



Media Release

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RMS Refugee Resettlement welcomes Ahmed Zaoui decision

RMS Refugee Resettlement welcomes the decision made by the Director of Security to withdraw the security risk certificate against Algerian refugee Ahmed Zaoui.

Peter Cotton, RMS Refugee Resettlement's Chief Executive, said Mr Zaoui entered New Zealand as an asylum seeker which is a legitimate pathway under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees when anyone is applying for asylum against persecution.

The convention also acknowledges that someone fleeing persecution may enter a country by irregular means (and often without documentation) in order to claim asylum.

"Mr Zaoui was granted refugee status by the Refugee Status Appeal Authority in August 2003. The RSAA is one of the world's most highly respected appeal bodies and its decisions have helped to establish international juris prudens in the area of refugee law."

Mr Cotton said It is neither possible nor appropriate to comment on the original decision by SIS to issue a security risk certificate, since the classified information upon which this was based has never been revealed. However, the removal of the certificate confirms that the Government now accepts that Mr Zaoui is a genuine refugee and that he poses no threat to national security. "It is our hope that he and his family will soon be reunited and allowed to build a brighter future together as contributing members of their new society."

Mr Cotton also said that Winston Peters is quite wrong in suggesting that Mr. Zaoui had attempted to "jump the queue" to enter New Zealand. This suggestion unfairly blurs the important distinction between "illegal migrants" and "refugees". If you are a genuine refugee, seeking asylum from persecution there is no queue to jump.

The Ahmed Zaoui case also serves to highlight the danger in some of the proposed changes to the Immigration Act currently being considered by Government. In particular, the entrenchment of the Government's right to use classified information against someone who is not permitted to know either the content or the source of the prejudicial information or allegations against them. This clearly contravenes the principles of natural justice, in which an accused person must be granted the right to face his or her accusers and have the opportunity to defend themselves against the allegations being made. RMS Refugee Resettlement shares the views expressed

by UNHCR and many other organisations in their opposition to the incorporation of such powers within the proposed new legislation.

ENDS:

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