



Refugee Council
of Australia

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INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND NATURAL JUSTICE CRITICAL TO NEW REGIONAL REFUGEE PROCESSING PROPOSAL

Australia's attempt to establish a regional processing centre for refugees in East Timor will succeed or fail according to the level of international cooperation it receives and the quality of the justice it provides to people seeking protection from persecution, the Refugee Council of Australia (ROCA) says.

“The Refugee Council of Australia has always advocated that the proper approach for asylum issues is regional cooperation,” ROCA president John Gibson said. “If coupled with positive resettlement programs in Australia and other resettlement countries, this proposal could see the beginning of a regional framework for protection that could enable refugees to find durable solutions for the reasons they fled their homelands.

“However, if the proposal announced today by Prime Minister Julia Gillard is not backed up by strong international cooperation and a fair refugee status determination process, it could result in prolonged detention and the denial of natural justice for highly vulnerable people.

“At best, it could be an important step towards effective regional cooperation on refugee protection. At worst, it could be a cynical deflection of Australia’s international responsibilities for refugee protection.

“For these reasons, the Refugee Council, as the national umbrella body for Australian organisations working with refugees, is keen to work further with the government on the development of this proposal. We will be asking questions about the refugee status determination process which will be applied, the options for appeal which will be provided to ensure that every asylum seeker receives a fair hearing, the accommodation arrangements and the resettlement options available for people found to be in need of protection.

“The cooperation of refugee resettlement states is absolutely critical to the success of this centre. East Timor clearly does not have the capacity to provide long-term solutions to refugees. Australia must work with other countries to ensure that refugees are not left endlessly in limbo.”

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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