

refugee council of australia
annual report 2007-2008





acknowledgements

The Refugee Council would like to acknowledge the generous support of the following organisations and individuals for the work of the Council during 2007-08:

- ACL
- AMES Victoria
- Amnesty International Australia
- Asia-Pacific Philanthropy Consortium
- Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)
- Australian Catholic University
- Australian Council for International Development
- Australian National Maritime Museum
- Australian Refugee Foundation
- Penny Biggins
- Brett Enman Webdesign
- Caritas Australia
- City of Sydney
- Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural NSW
- Connect Infobahn Australia
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship
- Foundation for Young Australians
- Jesuit Refugee Service Australia
- Leichhardt Council
- Mallesons Stephen Jaques
- Multicultural Arts Victoria
- Myer Foundation
- National Council of Churches in Australia
- NSW AMES
- NSW Department of Sport and Recreation
- Oxfam Australia
- Reichstein Foundation
- Timothy Seeto
- Sidney Myer Fund
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Regional Office, Canberra
- University of Sydney
- University of NSW
- Victorian Multicultural Commission
- Hon. Graham West MP
- Yulgilbar Foundation

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Cover photograph: The Dut family at home in Brisbane. This image was featured on the 2008 Refugee Week poster, to promote the theme "A Place to Call Home".

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president's report

The 2007-08 year was one of the most productive in the 27-year history of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA). In a year when RCOA's membership grew by 36 per cent to an historic high, we saw significant and positive changes in Australian Government policy, the fruits of representation from our organisation, its membership and other agencies in the sector over a long period.

In the early part of the financial year, RCOA was very active in supporting African refugee communities who were under political attack and in opposing plans to introduce an integration assessment for all refugee and humanitarian visa applicants. We responded to the changing political environment after the November 2007 election by working closely with member agencies to develop a common reform agenda to take to the new Government.

Since December, we have seen some very welcome and much-needed changes to Australian refugee policy, including an end to offshore detention and processing on Nauru, the winding up of the temporary protection visa system, further reform of the immigration detention system by shifting the onus on to the government to justify detention in individual cases and increased funding to improve the link between language learning and employment for new arrivals. We will continue to engage with our members to monitor the changes and to ensure that the measures implemented meet the principles outlined in the Government's public announcements.

This annual report outlines these points and some of the many issues we took up in 2007-08 including: the impact of the citizenship test on refugees; the burden of travel costs incurred by newly arrived Special Humanitarian Program entrants; the need for changes to funding arrangements for refugee settlement services; reassessment of the ministerial intervention process; and a need to focus more attention on the employment and housing needs of refugees. Our work to build public awareness of refugee concerns included the national promotion of Refugee Week, the encouragement of local councils to declare their communities Refugee Welcome Zones and an active engagement with the media on refugee issues.

The continued growth in membership is an affirmation of the work RCOA is doing to represent community perspectives on refugee policy reform. In just two years, our membership has doubled and our organisational membership includes nearly all of the major Australian agencies involved in supporting refugees and asylum seekers. This growth in membership has coincided with a period of organisational reform, which began with a strategic planning process in 2005. Since then, we have reviewed our staff structure, refined our governance arrangements, improved our communication with members, changed our logo, revamped our publications, moved premises in Sydney and Melbourne and put greater emphasis on consulting the sector we represent.



Central to such positive change is an excellent working relationship between our board and staff. The chair of our Governance and Finance Subcommittee, Sky de Jersey, and our Treasurer, Lionel Conyer, in particular, have worked hard with our CEO, Paul Power, and staff members Martyn Green and Natalie Gooch in ensuring that RCOA is well run. This has enabled the Council to put greater emphasis on its core functions of research, policy development and representation on refugee issues. All board members have contributed constructively to the setting of our research and policy priorities and supported the excellent work carried out in 2007-08 by Paul Power and the RCOA policy team of Anna Samson,

Refugees returning from Liberia to Sierra Leone. Photo: UNHCR/E.Kanelstein.



RCOA's objectives and priorities

Annette McKail and Jacki Whitwell. RCOA's submission to the Australian Government on the 2008-09 Refugee and Humanitarian Program, in particular, drew widespread praise for its clarity and analysis.

The year saw a significant expansion of the involvement of volunteers and interns in the work of RCOA. During the year, 34 people donated significant time and expertise to assist RCOA. The contribution that was made by these individuals added significantly to the capacity of our staff team and contributed to the high standard of the organisation's research and submissions. In this regard, I would particularly like to acknowledge Eileen Wahab, a development consultant who has provided valuable support to many aspects of our work in recent years. I would also like to mention and to thank Val Grogan, who stepped down in June after eight years' committed service as a trustee of the Australian Refugee Foundation.

As President, I have particularly appreciated the support of RCOA's Chair, Barbara Young, who has served the organisation with distinction as a board member since 1992. Her wisdom and her institutional knowledge have been vital during the organisation's renewal process. Barbara has decided not to seek re-nomination to the Board at the 2008 Annual General Meeting, confident in the organisation's future and keen to create space for others to serve on the board. We will miss her greatly.

I would also like to thank two other members of the RCOA Board who are retiring in 2008 - Grant Mitchell who has been a significant and thoughtful contributor to all our deliberations and to the development of the Council over the past four years and Monsignor John Murphy whose counsel in his two years as a Board Member has been greatly valued.

I would like to pay special tribute to Paul Power our CEO whose skills in bringing people together have played such an important part in the Council becoming a genuine umbrella body in the refugee sector.

The 2008-09 year has begun very positively for RCOA with new research funding from the Sidney Myer Fund and the NSW Government, continued growth in membership and constructive working relationships with Government, major political parties and key national and international networks.

In this context, I want to particularly acknowledge the continuing and positive process of cultural change in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) begun three years ago under the previous administration, as well as the significant policy changes implemented and under consideration by the present Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans.

We look forward to working with government, the refugee sector and our membership to further enhance government and community support for people forced to flee their countries of origin because of conflict and persecution.

*John Gibson
President*

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is a national, not-for-profit organisation with more than 300 organisational and individual members. Formed in November 1981, RCOA's aim is to promote the adoption of flexible, humane and constructive policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons by the Australian and other Governments and their communities.

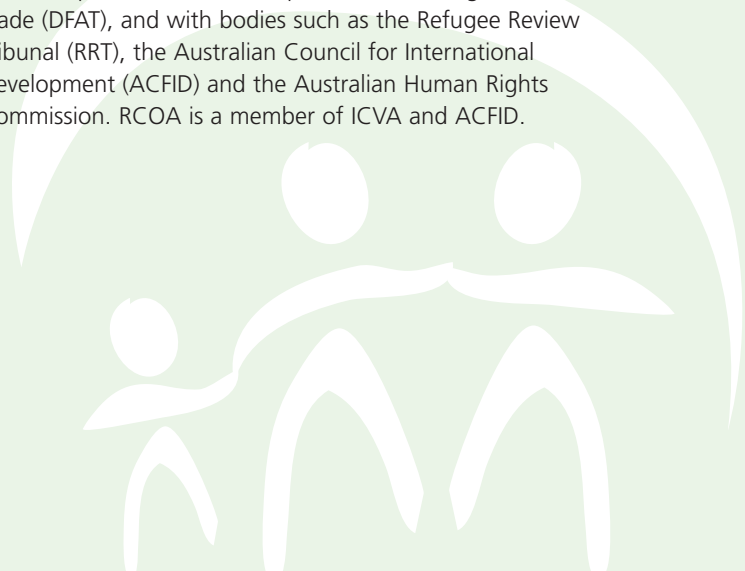
To achieve this aim, the Council has a number of key objectives which are to:

- act as a unifying organisation and general representative for its members;
- present the case on matters relating to refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons as strongly as possible, wherever appropriate;
- increase public awareness and media sensitivity towards refugee needs;
- build the capacity of the refugee sector; and
- build an effective and respected national organisation.

The priority activities for RCOA are set by its members, as represented by an elected Board. They centre on conducting research, policy analysis, representation, training and community education. We are funded through membership fees, by project grants, by trusts and foundations, by undertaking consultancies and through donations.

RCOA works to further the interests of members who themselves are involved in the full spectrum of work with refugees, from assisting refugees in countries of first asylum and when they repatriate to their homelands, to providing settlement support to refugees in Australia and providing protection and legal advice to refugees and asylum seekers.

We maintain close ties to many international organisations including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) and refugee councils in other countries. The Council is also engaged in regular dialogue with federal and state government departments, in particular the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and with bodies such as the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT), the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) and the Australian Human Rights Commission. RCOA is a member of ICVA and ACFID.



RCOA's people

Board changes

The 2007 Annual General Meeting saw two new members elected to the RCOA Executive Committee – Paris Aristotle AM, Director of Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House), and Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Manager of Settlement Partnerships for AMES Victoria. David Manne, Coordinator of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, did not seek reappointment, having served on the Board since 2000.

Our founder remembered

As noted in the 2006-07 annual report, RCOA's founder and first President, Major General Paul Cullen AC CBE DSO ED, died in Sydney on September 19, 2007 aged 98. A life member of RCOA and the 1981 winner of UNHCR's Nansen Medal for his international work with refugees through Austcare, Paul Cullen had a distinguished 39-year military career and voluntary involvement in numerous organisations involved in international humanitarian response, disability support and social welfare. He led the movement to form RCOA in November 1981 and served as RCOA President until 1990, remaining on the Executive Committee until 1994. The life and contributions of Major General Paul Cullen were remembered at a memorial service at Victoria Barracks, Sydney on September 26, 2007.

Executive Committee 2007-08

President

John Gibson
Barrister at Law
Principal, International Refugee Consulting

Vice President

Professor William Maley AM
Barrister-at-Law
Director, Asia Pacific College of Diplomacy
Australian National University

Chairperson

Barbara Young AO
Director, Austcare Board,
Chairperson of the Austcare Project Advisory Committee

Immediate Past President

David Bitel
Secretary General, International Commission of Jurists (Australian Division)

Hon. Secretary

Esta Paschalidis-Chilas
Consultant

Hon. Treasurer

Lionel Conyer
Member of Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia

Executive Committee members

Maureen Adamson
Individual RCOA member, Hobart
Paris Aristotle AM (from November 2007)
Director, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture
Elizabeth Biok
Solicitor, Legal Aid Commission of NSW
Member, International Commission of Jurists

Sky de Jersey
Program Manager, ChildFund Australia

Kevin Liston
Director, Australian Refugee Association

David Manne (until November 2007)
Coordinator, Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre

Grant Mitchell
Coordinator, International Detention Coalition

Rev Monsignor John Murphy OAM
Director, Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office

Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin (from November 2007)
Manager, Settlement Partnerships, AMES Victoria

Jenny Semple
Director, South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre

STAFF 2007-08

Chief Executive Officer

Paul Power

National Policy Director

Anna Samson

Research and Policy Officers

Annette McKail
Jacki Whitwell

Accounting Officer

Martyn Green

Administration and Membership Officer

Natalie Gooch (from October 2007)
Marwah Evans (until August 2007)

VOLUNTEERS and INTERNS 2007-08

Agnes Artemi
Rosi Aryal
Zoe Beath
Dominique Bigras
Megan Caristo
Michelle Carr
Viisti Dickens
Andrew Harrison
Jan Ho
Tracy Holt
Jacinta Isaacs
Nahrain John
Youn Hea Joo
Pinthinee
Khluiprasert
Tiffany Ma
Svetlana
Martynovich
Sophie Mast

Lucy Morgan
Sarah Nimfuehr
Sherona Parkinson
Rhiannon
Partington
Pamela Pau
Melinie Ridge
Vince Scappatura
Claire Sessions
Elizabeth Simpson
Angelo
Spadavecchia
Canan Suveren
Eugene Tan
Ozgur Unal
Celine van Klaveren
Eileen Wahab
Jane Walther
Katie Yealland



RCOA board members, (from left) Liz Biok, Paris Aristotle, Lionel Conyer, Barbara Young, Monsignor John Murphy, Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Jenny Semple, John Gibson, Sky de Jersey, Professor William Maley and Grant Mitchell.



research and representation

The core work of RCOA is its national research, policy development and representation of its members on refugee issues. 2007-08 was a challenging and productive year which provided many opportunities for RCOA to present the concerns of members to national decision-makers, both in the lead-up to the November 2007 Federal election and as the new Labor Government began considering what changes it would implement. Throughout the year, RCOA worked hard to consult its membership, to build consensus among non-government organisations on preferred policy options and to work cooperatively with key agencies to present ideas to political leaders and government officials.

Election brings policy changes

While the 2007-08 year began with a difficult and divisive pre-election debate on issues of integration and settlement of African refugees (see below), the change of government altered the political dynamics significantly. In the months following his appointment in December as Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans announced a number of substantial and very welcome changes to Australian refugee policy.

On December 9, Senator Evans announced plans to resettle seven Burmese refugees detained on Nauru for the previous 16 months, signalling his intention to close permanently Australia's offshore detention centres. This commitment was achieved on February 8, with the resettlement of the remaining group of Sri Lankan refugees held on Nauru.

The Federal Budget, announced on May 13, included four significant refugee policy announcements:

- The scrapping of Temporary Protection Visas and Temporary Humanitarian Visas, with holders of these visas to be given permanent residency.
- A small increase in the number of places in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, from 13,000 to 13,500 in 2008-09 and to 13,750 in 2009-10.
- Funding of \$49.2 million over four years to improve vocational English and work placement programs for new arrivals.
- An increase in Australia's core funding of UNHCR from \$8.3 million to \$9.9 million.

In July 2008, the Minister announced his intention to bring about further reform to the immigration detention system, viewing detention as a last resort which should be applied only for the shortest practicable time.

RCOA remained in close contact with the Minister, his staff, MPs and senior DIAC officials throughout this period, putting forward constructive policy alternatives and raising issues of community concern.

Integration and African settlement

As noted earlier, the 2007-08 year did not begin as positively as it ended. In July 2007, the then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Kevin Andrews, announced plans to reintroduce integration criteria in assessing applications for permanent visas (including refugee and humanitarian visas) and to ask permanent visa applicants to sign a values statement. RCOA immediately objected, writing to Mr Andrews to point out that such measures could mean a watering down of Australia's commitment to resettling the most vulnerable.

In October 2007, Mr Andrews created international controversy with a series of media interviews in which he publicly criticised African refugees for what he saw as a failure to integrate in Australia. The nature of the public criticism was unprecedented for an Immigration Minister in the 30 years of the current Australian Refugee and Humanitarian Program. RCOA was among the first organisations to issue a public

Australian Government refugee statistics 2007-08

Offshore refugee visas	6004
Offshore Special Humanitarian visas	4795
Onshore protection and humanitarian visas	2215
Total refugee and humanitarian visas	13,014

Primary countries of origin for offshore refugee and humanitarian visas were Burma 2961, Iraq 2215, Afghanistan 1185, Sudan 1158, Liberia 410, Democratic Republic of Congo 348, Burundi 303, Iran 302, Sierra Leone 267 and Sri Lanka 243.



statement condemning Mr Andrews' statements. In the following days and weeks, RCOA representatives gave many media interviews and spoke at public events, outlining the valuable contribution of African refugees who had settled in Australia and the importance of a non-discriminatory humanitarian program. On October 15, RCOA was one of 68 organisations to publish an open letter in The Australian newspaper, expressing support for Australia's African communities and for humanitarian need to remain the basis for Australia's refugee program.

RCOA followed up the public debate sparked by Mr Andrews' comments with a public forum on the future of Australian refugee resettlement policy, coinciding with the 2007 Annual General Meeting in Sydney on November 19. The speakers, Ajang Biar (Sydney), Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin (Melbourne) and Kevin Liston (Adelaide) advocated a rejection of political attempts to push the agenda of "integration potential" and agreed that non-government organisations should speak more proudly and confidently of the community's work and achievements in refugee resettlement.

In December, plans to introduce integration criteria for permanent visa applicants were scrapped by the newly appointed Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, who also met African community leaders in Melbourne and Sydney to assure them the new Government would maintain non-discriminatory humanitarian and migration programs.

Raising asylum policy concerns with the new Minister

In early December, RCOA and A Just Australia (AJA) gathered together organisations from the refugee sector to develop a common platform of ideas to take to Senator Evans as the new Immigration Minister. Organisations working with asylum seekers nominated seven priority issues for the Minister's immediate attention:

- Ending the Temporary Protection Visa and Temporary Humanitarian Visa system.
- Ending offshore processing and resettling refugees held on Nauru.
- Transferring long-term detainees for whom there are no character or security concerns from Immigration Detention Centres into the highly successful Community Care Pilot.
- Reviewing the Ministerial Intervention process in the light of recommendations from the Commonwealth Ombudsman, halting any imminent removals from Australia while this review takes place.
- Giving priority to reuniting split families of former Temporary Protection Visa holders who have been trying unsuccessfully for some years to bring immediate family members to Australia.
- Reversing the denial of work rights and access to Medicare for asylum seekers on Bridging Visas affected by the "45 day rule".

- Changing the language used in policy and public discourse about refugee issues, replacing public condemnation of asylum seekers and refugees with more balanced and positive commentary on refugees and the humanitarian program.

By July 2008, the Government had resolved or made some progress on six of these issues and had commenced discussions on the seventh – the impacts of the "45 day rule".

Settlement policy agenda

Drawing on feedback received through its annual national consultations, RCOA met representatives of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, migrant resource centres and settlement services, torture and trauma services and multicultural youth services to discuss common settlement policy concerns to take up with the new Minister and Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson. The resettlement policy priorities nominated were:

- Refugee and Humanitarian Intake – Ensuring that the Refugee and Humanitarian Program remains focused on humanitarian need. Increasing the refugee resettlement intake and advocating for other countries to do the same.
- Reuniting families – Ensuring that reuniting split families is given a high priority in the humanitarian program, regardless of regional quotas for the refugee program (possibly through a new humanitarian family reunion visa category). Reviewing the financial arrangements for travel to Australia under the Special Humanitarian Program, to reduce the financial burden on new arrivals.
- Language learning and education – Improving the effectiveness of English language programs for new arrivals and of education strategies for school-aged refugee and humanitarian entrants.
- Employment – Improving employment outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants, through fairer skills recognition processes, reviewing the applicability of "welfare to work" obligations, improving the effectiveness of the Job Network and



Speakers at RCOA's 2007 AGM forum focused on the future of resettlement policy, (from left) Kevin Liston, Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin and Ajang Biar, with RCOA CEO Paul Power.

research and representation

giving greater support to successful job placement strategies.

- Housing – Ensuring that the needs of refugees are given a high priority in the development of strategies to improve housing affordability.
- Citizenship test – Developing strategies to ensure that refugees and humanitarian entrants are not disadvantaged by the testing regime or discouraged from seeking citizenship.
- Settlement services – Reviewing the provision of settlement services for new refugee and humanitarian entrants, exploring the impacts of recent tendering and funding strategies on service delivery, the viability of settlement services and co-operation between services.
- Whole-of-government approach to settlement issues – Exploring how different Federal Government departments and the Federal and State Governments can work together more effectively to ensure better outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants across all policy areas.
- Migration advice and legal assistance – Expanding access to free migration advice and legal assistance for people seeking to propose humanitarian entrants, as well as for people seeking onshore assistance.
- Positive promotion of multiculturalism and the humanitarian program – Replacing the past negative political rhetoric about refugees, asylum seekers and multiculturalism with a confident and positive promotion of Australia's diversity and

its role in welcoming and supporting refugees. Funding independent research on migration issues to improve national knowledge and planning.

2008-09 submission on refugee intake

As in previous years, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) contracted RCOA to conduct a national consultation process and to prepare a submission on community views on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. Between September and December, representatives of more than 160 organisations took part in 40 consultations across eight states and territories. A 113-page submission with 22 recommendations was completed in February. It canvassed many issues, including the size and composition of the humanitarian intake, family reunion for refugees, employment issues, housing, language services, international cooperation and Australian support for UNHCR. The submission was presented to Senator Evans at the refugee sector's formal annual meeting with the Minister on February 28 and presented at separate meetings with Mr Ferguson and senior DIAC staff.

Meetings with Parliamentarians

In March, RCOA joined representatives of AJA, Uniting Justice, Amnesty International, National Council of Churches, Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project and Asylum Seeker Resource Centre for three days of meetings at Parliament House, Canberra. In the three days, 26 MPs and Senators and four ministerial advisers were visited – the Parliamentarians principally being newly-elected or Government and Opposition members in new roles relevant to refugee policy. RCOA worked with AJA to prepare a two-page policy brief, outlining the main issues of concern presented to Senator Evans at the sector's meeting with the Minister on February 28. The purpose of the lobbying effort was to familiarise Parliamentarians with the constructive agenda for change being presented by NGOs to the new Government.

Dialogue with government

RCOA participates in a series of formal discussions with various Australian Government agencies including DIAC, Centrelink, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Attorney-General's Department. Of particular significance is the biannual DIAC-NGO Dialogue on Humanitarian Issues, which provides an opportunity for RCOA to raise many issues with senior DIAC staff. Among the issues raised by RCOA at the July 2007 dialogue were: the need for more effective government consultation with asylum seeker support agencies; the inappropriate issuing of certain classes of visas to some protection visa applicants; the situation of asylum seekers then being held on Nauru; and DIAC's plans for its new Transitional Accommodation Centres for people in the process of being returned to their country of origin. Discussion at the February 2008 dialogue focused particularly on the high priority asylum and settlement policy issues outlined above.

Throughout the year, RCOA maintained regular informal dialogue with many Australian Government officials, particularly in DIAC and the Immigration Minister's office. Among the topics regularly under discussion during 2007-08 were: efforts to improve support to people proposing under the Special Humanitarian Program; the development of plans for a



At Parliament House, Canberra in March 2008 to discuss refugee policy reform options with MPs, (from left) Paul Power (RCOA), Pamela Curr (Asylum Seeker Resource Centre), Caz Coleman (Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project) and James Thomson (National Council of Churches).



Complex Case Support Network for refugees; the Ministerial intervention process; and exploration of changes to the immigration detention system.

Involvement in interagencies

Critical to RCOA's success as an effective representative body is its close contact with refugees, asylum seekers and the organisations which provide services to them. In addition to its extensive consultations for its annual submission on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, RCOA attends a broad range of interagency meetings and holds countless meetings each year with refugee community leaders and member organisations.

RCOA continues to convene the Network of Asylum Seeker Agencies Victoria (NASA-Vic) meetings on a monthly basis. This network serves as a forum to discuss concerns about policies affecting asylum seekers and as a coalition working to improve support to asylum seekers. In 2007, NASA-Vic was successful in negotiating with the Victorian Government for \$150,000 in emergency relief funds to be distributed through key agencies and for the allocation of \$50,000 in Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) money specifically for asylum seekers, to assist people at risk of homelessness. Work was also completed on referral protocols for asylum seekers to retain access to their superannuation whether or not they are successful in gaining protection in Australia.

In May 2008, RCOA convened the first national teleconference of asylum seeker support agencies, to share information across state boundaries and to enable a new national voice for these agencies, Asylum Seeker Agencies Network of Australia (ASANA), to be formed.

National teleconferences

RCOA hosts two bi-monthly teleconferences to enable member organisations from across Australia to share information and work together on issues of common concern.

The Asylum Policy Teleconference brings key individuals and agencies together to discuss current policy and legislative issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers. This teleconference has a number of standing agenda items relating to protection issues, onshore refugee status determination procedures, detention issues and problems facing community-based asylum seekers. During 2007-08, these teleconferences were particularly valuable, as agencies shared information on pre-election strategies and post-election discussions with the new Government.

The Settlement Policy Teleconference serves as a national forum, bringing people together to discuss common issues and share information about innovative approaches to refugee settlement. During the past year, the teleconferences focused on the following themes:

- Travel loans for SHP entrants and proposers (July);
- Refugees and preventative health care (September);
- Young refugees and crime (November);
- Settlement issues raised with the new government (March); and
- Housing solutions for refugees (May).



Refugees awaiting resettlement learn about tax file numbers during the Australian Cultural Orientation program at Mae La refugee camp, Thai-Burma border.

Submissions on employment issues

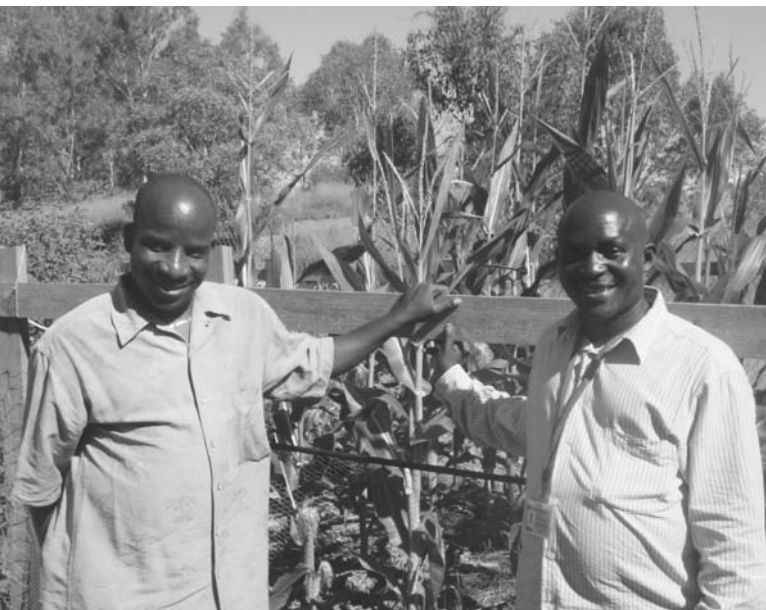
In early 2008, as part of the Australian Government's implementation of the ALP's Social Inclusion Policy, a number of Ministers invited comment on various programs within their portfolios. RCOA responded to invitations to comment on the Job Network and the Job Capacity Assessment program. RCOA's submission on the Job Network included concerns about the general failure of the Job Network to meet the needs of refugees and humanitarian migrants, the conflict between the program's obligations and other settlement needs such as attending English classes, problems associated with Centrelink's breaching of refugee clients and the potential value of migrant-specific employment services. The submission on the Job Capacity Assessment program highlighted problems regarding referral and assessment of clients, the limits of the Job Capacity Account and the appropriateness or otherwise of attendance requirements and Centrelink obligations.

Citizenship test

In April 2008, Senator Evans announced an independent review of the Citizenship Test and invited public submissions. RCOA's submission called on the Government to abolish the test or at least acknowledge that some refugees and stateless people should be exempt from sitting the test on account of the nature of their migration experience. DIAC figures show that, while refugee and humanitarian entrants are proportionately overrepresented among the ranks of individuals who are seeking Australian citizenship, they are also far more likely to fail the test on their first attempt than other applicants. An overall reduction in the numbers of people applying for citizenship has also been linked to misplaced fears in some migrant communities that failure will result in deportation. The Citizenship Test Review Committee is due to release its report in late 2008.

Research on SHP travel costs

The Refugee Council, supported by the Reichstein Foundation, completed a report in June 2008 highlighting the burden of



Pascal Ntakiratimana (left) and Jeremie Heri, part of the ACCES Services Inc volunteer training program in Logan (Qld), one of the projects featured in *“Empowering Refugees: A Good Practice Guide for Humanitarian Entrants”*.

travel costs for Special Humanitarian Program (SHP) entrants. The SHP makes up nearly half of the 13,500 places in Australia's annual refugee and humanitarian program. SHP entrants are proposed (or sponsored) by family, friends or organisations in Australia. Under current government policy, the airfares of SHP entrants (unlike those on refugee visas) are not covered by DIAC. Proposers must find the funds and organise airfares once the visas have been issued. In many cases, the cost of air travel is passed on to humanitarian entrants when they arrive.

RCOA's research, conducted in Victoria, indicated that the hardship created by new entrants having to pay back the full cost of airfares is far greater than previously envisaged. The research uncovered a range of serious hardships resulting from the travel debts including poverty, malnutrition, housing stress and homelessness, bad credit ratings and bankruptcy. Recognising that most SHP entrants have had similar displacement experiences to those arriving under the refugee program, the RCOA report recommended that the Australian Government pay the full cost of all SHP airfares. Failing this, the report made a number of other recommendations to help mitigate the hardships experienced, including improving access to interest-free travel loans.

Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council

In March, Refugee Council CEO Paul Power was appointed to the Australian Government's Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (RRAC). Other new appointees were Samia Baho (member of African Think Tank, Melbourne), Mohammed Issa (Iraqi community, Sydney), Jenny Semple (South-Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, Melbourne and RCOA Board), Daniel Zingifuaboro (ACCES Services Inc, Brisbane) and the new Chair of RRAC, Bruce Baird (former Liberal MP). Reappointed were Paris Aristotle (Foundation House and RCOA Board), Carmel Guerra (Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues), Kevin Liston (Australian Refugee Association and RCOA Board) and Margaret Piper (consultant, formerly RCOA Executive Director). RRAC is a body which meets up to four times a year to provide strategic advice to the Australian Government on refugee resettlement issues.

Settlement advice for AUSCO program

Through an agreement between the Refugee Council, DIAC and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a pilot program to provide support to trainers involved in the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program for refugees was launched in 2008. After a national recruitment process, Victor Saw, a Karen community worker from Sydney, and Kathy Ragless, director of Companion House (Canberra's torture and trauma service), were chosen to assist the local AUSCO trainers in South-East Asia to refine their content and presentation with up-to-date information on the practical realities of refugee settlement in Australia. Victor and Kathy travelled to Kuala Lumpur in June 2008 for a one-month placement with the AUSCO program in Malaysia and Thailand. AUSCO is conducted by the IOM, with funding and curriculum development provided by DIAC. IOM conducts five-day AUSCO classes at venues across Asia, the Middle East and Africa. It also conducts similar orientation courses for refugees being resettled to the USA and Canada. Building on the success of the pilot program, two advisors from settlement services in Australia will be deployed in November 2008 to the Middle East to assist in the training of AUSCO trainers. More deployments are being planned for 2009.

Launch of Good Practice Guide

Empowering Refugees: A Good Practice Guide to Humanitarian Settlement was launched on World Refugee Day June 20, 2008 by Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson. RCOA was contracted in 2007 by DIAC to research and profile 29 successful refugee settlement projects around Australia for the Good Practice Guide, in key areas such as health, education, employment, law and community harmony. The Good Practice Guide is intended to act as a resource tool for the community sector, as well as a source of information for government policy-makers.

international links

UNHCR global refugee statistics 2007

UNHCR released the following global picture of displaced populations in its "2007 Global Trends" document:

Refugees

Refugees under UNHCR mandate	9.7 million
Refugees under UNRWA mandate (Palestinians)	4.6 million
People in refugee-like situations	1.7 million
Total	16 million

Internally displaced persons

Victims of conflict	26 million
Victims of natural disaster	25 million
Total	51 million

Top host countries

Rank	Country	
1.	Pakistan	2,033,100
2.	Syria	1,503,800
3.	Iran	963,500
4.	Germany	578,900
5.	Jordan	500,300
6.	Tanzania	435,600
50.	Australia	22,164

Includes both refugees and people in refugee-like situations. For industrial countries, includes 10 years of refugee recognition.

Asylum seekers and resettlement

	Global total	Australia	
Asylum seekers recognised	468,597	1,702	(0.4%)
Asylum seekers – cases pending	739,986	1,516	(0.2%)
Refugees resettled	75,302	9,628	(12.8%)

As the national umbrella body for Australian NGOs working with refugees, RCOA has an important role in building links with NGOs, inter-governmental organisations and government bodies from around the world. During 2007-08, RCOA participated in key international meetings hosted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), particularly its 2007 NGO Consultations (September), 2007 Executive Committee (October), 2008 NGO Consultations (June) and 2008 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (June-July).

RCOA is an active member of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), a Geneva-based global network of NGOs focused on humanitarian and refugee issues, and remains closely connected with Australian agencies working in international humanitarian situations through active membership of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID). In 2007 and 2008, RCOA also participated in meetings in Geneva of the International Detention Coalition and the Southern Refugee Legal Aid Network.

2007 UNHCR Executive Committee and NGO Consultations

RCOA joined other Australian NGOs and Australian Government representatives for UNHCR's annual Executive Committee (ExCom) meeting in Geneva in October 2007. The 2007 ExCom gathering was preceded a few days earlier by UNHCR's 2007 NGO Consultations which brought together 324 NGO representatives from 61 countries to discuss key issues affecting refugees worldwide. ExCom was attended by representatives of 126 governments, 22 UN and international bodies and 56 NGOs. Drawing together hundreds of international policy makers on refugee issues from government, non-government and UN bodies, these two events provide an unparalleled annual advocacy opportunity.

The 58th Session of the UNHCR ExCom in October 2007 was attended by RCOA President John Gibson, Board Member Grant Mitchell and National Policy Director Anna Samson. In 2007, RCOA managed to secure \$10,000 in contributions to cover the costs of two refugee community representatives to attend the UNHCR NGO Consultations and ExCom meetings in Geneva. Contributions were received from Oxfam Australia, Caritas Australia, ACFID, National Council of Churches, Jesuit Refugee Service and Amnesty International to fund the travel of refugee community leaders, Tenneh Kpaka (Sierra Leonean community, NSW) and Tony Ogeno Oyet (Sudanese community, SA), to the conference. Together with three other refugee representatives from Australia, Tenneh and Tony were able to share their first-hand experiences of displacement and resettlement with UNHCR agency staff, field workers, policy advocates and government officials. Their contribution was personally acknowledged by the High Commissioner, Antonio Guterres, and by many NGO representatives. The main international NGO statement to the ExCom meeting was made by Aguil de Chut Deng, a Sudanese-Australian



Australian NGO representatives at the 2007 UNHCR Executive Committee meeting, (from left) Aguil de Chut Deng, Nava Malula, Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin and Tenneh Kpaka.

woman from Canberra.

The issues which featured most heavily in the consultations and ExCom meetings were:

- The ongoing and deepening refugee crisis resulting from the occupation of Iraq. The governments of Jordan and Syria were particularly vocal in their calls for greater support from the international community to assist them in accommodating the large influx of Iraqi refugees who are no longer temporary stayers subsisting on accumulated savings, but have become longer term residents drawing on state resources. The United States also called on other states to provide greater assistance to refugees leaving Iraq. The USA has committed to meeting this year's resettlement quota from Iraq.
- Durable Solutions for protracted situations in Sudan, on the Thai-Burma border and in Nepal.
- The importance of UNHCR's partnerships with NGOs as being real and collaborative (as opposed to simply implementing) in nature.
- Developments in the implementation of the cluster approach. Some concerns still remain about the potential gaps in service delivery, especially in displacement situations where there is an expectation about the ability and capacity of UNHCR to provide for the full range of needs while the cluster arrangements allocate those responsibilities to other agencies.
- The Conclusion on Children at Risk.
- Regional models for securing effective protection, for example in Latin America through the Mexico Plan of Action.
- High Commissioner's dialogue on protection issues focusing in 2007 on the asylum-migration nexus; and

- UNHCR's aim to significantly increase resettlement referrals in 2008.

2008 UNHCR NGO Consultations

UNHCR's 2008 NGO Consultations were brought forward three months to June, unfortunately breaking the direct connection with ExCom and blunting opportunities for NGO advocacy with government representatives. The consultations were attended by 22 Australian NGO representatives, including RCOA Board Members Paris Aristotle, Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Jenny Semple and Grant Mitchell and National Policy Director, Anna Samson. Dr Sheikh-Eldin attended, with the financial support of Caritas Australia and DIAC, as a refugee community representative.

The consultations focused on such issues as the use of human rights mechanisms in protecting refugees, governance of refugee law, the situation of urban refugees, protection of women and girls at risk, statelessness, education for vulnerable young refugees and monitoring of detention conditions. Among the themes to emerge from the consultations were: the slow progress in achieving change in seriously protracted refugee situations; the role non-signatory states play in undermining the effectiveness of international human rights instruments; the need for greater involvement of refugees in UNHCR and NGO decision-making and implementation processes; and questions about the effectiveness of much humanitarian aid for refugees and the accountability of implementing agencies.

2008 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement

The 2008 UNHCR NGO Consultations were followed by the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR),



attended by 173 delegates from 34 countries involved in refugee resettlement. Australian NGO representatives were Paris Aristotle, Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Jenny Semple, Anna Samson (RCOA), Linda Bartolomei (UNSW Centre for Refugee Research) and Graham Thom (Amnesty International). The ATCR is an important planning meeting and forum for the global cooperation on resettlement between UNHCR, governments and NGOs. UNHCR reported to the gathering that, in 2009, it expected to identify 561,000 refugees in need of resettlement and would have the capacity to refer up to 127,000 of these people to resettlement countries; however, the number of resettlement places offered by governments around the world remains little more than 80,000. Discussion covered topics including the strategic use of resettlement in protracted refugee situations, support for emerging resettlement countries, resettlement of refugees with medical needs, implementation of the UNHCR ExCom Conclusion on protection of women and girls at risk, employment initiatives and participation of resettled refugees, and challenges in ensuring family reunion.

Visit to Vietnam and Thailand

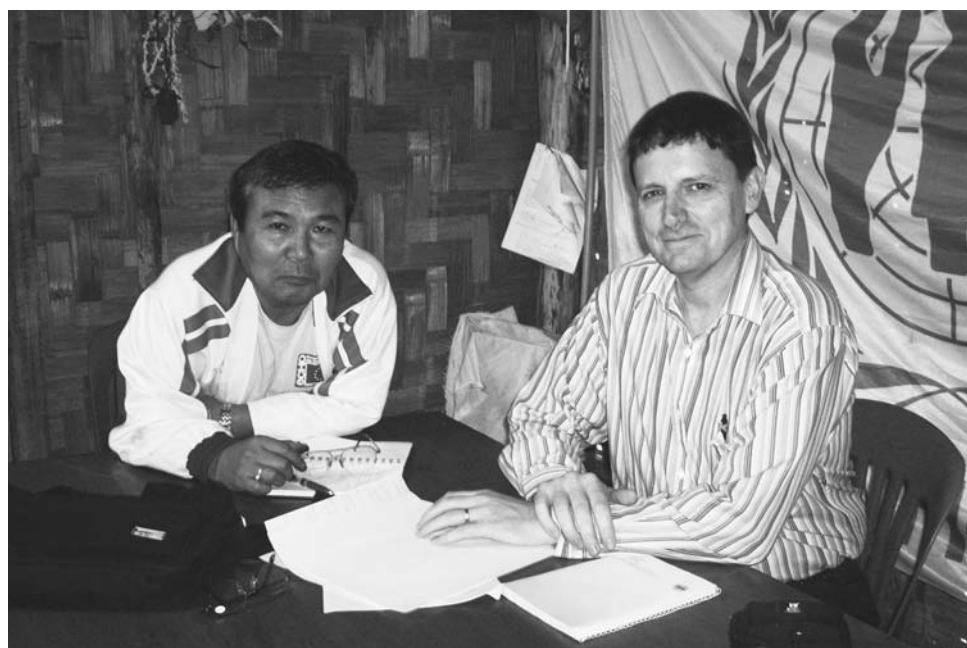
In May 2008, RCOA's CEO Paul Power was invited by the Asia-Pacific Philanthropy Consortium (APPC) to participate in the APPC's conference in Hanoi, Vietnam on the topic "Diaspora Giving: An Agent of Change in Asia Pacific Communities?". The conference highlighted the role that diasporas, including former refugees from countries such as Vietnam, are playing in supporting development and humanitarian programs in their countries of origin.

The conference also provided Paul the opportunity to return via Thailand to visit the Mae La and Umpium refugee camps on



■ Mae La refugee camp, Thai-Burma border.

the Thai-Burma border and to see the work of UNHCR and IOM in processing and preparing people for resettlement. The visit highlighted the lack of access for asylum seekers to refugee status determination processes in Thailand and some of the many challenges involved in resettlement. These include the difficult choices refugees face in choosing whether or not to resettle, the impact of resettlement on remaining populations and the many logistical problems involved in preparing people for resettlement. The visit was well-timed, giving Paul an opportunity to see the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program being delivered by IOM trainers immediately prior to RCOA's first deployment of visiting settlement advisers to the AUSCO program in Malaysia and Thailand.



■ RCOA CEO, Paul Power (right), with Saw Wah Htee, chairperson of camp committee, Umpium refugee camp, Thai-Burma border.



information and community education

RCOA's work in building public awareness of refugee issues continued in 2007-08 through a variety of public events, through the publication of newsletters and email bulletins, an active website and involvement with national and local media. In addition, RCOA staff, board members and volunteers participated in and spoke at a wide variety of public events, forums and training sessions.

Refugee Week 2008

Refugee Week 2008 was held across Australia from June 15 to 21, coinciding with the international celebration of World Refugee Day (June 20). The theme of Refugee Week 2008 was 'A Place to Call Home', a theme which encouraged Australians to think about our common obligation to people who have no secure home, and connected with UNHCR's World Refugee Day focus on refugee protection.

RCOA's role in coordinating Refugee Week included producing a national poster and other information materials, encouraging organisations to hold local celebrations and promoting Refugee Week events to the media. The Refugee Week 2008 poster featured a photograph by Cassandra Mathie of the Dut family, refugees from Sudan now settled in Brisbane.

Refugee Week 2008 was more successful than ever with more than 140 events held across Australia's eight states and territories. These included local festivals, celebrations of music and creative arts, film screenings, sharing of refugees' personal stories, seminars on issues of refugee protection and settlement, citizenship ceremonies, sporting events, open days and information sessions about refugee services, launches of new reports and resources, formal dinners and receptions, award ceremonies and fundraising activities for refugee programs.

Official launches of Refugee Week were held in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. At the Sydney launch, the keynote speaker, SBS sports broadcaster Les Murray, told the story of his escape from Hungary as an 11-year-old and his pride in the achievements of refugees who have settled in Australia. At the Adelaide launch at the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia (MRCSA), the Lieutenant Governor of South Australia, Hieu Van Le, spoke of fleeing devastation in Vietnam 30 years ago and the role Australia has played in providing a new home for 700,000 refugees over the past 60 years. The Victorian launch, held in conjunction with the Emerge Festival, included a digital photo exhibition by Viv Mehes called 'Made in Australia', on the theme of Hope, Complacency, Power and Consequence. In Brisbane, a major World Refugee Day celebration was held at Annerley, coordinated by VORTCS, the St Vincent de Paul Society's refugee tutoring program.

RCOA greatly appreciates the financial support given to Refugee Week by Victorian Multicultural Commission, AMES Victoria, NSW AMES, NSW Community Relations Commission, ACL, Leichhardt Council and Mallesons Stephen Jaques, as well as the involvement and support of MRCSA, VORTCS, the Victorian Government and the City of Sydney.

Refugee Welcome Zones

In 2002, RCOA began encouraging local government authorities to declare their districts Refugee Welcome Zones, to



Sports broadcaster Les Murray tells of his escape from Hungary as an 11-year-old, at the NSW launch of Refugee Week 2008.



foster understanding of Australia's positive role in refugee protection. During 2007-08, this initiative continued to grow with four NSW Councils signing the pledge to become Refugee Welcome Zones – Dubbo, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie Hastings and Penrith. This increased the total number of councils around Australia to declare themselves Refugee Welcome Zones to 68.

In June 2008, Bankstown City Council in NSW of its own accord formally adopted RCOA's Refugee Charter. The Council is the first local government authority in Australia to adopt the 12-point Refugee Charter developed by RCOA in 2004. The Charter outlines principles of refugee protection, based on the provisions of international conventions and agreements. The Council has translated the Charter into Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Dinka, Farsi and Vietnamese.

Monthly e-bulletin

RCOA's monthly email bulletin was increasingly recognised as an important source of information on refugee issues. The free monthly bulletin gives an overview of current issues, coming events, new publications and sources of information and a summary of refugee issues in the media. Each month, RCOA receives numerous requests to be added to the mailing list. During 2007-08, the number of people and organisations receiving the bulletin increased by 50 per cent to around 2600.

Website

The increasing interest in information on matters of refugee policy was reflected in 2007-08 by a 30 per cent increase in visits to the RCOA website. The website, which had around 85,000 visitors during the year, includes information on Australian refugee policy, current issues of concern, submissions, reports, media releases, bulletins, employment and volunteering opportunities, coming events and links to the websites of RCOA members. Towards the end of 2007-08, RCOA began work on revamping the website, updating content and improving the presentation and organisation of the site. This work is done with pro-bono assistance from Brett Enman Webdesign and financial support from AMES Victoria.

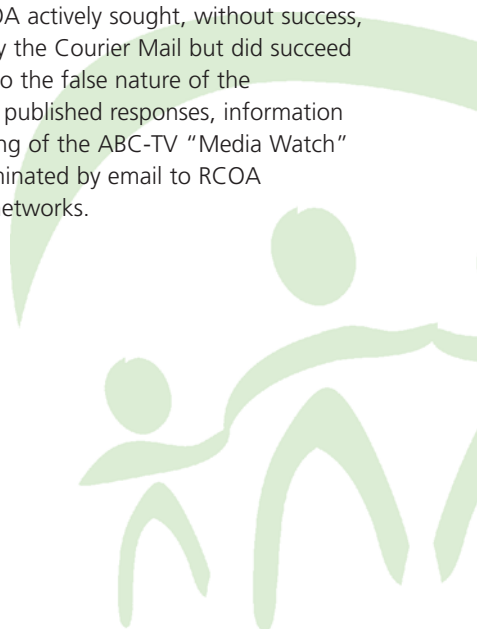
Work with the media

As the national umbrella body for organisations working with refugees, RCOA is often a first point of contact for media organisations researching articles on refugee policy matters. During 2007-08, RCOA had hundreds of contacts with the media, giving interviews on many matters of asylum policy and refugee resettlement and referring journalists and researchers to appropriate contacts within its membership or to other refugee

community organisations and service providers.

RCOA's contact with the media also included raising concerns about reporting of inaccurate or false information concerning refugees. One particularly persistent myth about refugees – a false claim that a single refugee receives \$1458 more per month in social security benefits than an aged pensioner – was widely promoted by email and appeared dozens of times in the media during 2007-08, particularly in newspaper letters pages and on talkback radio. RCOA responded to many media outlets which published this information and featured accurate information on this matter on its website.

Perhaps the most blatant example of a media outlet publishing and refusing to correct false material was the publication in June by Brisbane's Courier Mail newspaper of its claim that "taxpayers would be forced to pay thousands of illegal immigrants the dole" under a policy being considered by the Australian Government. RCOA actively sought, without success, to get the article retracted by the Courier Mail but did succeed in drawing public attention to the false nature of the newspaper's claims, through published responses, information on the RCOA website, briefing of the ABC-TV "Media Watch" program and material disseminated by email to RCOA supporters and community networks.



Mayor, Councillor Greg Davies, with RCOA National Policy Director, Anna Samson (second right), and council and community representatives at the June 2008 declaration of Penrith City as a Refugee Welcome Zone.

support for our work

As a small not-for-profit organisation with no source of core funding, RCOA has to rely on support from a diverse range of sources to maintain its work. In 2007-08, our income came from:

Australian Refugee Foundation	\$123,100	35%
Federal Government contract	\$65,123	19%
Training and consultancies	\$46,725	13%
Grants from non-government sources	\$35,840	10%
Membership fees	\$29,290	8%
State government grants	\$25,000	7%
Public donations	\$24,105	7%
Interest and other income	\$1,332	-
TOTAL	\$350,515	

Just over half of RCOA's income (\$177,827 or 51%) was untied income, received in donations from the Australian Refugee Foundation or supporters, membership fees and interest. This income enabled RCOA to continue its core work of being a national representative voice for Australians concerned about refugee issues – vital for an organisation which has survived without core funding since 2001. The remainder (\$172,688) came in grants for specific projects or fees for consultancies.

The Australian Refugee Foundation

The Australian Refugee Foundation was established in 1997 to support the work of the Refugee Council and to build the organisation's capacity to act as an independent voice for refugees. The Foundation's aim is to secure and manage funds so as to maximise the long-term benefits to RCOA and is

accomplished under the supervision of its Board of Trustees. In 2007-08, James Altman, David Bitel, Lionel Conyer, John Gibson, Valerie Grogan AM (until June 2008), Quang Luu and Barbara Young AO served as Trustees. The Patrons of the Australian Refugee Foundation are the Rt Hon Sir Zelman Cowan AK GCMG GCVO, the Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser AC CH and Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO.

The Australian Refugee Foundation is registered with the Australian Taxation Office as a charitable organisation and gifts of \$2 and over are tax deductible. Members and friends of the Council are encouraged to remember the Foundation when considering donations and when making plans for wills and bequests. Further information about the Australian Refugee Foundation can be obtained from the Refugee Council.

Grants, contracts and consultancies

The main grants, contracts and consultancies received by RCOA during 2007-08 were from:

- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (\$65,123) for the community consultation and submission on Australia's 2008-09 Refugee and Humanitarian Intake;
- Caritas Australia (\$22,000) for a study of refugees' views on protection issues;
- International Organization for Migration (\$19,176) for the Australian Cultural Orientation exchange with settlement service providers;
- Victorian Multicultural Commission (\$20,000) for Refugee Week;
- Foundation for Young Australians (\$14,740) for research on issues faced by young refugees; and
- AMES Victoria (\$10,000) for Refugee Week.

The research projects funded by Caritas Australia and the Foundation for Young Australians will be completed during 2008-09.

Donations and memberships

Donations and memberships provided \$53,395 in income for RCOA in 2007-08. Continued public financial support is vital to the organisation maintaining its role and independence. Tax-deductible donations to the Council, or through the Australian Refugee Foundation, are always gratefully received. For more information about donations, contact our Sydney or Melbourne offices or visit our website – www.refugeecouncil.org.au



Aliyah (left) studies in Kabul, Afghanistan after her family's return from Pakistan.

Photo: UNHCR/N. Behring.



our members

In 2007-08, membership of the Refugee Council of Australia grew to the highest level in the organisation's 27-year history. The number of organisational members increased by 29 and individual memberships by 56 to take total membership to 319. This represents a 120% increase in membership in just two years. As at June 30, 2008, RCOA had 125 organisational members and 194 individual members (including three honorary life members).

RCOA's organisational members include community-based organisations formed by refugees and humanitarian migrants and agencies involved in settlement services to recently-arrived refugees, legal assistance and practical support to asylum seekers, torture and trauma services, international development and humanitarian programs, and advocacy on refugee issues and social policy.

Members are a vital part of the organisation. They elect RCOA's Executive Committee and have direct input into the organisation's priorities.

In this annual report, we give a brief snapshot of some of the organisations which make up our membership.

Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre, Brunswick, Victoria
*Contact person: Margaret Gibson, Chairperson –
aswc@uniting.com.au / (03) 9388 2459*

The Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre was established in response to the growing need for support for asylum seekers in the community and for refugees on temporary protection visas. The Centre is particularly focused on providing support to asylum seekers who are living in the community without any Government support, without work rights and who do not have the right to Medicare.

In addition to providing migration advice, the Centre offers a space where refugees and asylum seekers can socialise and support one another. The Centre also runs a number of programs including English language tutoring, a community dinner program and group activities for young people, women, children and men. Staff and volunteers at the centre also provide casework, referral, information and employment advice and assistance.

The Centre has also been an active voice lobbying for the rights of community-based asylum seekers and has worked in collaboration with a number of asylum seeker support agencies to raise awareness in the broader community about the issues faced by asylum seekers.

Activities 2007-08

In 2007-08, the Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre continued to assist clients from a wide range of countries and backgrounds. This assistance included the establishment of a community garden designed and maintained by asylum seekers. The Centre also received funding to publish a cook book featuring the recipes of asylum seekers who have contributed to and attended the Community Dinner program.

To assist the constant stream of asylum seekers requiring legal advice, the Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre has been fortunate enough to receive funding to employ a part-time migration agent. Funding has also been received to employ a part-time volunteer coordinator.



our members

Throughout the 2007-08 period, the Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre has received considerably more publicity which has significantly boosted the profile of the Centre and encouraged more volunteers to donate their time.

Edmund Rice Centre, Mirrabooka, WA

Brother Steve Bowman, Director

<http://www.edmundricecentremirrabooka.com> / (08) 9440 0625

The Edmund Rice Centre, established by the Christian Brothers in 1998, works to support newly arrived refugees and Indigenous families living in and around Perth. In addition to casework, referral and counselling services, the Edmund Rice Centre also runs an extensive range of programs including settlement services, English language tuition, classes in computer literacy, cooking, sewing, arts and crafts, driver education, life skills, women's programs, youth focused programs including leadership and sporting programs.

Activities 2007-08

World Youth Day this year presented a unique opportunity for the Edmund Rice Centre to coordinate and bring together people from across the globe at a Young Adult Justice Gathering. Over four days, those in attendance participated in workshops and discussions on issues of social justice, indigenous rights and international issues.

In May, the Centre also held a 'Harmony Camp' that brought together more than 60 adults and young people from a variety of cultural backgrounds to promote inclusion, learn about local Indigenous history and language and engage in a range of fun activities and multi-faith services.

Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency in Australia (HARDA), Flemington, NSW

Contact: Hassan Omar, Chairperson

<http://www.harda-australia.com/> (02) 8762 4227

HARDA'S mission is to unite refugees and migrants from all Horn of Africa countries living in Australia, through their community leaders, in order to act as a strong and effective advocate and lobbyist for their issues and concerns, both domestic and international. Since forming in 2003, HARDA's activities have focused on preserving the culture of Horn of Africa countries (Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda and Djibouti) while working to assist the settlement and integration of refugees from this region in Australia.

HARDA also has a strong advocacy role with a particular focus on issues affecting young people, issues of social justice, reconciliation, equity, relief programs, community capacity building and poverty-reduction.

Activities 2007-08

During the course of 2008, HARDA has partnered with the University of NSW to undertake *The Horn of Africa Refugee Settlement Survey*. The Refugee Council of Australia is proud to support this project, which aims to:

- develop indicators and benchmarks for successful refugee settlement across the key areas of education, health, social integration and social cohesion from the perspectives of refugees, service providers and policy makers; and



■ Edmund Rice Centre, Mirrabooka 2008 Harmony Camp



■ *Girls and volunteers attending the HARDA camp*

- identify the role that settlement services, mainstream services, the voluntary and community sector and refugee communities play in facilitating successful settlement, including examples of best practice, gaps and ineffective service provision.

The first report of the survey was presented to NGOs in Geneva in June this year and HARDA and UNSW are currently making an application to the Australian Research Council for further funding to conduct the survey nationally from 2009 through to 2011. Further information about the survey can be found at www.harda.unsw.edu.au.

In April this year, HARDA held a Youth Camp and Community Project with 37 teenage boys from the Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. The camp involved numerous outdoor activities, a citizenship project and many informative and interactive workshops. A few months later in June, HARDA also held a camp for 29 teenage girls for various Horn of Africa countries to promote inclusion, build self-esteem and provide some educational workshops on women's health and other issues.

Migrant Resource Centre of Northern Tasmania, Launceston, Tasmania

Contact: Melinda Seow, CEO
www.mrcltn.org.au (03) 6331 2300

Established in 1982, the Migrant Resource Centre of Northern Tasmania provides a range of services to established communities and newly arrived refugees and migrants settling in the northern parts of Tasmania. The MRC provides information, referral and counselling services, provides support to emerging communities, raises awareness of the issues and needs of refugee and migrant communities to mainstream services and advocates on behalf of clients and the community. The MRC also plays a strong role in providing input to policy development and promoting a greater appreciation of cultural diversity in the broader community. Launceston and surrounding areas have welcomed a diverse range of newly

arrived refugees from Bhutan, Burma, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan over the past few years.

Activities 2007-08

The Migrant Resource Centre of Northern Tasmania ran a number of interesting projects throughout the 2007-08 period.

The SGP-funded mentor driving program has been strengthened with additional funding from the Motor Accidents Insurance Board (MAIB) to purchase a dual controlled vehicle so that volunteer driving mentors can safely assist clients build up their practice hours. A project that has significantly helped new families with their settlement is the MRC supported playgroup which provides pre-school age children with a wide range of culturally appropriate developmental and socialization activities. Children and parents have enjoyed a supportive environment and activities that enhance their knowledge and skills. The playgroup has also increased the communities' awareness of



■ *Children from MRC supported playgroup*

our members

services that are available; how to access these services; and how to influence the way these services are delivered. The MRC's youth worker has been busy collaborating with local police to build mutually understanding relationships between police and the youth, and hopefully to encourage more young people to consider the police force as a career option. The African Youth Choir has continued to be a much-appreciated musical force in Launceston and has provided a wonderful opportunity for its members to showcase their talents and act as ambassadors for their communities. In May 2008, the first Bhutanese entrants arrived in Launceston. The MRC has enjoyed supporting this brand new community and as usual owe a great debt of gratitude to its volunteers. Early indications are that the Bhutanese are settling well.

Refugee and Immigration Legal Service (RAILS), West End, Qld

Sonia Caton, Director

<http://www.rails.org.au/> (07) 3846 3189

The Refugee and Immigration Legal Service is Queensland's specialist refugee and immigration community legal centre. RAILS provides drop-in and telephone advice sessions. It takes on genuine cases of highest need to DIAC, the Migration and Refugee Review Tribunals and, on occasion, to the Federal courts. The service has operated since 1980 and is supported by over 100 dedicated volunteers.

RAILS undertakes law reform activities and provides community legal education to refugee and migrant communities and workers. It coordinates advice on refugee family reunion, including outreach to refugee settlement services in Logan and Toowoomba.

Activities 2007-08

The demand for RAILS services has dramatically increased, in line with the growth in numbers of permanent and temporary visas being issued and the need for former refugees to sponsor family members to Australia. Despite resource challenges, RAILS continues to achieve a high number of positive decisions and forge strong relationships with refugee communities.

RAILS community education activities in 2007-08 included:

- Training in regional Queensland to lawyers, migration agents, community workers and members, on refugee, domestic violence and family reunion matters
- A legal education program for new and emerging refugee communities, in partnership with Allens Arthur Robinson
- A week-long Community Knowledge legal education program for Sudanese community leaders.
- An innovative legal education project with young people at Milpera, Yeronga and Sunnybank High Schools, using art to involve young refugees and migrants in discussing Australian law and its values.
- A Family Peace Project to assist emerging communities of refugees to gain greater awareness of: Australian family law; the handling of domestic violence and child protection matters; the roles of males and females, spouses, parents and children in Australian families.
- A pilot Citizenship Education program to assist people to pass the citizenship test.
- Hosting, with the Environmental Defender's Office, the Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services annual conference, focusing on the theme 'A Climate of Change.'



■ Sudanese refugee women at Touloum, Chad. Photo: UNHCR/H.Caux



RCOA members

Honorary Life Members

H.E. Professor Marie Bashir

Major General Paul Cullen (died 19 September 2007)

Harold Grant

Tuong Quang Luu

Organisational Members

*A Just Australia, Glebe NSW

ACCES Services Inc, Woodridge Qld

Afghan Refugee Women's Network, Fitzroy Vic

Ahmadiyya Muslim Association of Australia Inc, Marsden Park NSW

AMES, Melbourne Vic

Anglicare North Coast Incorporated, Grafton NSW

Anglicare Sydney, Parramatta NSW

*Armidale Sanctuary Humanitarian Settlement, Armidale NSW

Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors Inc, Perth WA

*Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, West Melbourne Vic

*Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre, Brunswick Vic

Asylum Seekers Centre, Surry Hills NSW

Auburn Migrant Resource Centre, Auburn NSW

Austcare, Camperdown NSW

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, Canberra ACT

*Australian Council for International Development, Deakin ACT

Australian Council of Trade Unions, Melbourne Vic

Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, Sydney NSW

Australian Forum for Minorities in Bangladesh Inc, Claremont Meadows NSW

Australian Kurdish Association, Blacktown NSW

Australian Lutheran World Service, Albury NSW

*Australian National Committee on Refugee Women, Kensington NSW

Australian Refugee Association, Underdale SA

*Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre, Parramatta NSW

*Benarrawa Community Development Association Inc, Graceville Qld

Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre, Blacktown NSW

*Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia, Lakemba NSW

Canberra Refugee Support Inc, Canberra ACT

Canterbury-Bankstown Migrant Resource Centre Inc, Campsie NSW

Caritas Australia, Alexandria NSW

Catholic Immigration Office, Sydney NSW

Catholic Religious Australia, Annandale NSW

*Centacare Sydney, Fairfield NSW

Centacare Tasmania, Moonah Tas

Centre for Multicultural Pastoral Care, Paddington Qld

Centre for Multicultural Youth, Carlton Vic

Centre for Refugee Research – University of NSW, Kensington NSW

Centrecare Incorporated, Perth WA

Coalition for Asylum Seekers Refugees and Detainees, Perth WA

Community Qld Inc, Bardon Qld

*Companion House, O'Connor ACT

Community Relations Commission of NSW, Sydney NSW

Diversitat, Geelong Vic

Ecumenical Migration Centre, Fitzroy Vic

Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, Croydon NSW

Edmund Rice Centre, Mirrabooka WA

*Equatoria Community Welfare Association, Prospect NSW

Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, Cabramatta NSW

Fremantle Multicultural Centre, Fremantle WA

Friends of the Earth Australia, Fitzroy Vic

*Gowrie Community Services (WA), Cloverdale WA

*Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency, Croydon NSW

Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project, North Melbourne Vic

Illawarra Multicultural Services Inc, Wollongong NSW

Immigrant Women's Speakout Association NSW Inc, Harris Park NSW

*Immigration Advice and Rights Centre, Sydney NSW

International Commission of Jurists – Australian Section, Sydney NSW

*International Society for Human Rights, Thomastown Vic

Jesuit Refugee Service, Kings Cross NSW

Jesus Family Centre, Cabramatta NSW

Justice and Freedom for Ceylon Tamils Inc, Dandenong Vic

Lao Community Advancement (NSW) Co-operative Ltd, Cabramatta NSW

Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre, Liverpool NSW

Macarthur Diversity Services Inc, Campbelltown NSW

Melbourne Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, East Melbourne Vic

Mercy Refugee Service, Lewisham NSW

Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, Mirrabooka WA

*MigrantLink Australia, Hornsby NSW

*Migrant Resource Centre of Northern Tasmania, Launceston Tas

Migrant Resource Centre North West Region, St Albans Vic

Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia Inc, Adelaide SA

Migrant Resource Centre (Southern Tasmania) Inc, Hobart Tas

*Mission Australia Newly Arrived Youth Support Service, Cabramatta NSW

Multicultural Development Association Inc, South Brisbane Qld

Multicultural Information Network Service, Gympie Qld

*Multicultural Services Centre of WA, North Perth WA

National Council of Churches in Australia, Sydney NSW

New Hope Foundation Inc, Prahran Vic

Northern Settlement Services Limited, Newcastle NSW

NSW Refugee Health Service, Liverpool NSW

*NSW Teachers Federation, Surry Hills NSW

Oromia Support Group in Australia, Noble Park Vic

Oxfam Australia, Carlton Vic

Pratt Family Foundation, Melbourne Vic

Public Interest Law Clearing House, Melbourne Vic

RCOA members



Pe Chits Sein (left) and Henriette Shembo participate in the life skills program conducted by Edmund Rice Centre, Mirrabooka (WA), one of the projects featured in "Empowering Refugees: A Good Practice Guide for Humanitarian Entrants".

- *Uniting Justice Australia, Sydney NSW
- Victorian Arabic Social Services, Broadmeadows Vic
- Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, Brunswick Vic
- Victorian Multi Ethnic Slavic Welfare Association, Melbourne Vic
- Victorian Multicultural Commission, Melbourne Vic
- *West Coast Refugee Sanctuary Group, Greenwood WA
- *Western Sydney Community Forum, Parramatta NSW
- *Young Christian Workers (Parramatta), Granville NSW
- *YWCA of Australia, Dickson ACT
- *New member in 2008-09

Individual Members

- Maureen Adamson
- Joan Addison
- James Altman
- *Ian Anderson
- *Robyn Andrew
- Chris Ansted
- *Mary Banfield
- *Beck Barnett
- *Petrina Barson
- *Andrew Bartlett
- Ruth Beltran
- *Ross Betts
- Susie Biljuh
- Gray Birch
- *Wendy Birman
- David Bitel
- Robert Blackburn
- *Sarah Blegg
- Philip Bliss
- John Blount
- *Julie Bogotto
- Kathleen Boland
- *Sue Bolton
- Suzanne Bouchier
- Kim Boyer
- John Brentnall
- Linda Brightford
- Bernard Broughton
- Anne Brown
- Jennifer Bryce
- *Jennifer Burn

- Queanbeyan Multilingual Centre, Queanbeyan NSW
- Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma, Woolloongabba Qld
- Red Cross Australia, North Melbourne Vic
- Refugee Advice and Casework Service, Surry Hills NSW
- Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, Fitzroy Vic
- Refugee and Immigration Legal Service, West End Qld
- *Refugee Claimants Support Centre, Windsor Qld
- *Romero Centre, Buranda Qld
- *St Bede's Social Justice Group, Braidwood NSW
- St George Migrant Resource Centre, Rockdale NSW
- St George Youth Services, Rockdale NSW
- St Vincent de Paul Society, Deakin ACT
- Salvation Army, Sydney NSW
- *Sanctuary Refugee Foundation, Coffs Harbour NSW
- *Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), Carramar NSW
- South Australian Refugee Health Network, Adelaide SA

- South East Region Migrant Resource Centre, Dandenong Vic
- Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre Inc, Preston Vic
- Spiritus – Anglican Refugee and Migrant Service, Annerley Qld
- Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, Springvale Vic
- *Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families, Corrimall NSW
- Sudanese Liaison Office Australia Inc, Dandenong North Vic
- Sudanese Online Research Association, Melbourne Vic
- Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service (STTARS), Bowden SA
- Sydney Multicultural Community Services, Daceyville NSW
- The Smith Family Community Settlement Services, Burwood NSW
- *Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Service, Toowoomba Qld
- Townsville Multicultural Support Group Inc, Aitkenvale Qld
- United Nations Association of Australia, Canberra ACT
- Uniting Care Cutting Edge, Shepparton Vic
- Uniting Church National Assembly, Sydney NSW



Robin Burns
Elaine Butler
*Michaela Byers
Alison Caddick
Marion May Campbell
*Rosemary Campbell
Carolyn Carter
*Chris Cartledge
Michael Cashman
Henry and Mary Chan
*Elliott Coates
Bernard Collaery
*Cath Connor
Lionel Conyer
Bernard Cooney
Rosemary Cork
Peter and Linda Crawford
Mary Crock
Aileen Crowe
*Ann Curthoys
Hilary Da Costa
John Dargavel
Heather Dawson
Sky de Jersey
Mary Justine de Merindol
Jillian Dellit
*Patricia Dunn
Jenny Ellis
*Marie Emerson-Gill
Ruth Farmer
*Helen Fenbury
Barbara Ferguson
*Claire Foley
*Andrew Freeman
Penny Fry
Michael Gale
*Cindy Gallois
*Cath Garvan
Luke Geary
*Katy Gerner
John Gibson
Helen Glass
Andrea Goldsmith
Diane Gosden
Keren Gould
Michael Grainger
Valerie Grogan
Catherine Guinness

*Vandra Harris
*Andrew Harrison
*Johanna Hart
*Wendy Harte
Riaz and Selva Hassan
Jan Ho
*Lydia Ho
Katie Holmes
Richard Home
*Julia Horne
Matthew Howard
Andrew Hugh
*Gerri Hughes
Peter and Julia Hutten
Heather Johnson
Kate Johnson
Ann-Mari Jordens
Ulrike Kalthaus
Antigone Kefala
*Meredith Kefford
*Andrew Kenyon
Gaik Khong
Carol Klooger
*Susan Kneebone
*Graham Knell
Natasha Layton
Marion Le
Dorothy Leeder

*Richard Lefroy
Pamela Lemoine
Helen Light
Penelope Little
David Lloyd
*Jennifer Lock
George Lombard
*Jacqueline Lorber-Kasunic
*Kathleen Luchetti
Vicki Lynar
William Maley
*George Mansaray
*Julie Marcus
*Sarah Mares
John Marlton
*Thomas Mautner
Elaine Mayer
*Gay McAuley
Sandra McCullough
John McLean
*Scott McQuire
Susan Metcalfe
*Grant Mitchell
Mary Moore
Peter Morgan
Sharyn Munro
John Murphy
Kerry Murphy



Somali refugees preparing for repatriation from Ethiopia receive ID papers.

Photo: UNHCR/B. Heger



RCOA members



- *Michael Savic
- Marian Sawyer
- *Sonya Schmidt
- *Elizabeth Scott
- Madeleine Selwyn
- Susan Sheridan
- Nizza Siano
- *Jeff Siegel
- *Francesca Smullen
- Virginia Spate
- *Val Stafford
- Erika Stahr
- Gary Steadman
- Harvey Stern
- Jennifer Strauss
- Sabaratham Sundaramourthy
- Keith Suter
- Colin Tefler
- *Patrick Thomas
- Janet Thompson
- Sally Trevena
- Lina Varon
- Eileen Wahab
- *Virginia Walker
- *Amalina Wallace
- Elizabeth Walpole
- Renate Watkinson
- Sanjula Weerasinghe
- Graham Wells
- *Cameron White
- *Graham Whitley
- *Aija Wilson
- *Stephen Winter
- Sylvia Winton
- Peter Yeldham
- Barbara Young
- *New member in 2007-08*

Former refugees who have returned from Bangladesh to Burma learn vehicle maintenance as part of a program conducted by UNHCR and Bridge Asia Japan.
 Photo: UNHCR/C.Schwetz

- Jan Noakes
- *Carmel O'Dwyer
- *Kate Orman
- *Ali Elawad Osman
- Fortunee Ovidia
- Michael Pearce
- Jennifer Perry
- *Melissa Phillips
- *Cathy Preston-Thomas
- *Peta Price
- *Susanne Provis
- Margaret Ralph
- Mark Raper
- Sheridan Roberts
- Philippe Roussel
- Gillian Rubinstein
- *Joanne Russell
- Nouria Salehi
- *Nati Sangiau
- *Ramdas Sankaran





financial report

Refugee Council of Australia Inc – ABN 87 956 673 083

Profit and Loss Account – For the Year Ended 30 June 2008

	2008 \$	2007 \$
Income		
Fees	46,725	13,346
DIAC Contracts	65,123	89,990
Donations from ARF	123,100	102,742
Interest income	1,309	893
Member subscriptions	29,290	12,950
Grants	60,840	120,054
Donations	24,105	24,818
Other income	23	213
Total income	350,515	365,006
Less: Expenses		
Auditors remuneration	2,000	1,256
Bank charges	825	617
Board & meeting expenses	13,323	12,109
Computer expenses	736	3,420
Consulting and professional fees	435	4,723
Depreciation	4,243	5,483
Electricity and water	1,787	624
Insurance	2,624	2,602
Office rentals	24,977	7,255
Leave pay	2,972	(758)
Recruitment costs	824	1,730
Office relocation	–	4,021
Postage	2,173	2,669
Printing and stationery	6,680	12,553
Rates and taxes	526	246
Refugee Week Grants & other expenses	14,728	19,704
Registration fees	1,226	2,038
Repairs and maintenance	406	3,006
Salaries	234,553	242,708
Subscriptions	2,182	2,751
Sundry expenses	5,149	7,025
Superannuation contributions	20,679	21,454
Telephone and fax	9,666	10,484
Travel – domestic	7,864	6,228
Workers compensation insurance	2,141	3,283
Total Expenses	362,719	377,231
Profit before income tax	(12,204)	(12,225)



financial report

Balance Sheet – 30 June 2008

	2008 \$	2007
ASSETS		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	107,166	32,745
Trade and other receivables	30,590	14,313
Total current assets	137,756	47,058
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	8,662	11,915
Total non-current assets	8,662	11,915
Total Assets	146,418	58,973
LIABILITIES		
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	22,210	31,660
Short-term provisions	12,554	9,582
Other current liabilities	106,128	-
Total current liabilities	140,892	41,242
Total Liabilities	140,892	41,242
Net Assets	5,526	17,731
EQUITY		
Retained earnings	5,526	17,731
Total Equity	5,526	17,731

Audited financial statements

The Refugee Council of Australia accounts for 2007-08 were audited by DFK Laurence Varnay, Chartered Accountants, Sydney. The audited financial statements are available from the Refugee Council's Sydney office or online at www.refugeecouncil.org.au





**Refugee Council
of Australia**

How to contact the Refugee Council

Refugee Council of Australia

National Office:

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010

Ph: (02) 9211 9333

Fax: (02) 9211 9288

Email: info@refugeecouncil.org.au

www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Victorian Office:

81-85 Barry Street, Carlton VIC 3053

Ph: (03) 9348 2245

Fax: (03) 9342 9799

Email: melbourne@refugeecouncil.org.au

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Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

