



Refugee Council of Australia

14 August 2012

Australia must meet its regional responsibilities for refugees

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has expressed profound disappointment that exiling asylum seekers to Nauru and Manus Island is back on Australia's refugee policy agenda following yesterday's release of the report from the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers.

RCOA CEO Paul Power said the Expert Panel report was a mixed bag, bringing together recommendations which increase avenues for refugee protection and others which will punish people trying to seek effective protection in Australia.

"Sending asylum seekers to Nauru and Manus Island is wrong for all of the reasons the Government has outlined in the past," Mr Power said. "Despite what the Government may tell us now, people found to be refugees as part of the new version of the Pacific Solution overwhelmingly will have to be resettled to Australia – but only after an extended period of exile.

"It is highly unlikely that any resettlement country will seriously consider resettling refugees sent by Australia to Nauru or PNG, as each major resettlement country receives more asylum applications than Australia does. These refugees will be clearly seen in international law as Australia's responsibility."

In 2011, the United States received 60,587 asylum applications, Sweden 43,759, Canada 24,985 and Norway 18,222 while Australia received 15,441.

Mr Power said the Expert Panel report included a strong emphasis on deterrence but also a suite of refugee protection measures which go further than any Australian Government has for more than 15 years.

"We have been arguing the case for Australia to take refugee protection needs in South East Asia and South Asia far more seriously – and been disappointed again and again by the Government's low level of interest in the human rights of vulnerable people in our region," Mr Power said.

"We welcome the Expert Panel's recommendation – and the Government's commitment – to increase Australia's refugee and humanitarian program to 20,000 places.

"We also welcome the recommendations to focus much more effort on a Regional Cooperation Framework, on building the capacity of Asian non-government organisations working with refugees and on enhancing UNHCR's protection role. It is important that the Government does not back away from these recommendations.

"In our submission to the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers, we stressed that there were no instant solutions to deter asylum seekers arriving by boat and that Australia should focus on improving inadequate levels of protection that force people to make desperate journeys to safety.

"The Australian Government must continue to work cooperatively in the interests of the region for refugees and asylum seekers who need to be protected."

RCOA's submission to the Expert Panel on Asylum Seekers can be viewed at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/sub/120720_RCOA.pdf

Media contact: Andrew Williams 0488 035 535

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