



Refugee Council
of Australia

Media Release – for immediate release

2 June 2011

DETENTION INQUIRY A GOOD START BUT ACTION NEEDED

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) welcomes today's announcement of a comprehensive parliamentary inquiry into Australia's immigration detention system and hopes this will translate into real reform.

"A thorough detention inquiry will reveal tragic situations, exorbitant taxpayer expenses and systemic mental illness," RCOA CEO Paul Power said. "It must be noted that no inquiry would be necessary if the government had implemented its own policy that 'detention be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time'.

"A key item we expect the committee will address is the fact that Australia is alone in the world in detaining asylum seekers indefinitely without review. Another will certainly be our treatment of children seeking asylum.

"A thorough inquiry will require thorough follow up. We do not wish to see the findings of another report into detention ignored as has happened in the past.

"Bipartisanship on refugee issues is very much welcomed. We look forward to much needed immigration detention reforms also receiving bipartisan support.

"An inquiry that shows Parliament and the public the facts about detention can only lead to calls for change. It is vital these calls be actioned and more lives are not damaged or even lost in what we know to be a failed system.

Media enquiries: Sophie Peer **0488 035 535**

BACKGROUND:

- The adverse impacts of long term detention are well documented. Cases of long-term detention have increased dramatically.

People in immigration detention	12 March 2010	11 March 2011	Change
Less than 3 months	1475	1076	-27%
3 – 6 months	574	1842	221%
More than 6 months	258	3901	1412%
Total	2307	6819	196%

Source: http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/_pdf/immigration-detention-statistics-20110311.pdf and 2010 DIAC public statistics.

- Excerpt from Australian Human Rights Commission report issued May 2011; Villawood Immigration Detention centre

“At the time of its visit, the Commission had significant concerns about the provision of physical and mental health services for people in immigration detention at Villawood, particularly in the case of mental health. These concerns were informed by a consultant psychiatrist who was part of the team conducting the Commission’s visit.”

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/immigration/idc2011_villawood.html#s11

- The Government’s ‘key detention values’ were outlined in a policy statement made in July 2008. Detention in immigration detention centres is only to be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time. Value #5 states: “Detention in immigration detention centres is only to be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time.”

<http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/82detention.htm>