we should be looking to the example of the international cooperation developed in response to the Indochinese refugee crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, not to the negative example of the so-called 'Pacific solution'. A mature and politically bipartisan approach to the problem will achieve much more than the small-minded political pointscoring we are currently witnessing."

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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