



Refugee Council of Australia

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AUSTRALIA CANNOT ACT ALONE ON ASYLUM BOATS

Twenty-one major Australian refugee support organisations and aid agencies have today joined forces to call on the Australian Government and Opposition to focus on international cooperation on refugee protection, warning that there is no quick fix to the complex causes of asylum seeker movements.

In a joint statement coordinated by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), the NGO signatories say that asylum issues “cannot be resolved by any country acting unilaterally. There is no singular or simple ‘solution’ available because there is no singular or simple problem.”

“There is no quick fix available for the widespread and complex nature of human rights abuses in Asia. Responses which focus only on the interests of Australian political parties will fail to draw the cooperation needed to change the current situation,” RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said.

“Instead, Australia should work with its neighbours and UNHCR to develop a framework that will provide better protection solutions for refugees and asylum seekers in our region. This would help reduce the numbers of asylum boats as we assess claims for asylum and provide protection earlier on in the chain of asylum flows,” Mr Power said.

The Refugee Council of Australia believes the joint statement is an important critique of proposals from both the Australian Government and the Opposition to process asylum seekers in a third country.

“Australia must continue to process claims and provide protection to those who reach our shores, both to remain faithful to our commitments under the Refugee Convention and to show the good faith vital to building cooperation with our neighbours. As a rich and stable nation which values human rights, Australia must act as a good example, not a bad precedent, on refugee protection,” Mr Power said.

Australia’s approach to regional asylum issues must adhere to key principles: that Australian must not send asylum seekers who have reached our shores to third countries for processing, that a regional framework must comply with all international human rights standards and that Australia must not be a party to the detention of refugees.

“World Vision works in many of the places where refugees start their journey to Australia - their stories of loss, fear and persecution move the hardest of hearts,” said World Vision chief executive Tim Costello.

“This joint statement puts compassion and responsibility at the centre of Australia's response to refugees and asylum seekers. As the election campaign goes on, all sides of politics should seek to do the same.”

Media enquiries:
Kate Gauthier
0414 876 139

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