

Settlement Council of Australia

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Media Release – Settlement sector welcomes increase to the Humanitarian Programme

The Settlement Council of Australia welcomes news that the Humanitarian Programme will be increased to 18,750 places over the next four years.

SCOA Chair, Dewani Bakkum said, “The settlement sector is poised well to support increased Government intake. In 2013 when the intake was increased to 20,000 the sector was able to provide support to larger quantities of people from a variety of countries. The increase in intake will allow more families to find safety in Australia, and the increase should allow more unlinked cases to be accepted, providing protection to the most vulnerable.”

Resettlement is a key component of the international protection framework for refugees and we applaud Australia’s increasing commitment to its refugee program. “In view of this recent change of government policy where there will be an increase in numbers seeking settlement services, a commensurate increase in funding to the settlement sector should also be considered by the Federal Government, in particular the Department of Social Services” stated Ms Bakkum.

“Provision of work rights for asylum seekers in the community is good news, allowing people to look for work and support themselves” Ms Bakkum said. “Without work rights it has been difficult for people in the community to contribute. Fast tracking applications will resolve uncertainty for families.”

The settlement sector has outreach capacity to regional areas, many of which already have direct resettlement programs. The expansion of regional resettlement is positive news for communities on a number of fronts. “There are some excellent examples of regional resettlement programs matching employers to refugees” said Ms Bakkum.

SCOA is pleased that children and families will no longer be detained on Christmas Island. Ms Bakkum explained, “The settlement sector is keen to provide support to all refugees and asylum seekers in the community. Bringing families off Christmas Island and to areas across Australia that are already supporting refugees will allow services and the community to meet with asylum seekers directly and provide support.”

The settlement sector has concerns about the impact of some aspects of the legislation which will impact both people seeking protection and the communities in which they live. Review processes have proven critical in providing natural justice for asylum seekers. The principle of non-refoulement is a cornerstone in refugee protection, enshrined in the refugee convention.

The settlement sector is committed to continuing to provide practical support to refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. SCOA’s members have demonstrated over many years that they can assist in a myriad of ways to ease the transition to life in Australia for vulnerable refugees.

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