

Lifetime Ban for Refugees Arriving by Boat to Australia



Sydney, November 1 (RHC)-- The Australian government has announced that it will introduce a blanket ban on all refugees who arrive in the country by boat. The law, which would be retroactive to 2013, would block boat arrivals from gaining any type of entry visa into the country, further outraging human advocacy groups.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said that the law aimed to “send the strongest possible signal to the people smugglers ... they must know that the door to Australia is closed to those who seek to come here by boat with a people smuggler.”

The law would apply to all adults who attempted to reach Australia by boat after July 19, 2013, and would constitute a lifetime ban. The refugees would not be able to enter the country on a humanitarian, business or even a tourist visas or as a spouse, even if they had already been deemed a refugee.

Turnbull said that “people smugglers are the worst criminals imaginable” adding that the law is important to support the country’s tough border policy known as “operation sovereign borders,” which intercepts refugee boats before they reach Australia, where hundreds are held in offshore mandatory detention centers for “processing.”

The law will mean that around 1,300 people who are currently in detention on the islands of Nauru and

Manus island off Australia's northwest coast, will not be able to ever enter Australia. The majority of those held in the offshore camps would qualify for asylum status under existing laws.

Children would be exempt from the law, and would still allow discretion from the immigration department to legally let people into the country. The new proposal will be introduced through the federal parliament next week and despite criticism from the opposition Labor party, Turnbull expects the bill to be passed, given that similar policies have received bipartisan support.

The Green Party said the government had "sunk to a new low" through the legislation. "Supporting this policy will mean innocent men women and children will be punished for doing nothing wrong," said Green's immigration spokesperson Nick McKim.

Advocacy and human rights organizations who are well accustomed to slamming the government's harsh border policies are outraged by the new proposals. "It is fundamental that Australia lifts its effort to make a far greater contribution to this global crisis ... The way to do it is not to propose further measures that are about protecting borders rather than protecting people," refugee lawyer David Manne said to Reuters.

Last weekend, over 20,000 people peacefully marched across Australian cities to protest rising xenophobia and hate against refugees, while sending a message that Australia - a country built on mass migration, welcomed refugees.

While Australia has had a harsh immigration policy since John Howard's Liberal Party toughened the country's borders in the early 2000's, recently there has been rising anti-Islamic and anti-immigration rhetoric. Far right groups including the United Patriots Front, as well as One Nation Senator Pauline Hanson have called for bans on Muslim immigration.

An October report from Amnesty International detailed the country's mandatory detention program as amounting to torture, claims that were rejected by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the government of Nauru.

In August, the Australian and Papua New Guinea government's announced that they would be shutting down the Manus Island detention centre, which holds around 800 people, after leaked documents showed more than 2,000 incidents of sexual abuse, assault and suicide attempts by desperate detainees.

Turnbull has continually praised Australia's immigration policy for stopping the number of dangerous refugee arrivals by boat, and at the U.N. general assembly said that the policy was "both principled and pragmatic."

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