



Refugee Council  
of Australia

**Media Release – for immediate release**

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## **INTERNATIONAL NGOS HIGHLIGHT DAMAGE CAUSED BY AUSTRALIAN SUSPENSION OF ASYLUM CLAIMS**

Forty-five non-government organisations (NGOs) from 16 countries have combined to condemn the Australian Government's decision to suspend the processing of asylum claims by Sri Lankan and Afghan nationals, highlighting the damage caused to regional efforts to protect refugees.

In a joint statement coordinated by Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), the NGO signatories expressed deep disappointment that the Australian Government was "sending a clear message that it does not respect the binding nature of its international human rights obligations towards asylum seekers and refugees".

"With this message coming from one of the few countries in our region that has ratified the Refugee Convention, we question the basis on which the Australia government expects its regional counterparts to take upon themselves increased obligations towards refugees," the statement said.

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has welcomed the statement as an important international critique of the recent Australian Government decision.

As the APRRN signatories have stated, this suspension violates Australia's human rights obligations and risks inflicting additional psychological harm on vulnerable people, many of whom are survivors of torture and trauma.

"The Australian Government decision has damaged efforts to improve regional cooperation on refugee protection and undermined the efforts of civil society organisations which are working actively with governments to improve conditions for people fleeing persecution," RCOA CEO Paul Power said.

"We fear that the decision to reopen Curtin Air Base as a detention centre to house asylum seekers who are subject to the suspension will further exacerbate psychological harm to vulnerable individuals." Mr Power said. "The extreme isolation of Curtin will make the delivery of adequate psychosocial support services difficult, if not impossible, also deterring any regular social and pastoral visits which are so important for emotional support."

RCOA agrees with the APRRN statement's negative view on the tenor of the political debate in Australia, and call for maturity and balance in the public discussion of asylum seeker issues. The group also highlighted that the political and media obsession with boat arrival statistics in Australia is completely at odds with the reality of the number of people seeking asylum in

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia  
Phone: (02) 9211-9333 • Fax: (02) 9211-9288  
info@refugeecouncil.org.au • Web: www.refugeecouncil.org.au  
Incorporated in ACT • ABN 87 956 673 083

The Refugee Council of Australia represents  
non-government organisations and  
individuals working with and for refugees  
in Australia and around the world

Australia. In 2009, Australia received just 1.6% of all asylum claims lodged in the world's 44 industrialised nations. Less than half this number arrived by boat.

RCOA joins with NGOs across the Asia-Pacific region in calling for the Australian Government to reverse its suspension of asylum applications immediately, restoring the right of people seeking protection from persecution to have their claims assessed in a fair and timely manner.

**Note to editors:**

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) comprises a network of civil society organisations and individuals committed to advancing the rights of refugees in the Asia-Pacific region. The statement has been signed by members and non-members of APRRN, including some organisations outside the Asia-Pacific region. International representatives of APRRN are available for interview.

In 2009, Australia received 6170 asylum applications (offshore and onshore), just 1.6% of the 377,160 applications received across 44 industrialised nations. Of the 44 nations, Australia was ranked 21<sup>st</sup> on a per capita basis. The applications received in Australia were far fewer than those received in many other industrialised countries, including the United States (49,020), France (41,980), Canada (33,250), United Kingdom (29,840), Germany (27,650) and Sweden (24,190). Next month, UNHCR will release its 2009 global statistics for asylum applications (including the 148 UN member states outside the "industrialised nations" group).

**Media enquiries:**

**Kate Gauthier**  
**0414 876 139**