



Refugee Council of Australia

MEDIA RELEASE

April 18, 2007

ASYLUM SWAP WITH US DENIES AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL OBLIGATIONS

The Refugee Council of Australia is disappointed at the agreement between Australia and the US to effectively swap asylum seekers.

The government's move appears to be a politically motivated attempt to quell increasing public concern about sending asylum seekers to Nauru in the lead up to an election.

The Refugee Council accepts that re-settlement of Sri Lankan and Burmese asylum seekers in the US affords a protection solution to their plight, which is far preferable to the course of returning the former group to Indonesia, which was the government's first choice. However the Council believes this is a drastic departure from established international norms.

Refugee Council president John Gibson said when people make claims they should be processed and they should be processed fairly in Australia.

'Refugees often undergo long arduous journeys in their attempt to seek protection from persecution. To extend this journey by sending them half way across the world sets a bad precedent. The government again has built upon a flawed policy rather than retreating from it' Mr Gibson said.

'Australia should take a leadership role in the region and accept its responsibility to resettle refugees, rather than shift the responsibility to countries outside of our region.

'This agreement could also have unintended consequences. The US being the magnet it is may well attract further boat loads to Australia's waters and that would be contrary to what the government is intending to do', he added.

If Australia wants to take a leadership role in the Asia Pacific, then it needs to focus on addressing the issues that cause refugee movements in the region as well as taking a moral stance on protecting those people who most need our protection.

Where possible, refugee problems should be addressed at a regional level so as not to contribute to further displacement by sending refugees to the other side of the world.

"The proposal can only be predicated upon fair and transparent processing of the asylum seekers on Nauru. If the government is seriously minded to pursue the arrangement, it must facilitate legal representation for the asylum seekers so any re-settlement option in the US is genuinely meaningful" Mr Gibson concluded.