



Sri Lankan boat arrivals – DFAT website warns of terrorist dangers in Sri Lanka

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights today expressed grave concern that the government was considering an agreement with Indonesia that would mean the return of 83 refugees to Sri Lanka - a country which DFAT regards as highly dangerous.

Comments by Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews that 'it makes sense' for the 85 men to be sent back to Indonesia, when he knows that they may well end up back in Sri Lanka, fly in the face of DFAT's warnings about the country.

The DFAT website says about Sri Lanka:

“Politically motivated violence including assassinations, bombings in public places and on roads is escalating and there is widespread civil unrest.”

“We advise you to reconsider your need to travel to Sri Lanka at this time because of ongoing civil unrest, the volatile security situation and the very high risk of terrorist attacks.”*

“It would be a violation of the Refugees Convention for Australia to send the refugees back to Sri Lanka whether by chartering a plane to Colombo or indirectly through Indonesia,” said Simeon Beckett, President of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights.

“The entry into Australian territory of the 83 Sri Lankans puts beyond question that they have legally engaged Australia's obligations to keep them in Australia while we assess their refugee status,” said Simeon Beckett.

“The refugees have a right to legal advice and to be admitted to Australia's refugee status determination procedures without delay.

“We know from bitter experience that sending refugees to Nauru delays the refugee determination process at the expense of the health and wellbeing of the refugees and the taxpayer's pocket. In the end the refugees are most likely to end up back in Australia.”

“Instead of turning its back on a crisis in its own back yard, it's time Australia pulled its weight in the region.”

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Inquiries: Simeon Beckett, President, 0412 008 039
Eve Lester, Spokesperson, 0410 093 156
Website – www.alhr.asn.au

* http://www.smartraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/Advice/Sri_Lanka