



## Refugee Council of Australia

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **STEPS TOWARDS RESETTLING STRANDED ASYLUM SEEKERS WELCOMED**

The Refugee Council of Australia welcomes the government's decision to take Afghani and Iraqi asylum seekers stranded for the past five years in Indonesia.

This is an important step towards the resolution of a long standing problem faced by a group of 240 asylum seekers who were turned back while trying to enter Australia in 2001 and 2002.

Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews has positively responded to the pleas of the Refugee Council and other organisations who have been raising the plight of these asylum seekers for several years.

However, the Council believes that Australia should go further and resettle the entire group of 240 asylum seekers. This would remove the need of the UNHCR to find alternative solutions for the 120 asylum seekers not chosen for resettlement in Australia.

"Australia should accept responsibility for the impact of its border protection policies, rather than depending on the good will of countries like New Zealand and Canada", said Liz Biok, Board Member of the Refugee Council.

Ms Biok, an immigration lawyer, has visited the asylum seekers in Java on two occasions and has maintained contact with them over the past five years.

"It is a tragedy that these people who have experienced horrific events in their home countries, have been further traumatised by five years of uncertainty in an Indonesian camp funded by the Australian government," she said.

"We are particularly concerned by the potential long term impact that this may have had on the children who have been denied adequate access to education and healthcare," Ms Biok said.

"We must ensure that our border protection policies do not punish the victims of people smuggling."

"It is a positive move that Australia is taking responsibility by offering resettlement places, but we implore the government to accept the recommendations of the UNHCR and provide a new future for all of the 240 asylum seekers who have spent the last five years in limbo."

The Council believes that the government needs to find a balance between the need for border protection and deterring people smugglers and Australia's obligations under the Refugee Convention to protect those fleeing persecution. If Australia is prepared to increase its funds to the UNHCR then it should also closely consider recommendations made by the UNHCR in relation to vulnerable groups in need of resettlement.

Australia should seize the opportunity to show leadership in addressing regional refugee concerns and agree to resettle all 240 asylum seekers.