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## **Comprehensive reform of Australia's immigration detention system brings it into line with international standards**

The UN refugee agency today welcomed the Australian Government's wide-ranging measures to reform immigration detention.

UNHCR's Regional Representative, Mr Richard Towle, said that "these are positive changes that bring Australia broadly into line with international standards for the reception and treatment of asylum seekers and refugees."

UNHCR considers that the detention of asylum seekers is inherently undesirable and, where it is required for the purpose of managing health, identity and security risk, should be for as short as possible a time.

"The new policy – set out in the Detention Values – that detention is an option of last resort and based upon the actual risks posed by an asylum seeker, is a very welcome shift from the arbitrary and punitive policies of the past" said Towle. "The Government's emphasis on finding community-based alternatives to detention, particularly for children and their families, has our particular support", he added.

The agency has long held concerns about Australia's tough deterrence policies of detention for unauthorized arrivals which, in some cases, saw asylum seekers detained for unacceptably long periods with harm to their emotional and mental health.

"The overhaul of Australia's immigration detention system is a very positive step indeed," said Towle. "Freedom from arbitrary detention is a fundamental human right which has particular significance in the case of asylum seekers, many of whom are vulnerable and have suffered torture and trauma before finding asylum. This announcement is particularly welcome coming so soon after the abolition of the Pacific Solution and the Temporary Protection Visa regime, both of which also penalized asylum seekers on the basis of their mode of arrival in Australia."

UNHCR also welcomed today's announcement by the Immigration Minister of measures to reform the system of processing asylum claims on Christmas Island.

"Substantive improvements that guarantee publicly-funded independent advice, an independent merits review and external scrutiny by the Commonwealth Immigration Ombudsman, together go a long way towards ensuring that asylum seekers get a full and fair hearing of their claims on Christmas Island", said Mr. Towle.

**Contact:** UNHCR: Alex Donato, 02 6281 9108, 0423 233 944