

# ASYLUM SEEKERS

# MYTHBUSTERS



**MYTH:** REFUGEES ARE A BURDEN, THEY ARE NOT GOOD MIGRANTS

**FACTS:** Research suggests the opposite. Refugees and humanitarian entrants have succeeded in every field of endeavour, are often entrepreneurial and have made permanent social, economic and cultural contributions. These results can be achieved with community support, not years of damaging detention and alienation.

**MYTH:** PEOPLE WHO ARRIVE BY BOAT ARE JUMPING A QUEUE

**FACTS:** There is no queue. In war zones (e.g. Afghanistan, Syria and Sri Lanka) there is no access to UNHCR, embassies or consular offices and it is often too dangerous to travel to the capital where such offices may be situated. Only 11 per cent of asylum claims were registered with the UNHCR in 2011.

**MYTH:** REGIONAL COOPERATION WILL REDUCE THE NUMBERS REACHING OUR SHORES

**FACTS:** Australia is the richest country in our region and by some measures, in the world. Therefore there is little enthusiasm by our neighbours, Indonesia and Malaysia to carry any of our international obligations to refugees. We signed the 1951 Refugee Convention. We have the capacity and the responsibility to welcome refugees.

**MYTH:** DEPORTATION IS A SAFE & RATIONAL PROCESS

**FACTS:** Deportations often breach Australia's obligations to the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees, by returning refugees to "the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." It is well documented by the Edmund Rice Centre that refugees returned to Afghanistan and Sri Lanka have been jailed, tortured and killed.

**MYTH:** BOAT ARRIVALS ARE NOT GENUINE REFUGEES THEY ARE ECONOMIC MIGRANTS

**FACTS:** To be accepted in Australia as a refugee, asylum seekers must prove persecution in accordance with the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Boat arrivals have acceptance rates of 85-95% as opposed to about 45% for plane arrivals. Political leaders who label unprocessed asylum seekers "economic migrants" have no basis in evidence. Sri Lankans currently being returned as a result of "enhanced screening" may well be genuine refugees, but are being screened out of the chance to apply properly for refugee status.

**MYTH:** OFFSHORE PROCESSING DETERS PEOPLE FROM BOARDING BOATS

**FACTS:** The number of boat arrivals in Australia is reflective of people seeking asylum globally, not Australia's policies. Numbers go up and down according to push factors such as war and political repression.

2012 Labor's reopening of Nauru	A record 10,595 in first six months
1999 Temporary protection visas	48% rise in 2001
1992 Mandatory detention	3721 arrivals in 1999

**MYTH:** DETAINING REFUGEES ON THE BASIS OF AN ASIO ASSESSMENT IS FAIR AND SENSIBLE

**FACTS:** There are currently 52 people who have been found to be refugees are being held in detention indefinitely on the basis of an adverse security assessment from ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation). They have not been convicted of any crime, have no right to formal appeal and have not been given details of their assessments. Australian citizens cannot be treated this way.

**MYTH:** WE CAN'T AFFORD TO LOOK AFTER MORE REFUGEES

**FACTS:** Actually, it costs more to punish refugees than to welcome them. The projected cost of maintaining all the detention centres and other punitive measures is more than \$7 billion over the next five years—more than the cost of the Gonski school reform and the NDIS per year altogether. Asylum seekers living in community detention are entitled to \$210 per week Centrelink payment (less than the dole) and boat arrivals after 13 August 2012 are not allowed to work. Allowing them to work, pay tax and live in the community is clearly a cheaper option.

**MYTH:** PEOPLE SMUGGLERS ARE THE PROBLEM

**FACTS:** As long as asylum seekers are prevented from freely seeking protection in Australia, they will need to make informal travel arrangements. Without the organisers and the asylum boat crew to carry the asylum seekers, the thousands of refugees who have made their way to Australia to find safety would simply not have been able to get here. The constant reference to the "people smugglers' business model" diverts attention from the real reasons for asylum seekers arriving in Australia—the conditions in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran etc.

**MYTH:** THERE IS NO FEASIBLE ALTERNATIVE TO MANDATORY DETENTION & OFFSHORE PROCESSING

**FACTS:** We already have one! Asylum seekers who arrive by plane are not detained. It costs a fortune to detain people in more than 20 detention centres scattered across Australia and the Pacific. Community based processing is much cheaper. Before 1989, no asylum seeker was held in detention in Australia. The asylum seekers lived in the community in an open hostel while their claims were processed.

MYTH

## “WE HAVE TO DETER BOATS WITH HARSH POLICIES TO SAVE LIVES”

**FACTS:** There are more effective ways to save lives, e.g. Australia could accept as a priority 3,800 refugees a year ‘from the region’ as recommended in the Houston Report. Too often Australia does nothing about distress signals from asylum seeker boats. Better enforcing the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention would save lives, unlike deterrence policies.

### WHAT WE STAND FOR:

Established in 2000, Refugee Action Collective (RAC) is a democratic, grass root collective representing a broad cross-section of the community and is a member of Refugee Advocacy Network (RAN).

- We fight for the human rights of asylum seekers and refugees and call on the Australian government to:
- End the PNG deal and mandatory detention that violate basic human rights and contravene the United Nations Conventions to which Australia is a signatory.
- Cease deporting asylum seekers to countries where they can face persecution, torture and death.
- Urgently remove all children from detention in unison with their families to allow them a normal childhood and education as Australian laws demand.
- Appeal and review rights for all ASIO assessments. No detention on the basis of a security assessment. Free the refugees detained indefinitely because of unappealable ASIO assessments.
- Compensate those refugees who have suffered as a result of their detention enduring both physical and psychological afflictions.
- Fully implement the UN Conventions that protect the human rights of asylum seekers.
- Pull our weight among the nations, by accepting 30,000 refugees without onerous conditions.
- Decriminalise people smuggling; people smugglers are the travel agents and often life savers of the poor.



Refugee Action Collective (VIC)  
[www.rac-vic.org](http://www.rac-vic.org)

 [www.facebook.com/racvic](http://www.facebook.com/racvic)

 @racvictoria

### HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT ?

**Attend** our meeting every **Monday 6.30pm** (except first Monday in the month) at **ANF House, 540 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne** (north of Vic Markets) to assist with planning the campaign to broaden the movement for refugees.

**Join** RAC emailing list by sending a blank email to: [racactivist-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:racactivist-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

**Donate** - Deposit directly to Commonwealth Bank, BSB: 063262, Account number: 10252396 or send a cheque: Refugee Action Collective (VIC) PO Box 578, Carlton South VIC 3053

## ASYLUM SEEKERS MYTHBUSTERS

MYTH

### “ASYLUM SEEKERS ARE ILLEGAL”

**FACTS:** Article 14 of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that: “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution”. Asylum seekers have the right to be assessed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) or by any country like Australia that is a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention on Refugees.

MYTH

### “IT IS FAIR AND HUMANE TO SEND REFUGEES TO PNG”

**FACTS:** PNG is in a far worse position to deal with refugees than Australia. 50% of Papua New Guineans live under \$2 a day, 61% without access to clean water, and its GDP per capita is ranked 134th well behind Australia at 9th in the world. Although PNG has signed the UN Refugee Convention it does not guarantee refugees the right to work, public education or freedom of movement. Asylum seekers detained at Manus Island are regularly flown back to Australia for medical treatment. A UNHCR report on the conditions on the detention centre on PNG’s Manus Island criticised the “harsh” conditions, and the long delays in processing, and found that every asylum seeker detained there showed signs of depression and anxiety.