



Refugee Council of Australia

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NO AFGHAN RETURNS WITHOUT SAFETY MEASURES

Australia should not proceed with any program of removing failed asylum seekers to Afghanistan without a clear and effective strategy to maximise the safety of those being returned, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

“The Refugee Council of Australia accepts that, as part of the asylum process, some people are found not to require protection and are asked to return home. However, the safety of the person being returned must be central to any removal process,” Paul Power, RCOA Chief Executive Officer, said.

“The difficulty with returning people to Afghanistan is that many parts of the country remain volatile and unsafe. If, as reported, the Australian and Afghan governments are close to signing an agreement on return, it is essential that the governments outline how the safety of those being returned will be ensured. Australia cannot be a party to returning people to a place where their lives may be in serious danger,” Mr Power said.

“For Afghan returnees, even the route of return needs to be carefully examined. While some pockets of Afghanistan may be safer than others, it is often not possible to reach those areas without travelling through areas of serious risk.”

“For some time, RCOA has been calling for the introduction of a transparent pre-removal risk assessment procedure to ensure that issues of mental health, access to legal services, counselling and other necessary forms of support are adequately addressed,” Mr Power said.

“A clear and open removals process would also remove concern that people are being pressured in any way to return. In addition, it would provide transparency about what happens to people once they return to their country of origin and in the months following their return.”

“In the case of countries such as Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, where the safety of returnees is in serious doubt, a process of independent monitoring of the safety of those returned must be developed. This independent monitoring would also inform future decisions about asylum applications from citizens of those countries, giving decision makers a much clearer understanding of the implications of a decision not to provide protection.” Mr Power said.

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