



# Media release

## Senator Chris Evans

Leader of the Government in the Senate  
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship

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### **UNHCR report confirms worldwide increase in asylum seekers**

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said Australia will continue to meet its international obligations to refugees forced out of their own countries due to war or fear of persecution.

The UNHCR *2008 Global Trends Report* shows there were 42 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2008, which included 15.2 million refugees. A staggering 44 per cent of all refugees and asylum seekers were children under the age of 18.

Senator Evans said the report confirms that the increase in people seeking asylum in Australia is part of a worldwide trend driven by insecurity, persecution and conflict.

The UNHCR report shows that asylum claims increased worldwide by 28 per cent in 2008, with a dramatic escalation in the number of asylum seekers lodging claims in South Africa.

Europe remains the primary destination for asylum seekers with 333 000 claims registered in 2008, predominantly in France (35 400), the United Kingdom (30 500) and Italy (30 300). The United States received 49 600 new asylum claims and Canada 34 800. South Africa received 207 000 new claims from asylum seekers.

Senator Evans said that the 4750 people seeking asylum in Australia in 2008 was relatively small in global terms.

The UNHCR report states that one third of all refugees were in the Asia Pacific region, with Pakistan housing 1.8 million – virtually all from Afghanistan. Afghanistan is still the leading country of origin for refugees, with 2.8 million Afghans receiving assistance from UNHCR in 2008 – representing one in four of all refugees worldwide.

“We have an obligation as a wealthy and stable society to assist in the global solution to the worldwide refugee crisis,” Senator Evans said.

“Australia, along with the United States and Canada, will continue to play a leading role in providing resettlement opportunities for some of the most vulnerable people in the world.

“The UNHCR has called on those traditional resettlement countries to not resile from our commitment to refugees during the global economic downturn.

“In 2009-10, Australia will welcome 13 750 people under our Humanitarian Program – an increase of 250 places on the previous year.”

Senator Evans said the size and composition of Australia’s humanitarian program is guided by the UNHCR’s world resettlement priorities and the views of the Australian community. The main focus will remain on the Middle East, Africa and Asia, with refugees from Iraq, Burma, Afghanistan, Sudan and Bhutan, among other nationalities, to be resettled.

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