



Net I PR

Network for

International Protection of Refugees

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PRESS RELEASE

The Federally unfunded release of Woomera refugees should be construed as a policy to manufacture xenophobia

1. There have been disturbing reports of the Commonwealth Government of Australia restricting the welfare rights of refugees who have been granted three year temporary protection visa. The Commonwealth Government restricts these refugees accessing programs such as community refugee settlement, language training and jobsearch assistance. There has also been a suggestion for refugees to pay the costs of these welfare programs and, even, suggesting that refugees pay the cost of detention and application processing. The Commonwealth Government has imposed these rules on the ground that these refugees entered Australia "unlawfully" and "illegally" (see immigration minister's statement on 29/4/2000 Advertiser). The minister particularly branded "unlawful" and "illegal" those refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq, who came to Australia by boat.

2. In fact, any asylum-seeker at one stage has to become "illegal" and almost all refugees have to enter the country of their destination "unlawfully". Once an asylum-seeker in Australia has been examined against United Nations Refugee Conventions and is recognised as a refugee, he/she will be granted a protection visa and no longer considered as an illegal person. Therefore, after being granted protection visa, refugees must not be distinguished by how they entered Australia. Those refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq who arrived by boat must be treated the same as other refugees and all other Australian nationals.

3. The UN Refugee Convention requires the Australian Government to provide refugees with the same welfare rights and privileges as all other Australian nationals. On subsistence allowance (rationing) and public relief, the Article 20 and 23 of Convention Relating to Status of Refugees (1951) states:

Rationing: *Where a rationing system exists, which applies to the population at large and regulates the general distribution of products in short supply, refugees shall be accorded the same treatment as nationals.*

Public relief: *The Contracting States shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the same treatment with respect to public relief and assistance as is accorded to their nationals.*

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Therefore, by restricting welfare rights (or to apply the 'user-pays' scheme for the remaining assistance programs for those who have arrived by boat), the Commonwealth Government is in violation of this UN Refugee Convention. Further more, by demanding the refugees to pay for the costs of detention and application processing, the Commonwealth Government may be putting those refugees into a debt-bondage, or slavery, to the State. This is totally unacceptable under international human rights conventions.

4. As in other years, the total number of refugees arriving in Australia in this year has been between 8000 and 10,000. Australia does have the capacity to take these refugees in without much difficulty. Recent claims by both State and Federal authorities about hardships in resettling such number of refugees (1100 refugee for three different States) is a mere distortion.

5. According to South Australian Premier 's Press release on 28/4/2000, there have been a rather peculiar suggestion by State and Territory leaders to suspend the processing of Temporary Protection Visa in fear of State Governments having to pick up the cost of caring for refugees. The delay in processing of applications on any ground is unacceptable, especially for those asylum-seekers who already have been under detention for six months.

6. The Commonwealth Government, on the other hand, is threatening to release these refugees without federal funding and without adequate welfare support. The Commonwealth Government's plan to release these refugees at the expense of charitable organisations which are most supportive to refugees, but none the less have limited resources, must be viewed as a calculated attempt to cause distress to those charitable organisations.

The Commonwealth and State Governments do have the power and capacity to assist in resettling those refugees. Denying assistance by Commonwealth Government to these refugees will cause considerable stress within the community and, to some extent, will generate anti-refugee feelings. The Commonwealth Government's policy of denying assistance to these refugees must be duly interpreted as an attempt to manufacture xenophobia within the Australian community.

Dated: 8 May 2000

Secretary: netipr@senet.com.au

The Executive Committee

Network for International Protection of Refugees

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Media Release

28th April 2000

SA URGES COMMONWEALTH POLICY REVIEW

South Australian Premier John Olsen says the Federal Government's refusal to review its policy regarding illegal immigrants will mean the states will be left to pick up the tab – both financially and morally.

Mr Olsen, who is in Wellington as part of the Ministerial Council for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs meeting, says the Federal Government has refused to support calls by every State and Territory leader to immediately suspend the processing of Temporary Protection Visas pending a review.

"What this means is that South Australian taxpayers and South Australian charities and welfare agencies will be forced to pick up the tab whether they like it or not," Mr Olsen says.

"The Commonwealth is effectively recognising these people as refugees but don't want to have to pay for them.

"We find it incomprehensible that the states and territories are left at the coal face to pick up the cost."

Mr Olsen says the Commonwealth has created two classes of refugees.

"It's all very well for the Federal Minister to ask us to simply turn these people away. It is the Federal Government which has determined that they stay in Australia, but the Federal Government is not prepared to take responsibility for them," he says.

"South Australia understands the Commonwealth needs to deal with the problem of illegal immigrants and people smugglers, but this policy is not going to act as a deterrent – this policy is not the answer, it's wrong and it needs to be reviewed."

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No money to help illegals, says Olsen

By State Political Reporter
GREG KELTON
in Wellington

SOUTH Australia and the other states may be forced by tight budgets to refuse help to many of the 1100 illegal immigrants about to be released from the Woomera detention centre.

Pleas for assistance might have to be treated on a case-by-case basis, Premier John Olsen warned yesterday after an immigration ministers' conference in Wellington.

But an unrepentant federal Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, told the meeting the Commonwealth would not give any financial assistance.

"The states, if they wish, can elect to do whatever they like," he said.

"They can provide them with Rolls-Royces, they can give them a mansion on the Swan River, but that's not Commonwealth cost-shifting - it's a decision by the

state to provide a service from their resources.

"If people come to Australian unlawfully, and they are granted temporary visas, you do not deliver to them settlement services which signal you have taken them on board permanently."

After a debate which some state officials described as "passionate", Mr Ruddock said that for people who had entered Australia unlawfully, the Commonwealth would not deliver adult migrant English classes, access to job search programs, or community refugee settlement programs.

The illegal immigrants - many from Afghanistan and Iraq - will be directed to Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane once they have been released.

Mr Olsen has warned it could cost SA taxpayers up to \$5000 a year in assistance for each of them.

He moved a motion at the ministerial meeting - supported

by all states - objecting to the introduction of the temporary protection visa policy which meant additional expenditure by the states.

The motion, amended by Queensland to call for a suspension of the visa policy pending a funding review, was passed - but Mr Ruddock said the Federal Government would not accept it.

"It leaves the states effectively picking up the tab," Mr Olsen said.

"It is not additional support we are talking about - it is some basic social welfare support these people will demand and it is untenable to tell charitable groups that these people should not be helped at all..."

"But how, on compassionate, humanitarian grounds, can we just let these people languish? That's exactly what will happen when they are homeless and unemployed."

He said the Commonwealth had still not indicated how many would be released in SA.

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