



Refugee Council of Australia

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REFUGEE COUNCIL WELCOMES LIFTING OF SUSPENSION

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has today expressed relief that the suspension of processing of asylum claims from Afghanistan has been lifted.

“We are very glad to see the suspension lifted,” Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) chief executive officer Paul Power said. “We hope that priority can now be given to processing claims from those affected by the suspension, to take into account the prolonged period that many of these men, women and children have spent in immigration detention.

“The suspension policy was never a coherent one. It was impossible for the Government to defend a policy which saw a freeze on Afghan asylum claims made after April 9 because of a lack of country of information while claims received before April 9 continued to be processed.”

Mr Power said that the Refugee Council was concerned by the recent increase in rejections of asylum applications from Afghan citizens, as there were many reasons to be deeply worried about conditions in Afghanistan.

“Earlier this week, suicide bombers killed the deputy governor of Ghazni province, the province of origin of many of Australia’s current asylum seekers,” Mr Power said. “In June, a United Nations report noted that this year has been the most violent of the war so far, with attacks by insurgents growing significantly.”

On September 13, when commenting on Australia’s involvement in the war in Afghanistan, Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston said “The fight is becoming more intense. We can expect violence levels to increase as we contest the insurgency in greater numbers and across a wider area in the south.” The Australian military’s concerns prompted the Federal Coalition today to call for an increase in the number of Australian troops in Afghanistan.

“We would be very concerned if the Australian Government sought to return large numbers of asylum seekers to the country, particularly to a province where the safety of a deputy governor cannot be guaranteed,” Mr Power said. “Australia must see that there is an inevitable contradiction between fighting a war in Afghanistan against insurgents and returning people fleeing those same insurgents.

“In the past, many Afghans were sent back and faced danger and persecution, with some being killed. Protection decisions need to be made very carefully to ensure this does not happen again.”

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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