



MEDIA RELEASE

Changes to Australian detention arrangements

UNHCR said today that, while it acknowledges the operational constraints over the capacity of Christmas Island following recent boat arrivals, it is disappointed that the Government has chosen not to explore alternatives to detention for people who pose no identified health or security risks to the community.

UNHCR takes this opportunity to repeat its longstanding position that the detention of asylum-seekers is inherently undesirable.

“The combination of mandatory detention, suspension of asylum claims and the geographical isolation of detention facilities such as Curtin Air Force Base in Western Australia - all without any effective judicial oversight - is a deeply troubling set of factors,” UNHCR Regional Representative Richard Towle said today.

Experience shows that these measures are likely to have a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of people affected by the latest announcements, particularly those already suffering from torture or trauma before arriving in this country.

It has long been recognized that prolonged detention, particularly in isolated locations, can have severe and detrimental effects on the health and psycho-social wellbeing of those affected.

The choice of Curtin Air Force Base will make the provision of essential social services very challenging, particularly for those who may be in detention for six months or longer while subjected to the Government’s processing freeze.

UNHCR has cautiously welcomed the decision to move unaccompanied minors to community facilities at Port Augusta as preferable to detention on Christmas Island.

“The detention of children is inappropriate and we hope that Port Augusta will be an open and community-based facility where essential services are available to protect the best interests of children accommodated there,” said Towle.

UNHCR will continue discussions with the Government on how to minimize the impact of its suspension of asylum claims and continued mandatory detention arrangements on the health and welfare of asylum-seekers in Australia.

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