



MEDIA RELEASE

Australia urged to act on its promise to resettle Syrians and Iraqis

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The Refugee Council of Australia is calling on the Australian Government to act with more urgency in rescuing the 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees it has promised to resettle from the Middle East.

Paul Power, Refugee Council of Australia CEO, said, "Our government is dragging its feet while the rest of the world is acting much more quickly to meet their promises to resettle Syrian and Iraqi refugees and allow them to start to rebuild their lives."

Canada has resettled 20,490 refugees from the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts in less than half the time that Australia has taken to resettle just 26 people. New Zealand has already resettled 82 of the 200 Syrian refugees it plans to resettle by the end of June.

"Many organisations are desperate to help the increased resettlement plan and they have been left in the lurch," Mr Power said.

"Some of the non-government organisations engaged by the government as contractors for post-arrival services for refugees have hired staff, secured additional housing and organised other assistance in the expectation that the refugees would have begun to arrive in large numbers some months ago, as the government had previously indicated. These organisations are now bearing the costs of the government's delay.

"We know that there is no shortage of appropriate applications. Thousands were received from UNHCR and through relatives and communities in Australia in the three months following the Government's September announcement.

"It is a shame for all concerned that the Australian resettlement program is so bogged down in bureaucratic delays, when the governments of Canada and New Zealand have proven that it is possible to move much more swiftly.

"In December, I had the opportunity to visit Lebanon to learn more about the situation facing more than 1 million refugees living there. Living conditions for refugees are very difficult and Lebanon and its counterparts in the Middle East are under enormous

pressure. They need Australia to act much more quickly than the Government has to date.”

Contact Tim O'Connor 0431 147 366