



media release

Australian Council for International Development

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MORE ASYLUM SEEKERS WILL COME UNLESS PUSH FACTORS TACKLED

More asylum seekers could be expected to try to come to Australia unless the Australian Government works to tackle problems that are causing people to flee from their homelands, warned the peak body for Australian aid agencies, the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).

The end of the civil war in Sri Lanka and continuing hostilities in Afghanistan, and neighboring Pakistan, are pushing increased numbers of people to seek refuge around the world.

ACFID has called on the Australian Government to urgently engage the Government of Sri Lanka to close huge internment camps. Australia needs to invest more aid in rural livelihood programs in Afghanistan to assist people to rebuild their lives after years of conflict.

ACFID Executive Director, Marc Purcell said: "The Government needs to tackle the problem of why people are fleeing at its source, and not just the second last stop in Indonesia. There are compelling factors pushing people to escape from their country, particularly Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

In Sri Lanka, there are very dire humanitarian needs. Over 255,000 people are displaced and currently being held in internment camps in northern Sri Lanka by the Sri Lankan army, in the wake of the end of the civil war.

The Australian Government needs to step up its dialogue with the Sri Lankan Government to urgently get these camps closed. People need to be processed quickly and allowed to return to their homes as the rainy season has started, and we could face a humanitarian disaster.

The current approach towards internally displaced people- insufficient resources, a lack of speed in processing, and a lack of transparency and freedom of movement for civilians from displacement camps - is breeding uncertainty about peoples' futures.

"Continuing hostilities in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan are also pushing Afghans to seek refuge around the world. Australia needs to invest more aid in rural livelihood programs in Afghanistan to assist people to rebuild their lives after years of conflict," continued Mr Purcell.

Afghanistan has had high numbers of refugees returning home in recent years – with more than 4 million since 2002. However, now as the situation deteriorates we should not be surprised that people in Afghanistan are once again seeking stability and peace outside of their country. Increasing conflict in neighbouring Pakistan means it is becoming increasingly unsafe for refugees to continue to seek refuge there," he said.

Longer term, Australia needs to assist Sri Lanka with the process of reconciliation. Investment and aid from the international community are going to be important in helping rebuild livelihoods and trust in the war shattered north of the country.

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