

Australia and U.S. in refugees swap

by UPI

SYDNEY - Australian government officials released details of a refugee deal with the United States to exchange asylum seekers.

Under the new scheme asylum seekers detained on the Pacific island of Nauru will be taken to the United States and Cuban refugees held at the U.S. military base in Cuba will be resettled in Australia.

The resettlement agreement, worked out in Washington last week, was formalized Tuesday at a meeting of Australian, U.S., Canadian and British ministers near Sydney.

The scheme provides for Australia and the United States to each resettle up to 200 refugees processed in the other country every year.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard told the Australian Broadcasting Corp that the new deal "sends a message."

"People who want to come here will be deterred by anything that sends a message that getting to the Australian mainland illegally is not going to happen," he said.

But the opposition Labor Party leader Kevin Rudd said the plan defies logic.

Rudd said what it seems Howard is saying is "come to Australia as an asylum-seekers processed offshore,

possibly then be sent to America for us to receive the same number of asylum seekers back here. ... Australia becomes a halfway house to the United States."

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