



MEDIA RELEASE

From:

African Think Tank Inc.

WORKING WITH
VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY
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RE: ATT media release on HOWARD HORRORS BACK AGAIN"

The African Think Tank today commented on Tony Abbott's recent refugee policy announcement.

"This is a return to the scaremongering of the Howard years,' commented Dr. Berhan Ahmed. "This is not so much a policy as it is a return to the Howard political strategy of feeding the electorate's fears to try to gain votes. The real losers will be the Australian people who will pay very heavily for refugee processing overseas.

"Under the Howard government we saw children destined for years in refugee camps. We saw people who had already been traumatised by torture and war forced into accommodation much worse than that given to the worst criminals. We saw a human cost in added suffering. We saw Australia become a pariah in the developed world because of the inhumanity of our refugee policies. The political successes for the Howard government were gained at the expense of the poorest and most vulnerable people, people who had already lost everything and who were now to be forced to suffer more to keep a government in political power.

"There are more boat people now because there is more conflict in our region. We need to put this in perspective. Australia accepts a tiny percentage of refugees, far less than most other developed nations. We have international obligations as regards the humane treatment of refugees. These regulations are the result of careful deliberation and agreement between many nations. They do not pose any onerous burden for Australia.

The international picture for refugees changes constantly and needs to be continually monitored. The best solutions involve working for solutions at the heart, in the home countries, so that people are not forced out of their homes and lives. But when they are, we need to find a policy that is both realistic and compassionate. This policy is neither. It is just one sign of a worrying xenophobia that is beginning to be heard from some members of the opposition, a fear of the rich, rewarding diversity that is Australia.

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