



Refugee Council
of Australia

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REFUGEE ARRESTS IN THAILAND HIGHLIGHT STRUGGLE FOR PROTECTION IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

The arrest and detention in Bangkok of 86 refugees and asylum seekers of Pakistani origin highlight the great difficulties faced by many people seeking protection from persecution, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

The 86 members of the Ahmadiyya faith – nearly all of them UNHCR recognised refugees or UNHCR registered asylum seekers – were arrested from their homes in a dawn raid last week and taken to the Bangkok Detention Centre. At least 30 of the detainees are children. RCOA has joined 25 other agencies from 13 countries in signing a statement condemning the action by the Thai authorities.

RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said Thailand's actions against the 86 refugees and asylum seekers were deeply troubling.

"The children, women and men who have been arrested have committed no crime and most of them have UN recognised documentation. They sought refuge in Thailand after escaping the systematic persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan," Mr Power said.

"These arrests highlight the often dire situation for refugees and asylum seekers in South-East Asia – and the reasons that many people seek to move on to Australia and elsewhere to find safety and security.

"Much of the public debate in Australia about asylum assumes that there are 'proper processes' for people to seek protection in countries of first asylum," Mr Power said. "Unfortunately, many people fleeing persecution, particularly in Asia, have no access to an asylum process and many others face significant harassment while trying to seek protection through UN channels.

"As long as UN recognised refugees and asylum seekers remain in detention centres and prisons in South-East Asia, Australians cannot credibly claim that asylum seekers have no need to move on to other countries to seek protection."

RCOA has urged the Thai Government to release the arrested refugees and asylum seekers and calls on the Australian Government to join international efforts to seek their release.

"These arrests highlight the urgency of addressing refugee protection needs in Australia's cooperation with other nations in the Asia-Pacific region," Mr Power said.

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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