



Refugee Council of Australia

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Australians urged to restore hope for refugees and repair a tarnished reputation

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) President Phil Glendenning today appealed to Australians to help restore decency and fairness to Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

Speaking at the Sydney launch of Refugee Week in Granville, Mr Glendenning said current policies to deter, expel and punish asylum seekers who ask Australia for refugee protection was regrettable and unsustainable.

"At some point in the future, Australia will need to abandon policy outcomes that brutalise, humiliate and harm some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

"While we see the dreadful, unlawful processes and cruelty of our asylum policy, we also see the best of Australian generosity and wisdom in the growing numbers of people who advocate for and work with refugees and asylum seekers.

"Australia needs to get its history right and those who work tirelessly for human rights and respect for Australia's laws will be on the right side of history.

"For more than a decade, half a century of careful building of Australia's reputation as a haven for people seeking protection from persecution has been undermined by cruel policy settings that have damaged too many innocent people.

"Australia's political leaders have squandered opportunities to build on Australia's proud tradition as one of the first countries to accede to the Refugee Convention in 1954.

"Australian governments have gone to great lengths to convince the Australian public that people escaping persecution require a military response, rather than a humanitarian response.

"We cannot be silent on issues of justice and human rights. The neglect of the human dignity of refugees and asylum seekers is not being cruel to be kind. It's just cruel.

"The Australian Government is spending \$4 billion on detaining and deterring asylum seekers. Last year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) spent \$3.3 billion globally and only \$103 million in South-East Asia.

"Redirecting some of the billions spent by Australia to lock up a few thousand people to cooperating with nations in the Asia-Pacific region to assist asylum seekers with work, education and health rights will go a long way to restoring hope for people in desperate need of refugee protection."

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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