



Refugee Council of Australia

Media Release – for immediate release

15 March 2011

DETENTION NEEDS OVERHAUL NOT BAND-AID FIX

The weekend protests by asylum seekers on Christmas Island have highlighted the need for the Australian Government to rethink its immigration detention strategy, the Refugee Council of Australia says.

“Mental health specialists have been warning the Government privately and publicly for more than a year that the current approach to immigration detention will result in more acts of self-harm and more protest action borne out of deep frustration,” RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said. “What we are seeing now is what we have seen in the past at the former Woomera, Baxter and Nauru detention centres.

“The solution to an increasingly overcrowded and stressed immigration detention system is not to build more detention centres and increase security. The Government should learn from the practices adopted in many other western countries and develop processes for community supervision of asylum seekers after appropriate health, identity and security checks.”

Mr Power said the Refugee Council was alarmed by the Australian Federal Police’s use of tear gas against protesting detainees at Christmas Island yesterday.

“The Government has announced an inquiry into the protests on Christmas Island and the Australian public has a right to expect that this will include full public disclosure of how and why the police decided to use tear gas.

Mr Power noted that the Australian Government recently told the UN Human Rights Council that “detention in immigration detention centres is only to be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time”.

“It would be a welcome change to actually see this statement put into practice,” Mr Power said. “The unfortunate reality is that many of the 6,000 asylum seekers and recognised refugees now in immigration detention have been detained for periods of six months, one year or longer. There is no process for reviewing detention and little information to detainees about how much longer they must remain in detention.

“A feature of remote detention is limited access. We are certainly seeing the effects of this as this situation unfolds with very little independent information or timely updates available.

“Indefinite, mandatory detention is not a system used by other developed nations dealing with many more asylum applications than Australia receives. Our system does not work and must be remodelled, not simply given a band-aid fix.”

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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