



Refugee Council
of Australia

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AUSTRALIAN AID AND RESETTLEMENT CRITICAL TO BALI PROCESS TALKS

Australia must be prepared to offer additional aid, logistical support and resettlement places to advance discussions on improving conditions for refugees in the Asia-Pacific region, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) says.

Ministers from governments in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond will gather this week as part of the Bali Process, at which ideas for a regional cooperation framework on refugee protection will be discussed.

RCOA Chief Executive Officer Paul Power said his organisation's annual submission to the Australian Government emphasised the importance of Australia showing leadership by offering concrete proposals aimed at improving protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Asia.

"The Refugee Council does not support the idea of Australia pushing for a single refugee processing centre in the region but believes that Australia's focus in the Bali Process meeting should be on finding more effective collective responses to the needs of people seeking asylum in the region," Mr Power said.

"Australia is well placed to offer financial and logistical support to neighbouring countries responding to numbers of asylum seekers far larger than Australia has ever experienced. As a significant country of refugee resettlement, Australia can also promote the case for increased resettlement from the region, taking the lead by expanding its own resettlement program.

"A responsible offer for Australia to put on the table at the Bali Process would be the expansion of our offshore resettlement program to take more vulnerable refugees from within the region. It would be realistic for Australia to present a five year plan for expanding the program to 20,000 places each year – a figure similar to the annual resettlement program in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

"For Australia to show regional leadership domestic changes are needed. An immediate step would be for the government to live up to its own stated policy that detention should be used for the 'shortest practicable time' while 'health, security and identity checks are conducted'.

"Australia's failed system of indefinite, mandatory detention in remote locations is not something we wish to see replicated anywhere in the region or the world. The system is not the mark of a cooperative regional partner looking for solutions.

"It is a reality that some people seeking asylum will be found not to be refugees. The Bali meetings could be used as a platform for human rights advancement in the region if participants work to guarantee non-refoulement."

In future years RCOA hopes to see meaningful NGO input become a feature of the discussions associated with the Bali Process. The involvement of civil society in each country in the region is critical to building cooperation and public support for increased 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

Further information and statistics

- The Refugee and Humanitarian Program remains a small part of overall immigration to Australia, making up just 7.0% of permanent additions by migration in 2009-10.
- Australia’s share of international refugee support remains modest. In 2009, Australia hosted just 0.22% of the world’s refugees and received just 0.53% of asylum applications.
- UNHCR’s 2009 statistics record around 5.17 million people in Asia requiring protection, the largest groups being stateless people in Thailand, Nepal and Burma. Within Asia, there are unknown numbers of people (perhaps millions) who have been displaced primarily by persecution but do not appear in UNHCR statistics, having no official status as asylum seekers or refugees. Many of these people are from Burma and are regarded as “illegal foreign workers” or “illegal immigrants” with very limited rights and in very vulnerable positions.
- Australia’s humanitarian intakes for the last 34 years are listed in Table 2 on page 14 of RCOA’s 2011-12 submission on Australia’s refugee and humanitarian program.¹

For further information please see RCOA’s full submission to the 2011-12 humanitarian program - in particular, section 4 entitled ‘Developing an Asia-Pacific Protection Framework’
http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/2011-12_IntakeSub.pdf

¹ RCOA submission on Australia’s refugee and humanitarian program 2011-12

Table 2, pg 14 http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/2011-12_IntakeSub.pdf