



Refugee Council of Australia

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CHRISTMAS ISLAND TRAGEDY

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) expresses its deep sadness about the shocking loss of life today on the coast of Christmas Island.

"We extend our deepest sympathies to those who have lost loved ones and also to the many people on Christmas Island traumatised by what they have witnessed," RCOA chief executive officer Paul Power said.

"Inevitably, people will ask how and why such a terrible tragedy would occur, wondering why people would take such a risk with their own lives and the lives of family members."

"All Australians who care deeply about the welfare of people seeking asylum wish such dangerous sea journeys would cease. But very sadly this tragedy highlights the desperate circumstances of so many people trying to find effective protection from persecution in the Asia-Pacific region."

"People are not coming to Australia in this manner as part of some lifestyle choice. It is well known how difficult and dangerous this journey can be but so many asylum seekers continue to make this journey because they feel that they have few real options open to them."

"Nearly every week, we hear about UN recognised refugees and UN registered asylum seekers being arrested and detained in countries across South East and South Asia. While ever we have UN recognised refugees and registered asylum seekers sitting in detention centres and prisons across many parts of Asia, as we do now, we cannot fool ourselves into believing that refugees can get effective protection in Asia and have no reason to try to move on to Australia."

"If things are to change, if people are to believe that they do not have to put their lives at risk on boats to Australia, then the circumstances of asylum seekers and recognised refugees in South-East Asia and South Asia must change. We agree with the Australian Government and UNHCR that much more must be done to build regional and international cooperation to protect refugees in Asia. This tragedy emphasises the absolute urgency of this task."

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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