



# Refugee Council of Australia

24 June 2009

Senator Chris Evans  
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

The Honourable Stephen Smith MP  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ministers,

## Re: Australia's response to the ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka

I am writing to convey the extreme concern of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) regarding the severe and ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka and to call upon the Australian Government to swiftly adopt a range of additional measures to augment its existing humanitarian response.

The following recommendations reflect our extensive discussions with Tamil community leaders in Australia, our regionally engaged member organisations, and our Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) colleagues.

I attach, as background, an APRRN-issued joint statement, dated 19 May, and signed by 186 regional NGOs and individual experts. While much has transpired since that time, it is unequivocally recognised by reputable international bodies, such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, that the situation in Sri Lanka remains dire. Specific immediate concerns relate to the ongoing detention of an estimated 280 000 displaced civilians, severe and largely unmonitored conditions in the approximately 40 established camps (subject to planned consolidation), and the recent disbanding of the Sri Lankan government's Commission of Inquiry into serious violations of human rights committed by both parties to the conflict since 2006.

In light of the above, RCOA respectfully calls upon the Australian Government to urgently:

- Expedite the processing of Family Reunion visa applications by members of the Australian Tamil and other Sri Lankan community members with heightened family concerns;
- Allocate additional settlement places for Tamil and other Sri Lankans of particular humanitarian concern under the 2009-10 intake, through a reactivation of the In-country Special Humanitarian visa sub-class 201;
- Refrain from removing Sri Lankan asylum seekers until conditions have demonstrably improved in-country;
- Allocate additional financial assistance to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the specific purpose of supporting its activities within Sri Lanka; and
- Utilise diplomatic channels to encourage the Sri Lankan government to:
  - allow UNHCR and other international agencies with protection and humanitarian assistance mandates unrestricted access to all IDP camps;

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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

- release, or expedite trials for, all detained civilians against whom charges have not been laid; and
- release the findings of its inquiry into serious human rights abuses and prosecute individuals who have authorised, carried out or been complicit in extra-judicial executions, disappearances and other human rights atrocities.

Thank you in anticipation of your consideration of these urgent matters.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Gibson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'G'.

John Gibson  
President

cc: Janet Lim, Director, Asia-Pacific Bureau, UNHCR  
Richard Towle, Regional Representative, UNHCR  
Peter Hughes, Deputy Secretary, DIAC  
Arja Keski-Nummi, First Assistant Secretary, Refugee, Humanitarian and International Division, DIAC