



Media Release

Concern about protection and human rights of asylum seekers

Settlement agencies have been disturbed by the divisive asylum seeker debate that once more has become politicised. 'The new offshore arrangements are of concern on a number of fronts, in particular they do not support the human rights of people seeking protection. Outsourcing national obligations under the refugee convention is not an ideal approach for regional cooperation for resettlement of refugees' said Cedric Manen, SCOA Chair.

The Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) represents over 80 settlement organisations in Australia. Our members in turn represent individuals and communities who have been supported in their settlement journey settled as migrants, refugees and asylum seekers over the past 30 years. Australia has over 50 years' experience in resettlement, particularly from the Second World War onwards. Australia has benefited from closer ties across the world through the involvement of former refugees in all areas of life.

'The divisive debate has impacted the communities we serve. It has also impacted our members' ability to produce settlement results which the government's access and equity, human rights and multicultural policies demand' said Mr Manen.

We urge the Australian leadership during and post this election to humanise the debate with respect to asylum seekers to:

- ensure that inappropriate messages about vulnerable people are not tolerated in public discourse;
- establish and appropriately resource a regional processing solution that protects the human rights of asylum seekers, which is bi-partisan and free of political influence, and facilitates fast tracking of vulnerable people's applications for protection;
- recognise work rights as fundamental to the long term settlement needs of former asylum seekers;
- increase the intake of refugees as part of Australia's migration program.

SCOA is committed to assisting Australia's international credibility as a best practice settlement nation. It is also committed to assisting Australia's development based on harmony in diversity. This can only be achieved through our leadership bringing another perspective into this debate- one that is based on mutual benefit of Australia and asylum seekers.

We note the Prime Minister's statement in his welcome address to the Australian C20 Steering Committee emphasising 'the important role of civil society in ensuring the benefits and opportunities for growth are extended to vulnerable people, both here and around the world.'

We want to work with government post the elections to ensure that the settlement debate and service delivery continues to support Australian standards as the best in the world. Any regional policy and program responses to the complex issue of asylum seekers must be grounded in protecting the human rights of all.

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