



Refugee Council of Australia

30 May 2014

Government removes Refugee Council's core funding

The Australian Government has completely cut core funding to the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) despite allocating \$140,000 just two weeks ago in its 2014-15 Budget.

RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said he had been informed, in a phone call from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, that the decision to remove the funding from 2014-15 had been taken by Immigration Minister Scott Morrison.

"We are surprised that funding that was allocated in the Budget and allowed for in the Government's forward estimates to 2018 would be removed without explanation," Mr Power said.

"This decision is petty and vindictive and is symbolic of the Minister's very poor relationship with the non-government sector. While we and other agencies maintain constructive dialogue with other members of the Government, it is clear that Mr Morrison has little interest in the ideas and concerns of non-government agencies which support refugees and asylum seekers."

RCOA was founded by Major-General Paul Cullen in November 1981, just a month after he received UNHCR's global Nansen Medal for his support of refugees through Austcare and Australian Jewish community organisations. Since then, RCOA has grown to a network of 185 organisations, 800 individual members and thousands of supporters. Much of this growth has occurred in the past eight years, during which time organisational membership has more than doubled and individual membership has increased ten-fold.

"Our organisation has broad national and international respect as an authentic voice of Australian organisations involved in supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

"The ideas we put forward in reports, submissions, letters, public statements and direct lobbying of governments and inter-governmental bodies are based on wide consultation with refugee communities and our member organisations. The feedback I get from our members is that we are fair in the way we represent the community sector's views on refugee policy, giving a balanced critique of government policies and putting forward constructive alternatives.

"Our relationship with government has always waxed and waned, depending on the preparedness of the government of the day to listen to and engage with non-government organisations on matters of refugee policy. However, never has the communication between a government and our network been poorer than it is now and never has there been more despair about a government's demonisation of people seeking asylum."

Mr Power said RCOA would respond to the withdrawal of government funding by seeking more support from Australians who see the need for a strong and credible community voice on refugee policy.

"The withdrawal of our core funding represents a tiny cost saving for the Government – less than half of the annual salary of a Minister – but is close to one quarter of our organisational budget. It will hurt us but we have no intention of reducing our small staff team or allowing this cut to distract us from raising a voice for justice and compassion for refugees.

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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

“We are writing to our supporters asking for their help and will be seeking wider support to raise the funds we have lost.

“We know that there are millions of Australians who are deeply upset about how this Government and the previous Government have treated people seeking protection from persecution. We will be appealing to them to help us become an even stronger voice for humane and common-sense policies for refugees and asylum seekers.”

Donations to support RCOA's work can be made at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/donate

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