



Refugee Council of Australia

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REFUGEE COUNCIL URGES A FOCUS ON FINDING FREEDOM FROM FEAR DURING REFUGEE WEEK 2010

Refugee Week is Australia's peak annual activity to inform the public about refugees and celebrate positive contributions made by refugees to Australian society. The theme for Refugee Week in 2010 and 2011 will be "Freedom from Fear".

"The quest for freedom from fear is at the heart of a refugee's flight from danger," Paul Power, CEO of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) said. "When considering our responses as a nation, we should always remember that refugees and asylum seekers are searching for a place where they can feel free of the fear that drove them from their homes. We are lucky enough in Australia to be able to provide that freedom, and we have done so for over 740,000 refugees and humanitarian entrants since Federation. We should be very proud of that record."

"The theme also enables us to reflect on our own notions of refugees and asylum seekers. So much of the public debate is based on a fear of asylum seekers and the unknown, but when ordinary Australians meet refugees, those fears are entirely dispelled." Mr Power said.

Policy makers should also be aware of the pressing need to work with neighbouring countries on more effective responses.

"In the current debate, we tend to forget that asylum seekers arriving by boat make up such a small proportion of the refugees settled in Australia. In the current financial year (2009-10), asylum seekers who have arrived by boat and received permanent protection will make up just over 2000 of the 13,750 places in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. This is less than 1% of the migration program (around 225,000 in 2008-09)." Mr Power said.

"Instead of engaging in rhetoric about how to stop the boats, we should be looking for real solutions to the fact that many people have to flee their homes in the search for freedom from fear. A focus only on policies designed to halt boats at our borders, without addressing the very significant gaps in refugee protection in South-East and South Asia, will only result in a greater build-up of asylum seekers in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, inevitably leading to a breakdown of cooperation and the limited efforts they are currently making to meet the needs of asylum seekers," Mr Power said.

Refugee Week provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the positive contributions made by refugees to Australian society, and to remember that both the offshore program and the onshore asylum streams make up Australia's contribution towards refugees. Asylum seekers who settle in Australia, just like other refugees from the offshore program, make significant positive contributions to Australia - economically and socially.

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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

RCOA recently prepared a research report for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), *Economic, Civic and Social Contributions of Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants* that examined findings of 177 Australian and international research reports and articles.

“Refugees make substantial contributions to their new country – expanding consumer markets for local goods, opening new markets, bringing in new skills, creating employment and filling empty employment niches,” the report finds.

“There may be short-term costs as refugees are resettled and adjust to their new surroundings but, once successful integration has occurred, refugees are able quickly to make permanent cultural, social and economic contributions and infuse vitality, humanitarian values and multiculturalism into the communities into which they are resettled.”

The report notes that refugees are often entrepreneurial, as they face the need to set up and establish themselves in a new environment. The three people at the top of *Business Review Weekly*’s “Rich 200” list in 2009 were former refugees or children of former refugees.

The report, *Economic, Civic and Social Contributions of Refugees and Humanitarian Entrants*, can be viewed online at www.refugeecouncil.org.au

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