FECCA

Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

# Media Release

**6 July, 2010**

## *GILLARD'S ATTEMPT TO TONE DOWN THE ASYLUM SEEKER DEBATE WELCOME*

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) has welcomed Prime Minister Julia Gillard's attempt to tone down the unwarranted political frenzy which has surrounded asylum seekers in recent weeks.

"Julia Gillard's overt rejection of 'inflammatory politics' is to be commended," said FECCA Senior Deputy Chair, Dr Sundram Sivamalai.

"The government's new border security policy (released 6/7/10) is also commendable in its clear recognition that asylum seekers are people who deserve to be treated with decency and humanity.

"The government's decision to lift the suspension on the processing of Sri Lankan asylum seekers" visa applications is also to be applauded.

"However, FECCA has some reservations about the government's announcement that it will return asylum seekers who come by boat to „regional processing centres", in locations such as East Timor.

"We call on the government to ensure that all due process is offered to those who would be sent to 'regional processing centres'. All asylum seekers must have fair access to means of application review and must be able to live in safety while their claims are being considered. 'Regional processing centres' must not be used as a means of allowing Australia to avoid its responsibilities in relation to refugees, as outlined by international law.

"FECCA also calls on the government to lift the ban on the processing of Afghani refugees' asylum claims. Asylum seekers have the right to have their claims processed in a timely fashion - living with uncertainty can have serious mental health consequences for applicants.

"While FECCA largely welcomed the government's statements today, we were disheartened to hear the coalition's new policy statements in relation to asylum seekers, also outlined today.

"The opposition has threatened the wellbeing of asylum seekers by pledging to re-institute the damaging temporary protection visa scheme, to turn back boats and to abolish free legal advice for asylum seekers seeking to appeal a decision.

"Asylum seekers come to our shores seeking freedom from persecution – trauma, torture and discrimination.

It is our duty to treat them with humanity and respect," concluded Dr Sundram Sivamalai. "Australia's reputation as a fair and decent country will be severely compromised if we fail to do so."

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Promoting multiculturalism, community harmony and social justice.

www.fecca.org.au

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