



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



## **THE SENATE**

# **QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

## **Asylum Seekers**

## **SPEECH**

**Monday, 26 October 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 26 October 2009  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Eggleston, Sen Alan

**Source** Senate  
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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator EGGLESTON** (Western Australia) (4.03 pm)—As has been said, this is a very difficult problem. There are massive numbers of refugees in the world—something like 42 million was mentioned earlier by one speaker—and it is an enormous problem. But we in Australia have to be realistic about what we can do in terms of assisting with a resolution regarding the problem of the number of refugees around the world. We are in fact a very small country, of just some 21 million people. Even so, we have had a very fine record in assisting in resettling refugees, beginning of course after World War II, when we took huge numbers of displaced people, and continuing on through the years with the boat people from Vietnam and Cambodia.

Today we have a system for the orderly processing of people who want to come to Australia under the United Nations convention on refugees and have a quota within our migration system of some 15,000 people a year who come into Australia from UNHCR camps, where important checks are carried out before they get to this country. In particular, their identity is checked and verified—because, as has been said, very often people who claim to be refugees are not necessarily who they claim to be and they are not necessarily quite as innocent as they would like us to think they are. It is very important not only that their identity is checked but also that their security records and criminal records are checked. The policy that the Australian government has followed for a long time now is to accept a quota of refugees through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees process, and we have very much made our contribution to alleviating this problem around the world.

The recent flood of boat people from Indonesia and Sri Lanka reflects pull factors in Australia. Most important of all the pull factors is the change in the Rudd government's policy in dealing with refugees. There can be no doubt whatsoever that there is a view out there that, under this government, Australia will not just confine itself to taking refugees from the UNHCR sources but will take anyone who turns up on the doorstep and claims refugee status. So there is a very different kind of view out there about how the Australian government will react to anyone coming to this country. It is disgraceful that people smugglers are putting at risk the lives of asylum seekers, and there is absolutely nothing humane about border protection policies that increase the likelihood of vulnerable men,

women and children getting into leaky boats and risking their lives on the high seas.

The coalition believe the government must urgently set up an independent inquiry into the reasons for the surge of arrivals on our north-west coastline and seek to identify possible solutions to this problem. The government, we believe, must be prepared to accept responsibility for the consequences of the mixed messages it has sent. The question before the Senate today then becomes: why is the Rudd government running away from an inquiry into its border protection policies which the coalition believe should be carried out?

The situation is now becoming quite urgent, with ever-increasing numbers of boats appearing on our coastline. The facts are clear: the Labor Party policy has failed. They have lost control of our borders. What we need is a full and independent inquiry to consider all policy options. That is the question we must ask in the Senate today: why are the Rudd government running away from such an inquiry?

Question agreed to.