



Refugee Council  
of Australia

January 29, 2010

## **SENATOR FIELDING ALL WRONG ON DETENTION**

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has today expressed dismay at the inaccurate and inflammatory comments by Senator Steve Fielding about conditions in Christmas Island detention centre.

“Australia should never apologise for treating vulnerable people with a basic level of humanity,” Paul Power, CEO of RCOA, said.

A clear majority of asylum seekers processed on Christmas Island are found to be refugees who have been persecuted, often in horrific circumstances. “Senator Fielding is talking about people who have survived torture, persecution, threats against their children or witnessed the deaths of family members. To equate protecting these people with giving them a ‘gold pass’ is completely inappropriate and trivialises the suffering they have endured,” Mr Power said.

“Far from a ‘gold pass’ to enter Australia, refugees are assessed under very strict guidelines and do not receive any greater benefit from the Government than any other permanent resident.” Mr Power said. “Is Senator Fielding advocating we return people to persecution from groups like the Taliban?”

“I am very surprised that a committed Christian such as Senator Fielding is advocating we treat refugees poorly. The Christian churches have a long history of speaking up for the rights of refugees, and have played an important role in Australia’s proud history of providing protection to refugees,” Mr Power said.

The Refugee Council calls on Senator Fielding to be clear about the level of poor treatment he thinks would be more suitable.

Among other things, Senator Fielding cites the provision of food and phones as proving conditions are ‘better than many Australians get.’ RCOA has recently received complaints that asylum seekers are being denied access to mobile phones, and it seems far-fetched that Senator Fielding considers adequate supplies of food to denote special treatment.

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