



refugee  
council of  
australia

**annual  
report  
2010/11**



[www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)

Front cover: Ayan, 16, is one of more than 60,000 people who have fled war-torn south-central Somalia for Galkayo, in Somalia's Puntland region. Her goal is to teach the sewing skills that she has learned to other displaced girls from poor families so they can provide for their families. © UNHCR / R.Gangale

# Acknowledgements

The Refugee Council of Australia would like to acknowledge the generous support of the following organisations and individuals for the work of the Council during 2010-11:

## Funding support:

- AMES Victoria
- Amnesty International Australia
- Australian Cultural Orientation Program, IOM
- Australian Refugee Foundation
- City of Sydney
- Department of Immigration and Citizenship
- Leichhardt Council
- McKinnon Family Foundation
- Navitas
- NSW AMES
- NSW Community Relations Commission
- SBS
- Victorian Multicultural Commission

## In-kind support:

- Majak Daw
- Friends of STARTTS
- Yalda Hakim
- Carina Hoang
- Host 1 Pty Ltd
- Gracia Ngoy
- Pitt Street Uniting Church
- Nicholas Poynder
- Timothy Seeto
- Shaun Tan
- UNHCR Regional Office, Canberra
- University of NSW
- Najeeba Wazefadost
- Webcity

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# President's Report

The 2010-11 financial year proved to be one of the most challenging and difficult for national refugee policy, in the 30-year history of the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA). The year began in July with the formal commencement of the 2010 Federal election campaign, in which asylum seeker policy was debated in an extraordinarily destructive and divisive way. This, unfortunately, set the tone for the political and public debate for the entire year, as the leaders of the two main political parties battled to outdo each other with the harshness of their rhetoric about asylum seekers arriving by boat.

The shrill national debate was in contrast with the international realities of asylum. In June 2011, UNHCR released its annual statistics for 2010, which showed that Australia received just 1.0 per cent of the 1.06 million requests for asylum globally during the year. RCOA's analysis of UNHCR statistics since 1990 showed that, while the 10,955 asylum claims received in Australia in 2010 was higher than previous years, it was only the fifth highest annual total for Australia over the previous two decades.

The low point of the year was the shocking shipwreck on the coast of Christmas Island on December 15, in which at least 30 asylum seekers lost their lives. This tragedy highlighted the difficult choices facing many asylum seekers and refugees in the Asia-Pacific region and the pressing need for nations in the region to work together collectively to provide better protection for people fleeing persecution.

The year included some steps forward on refugee policy and many steps backward. Steps forward included the end of the six-month suspension of Afghan asylum claims, a considerable expansion of community detention arrangements for children and their families, the passage through the House of Representatives of legislation on complementary protection and very positive dialogue about regional refugee protection needs through the Bali Process. On the negative side, we saw the many damaging aspects of long-term indefinite detention for thousands of asylum seekers, the establishment of new detention centres in four states and territories and the Australian Government's decision to push ahead with a bilateral agreement with Malaysia to swap asylum seekers for resettled refugees.

Throughout the year, RCOA was very active in taking issues, ideas and concerns to senior Australian Government decision-makers, through dozens of meetings with Parliamentarians and senior Departmental officials. As the year progressed and the numbers of asylum seekers in detention for extended periods of time increased to record levels, many of the policy concerns raised by RCOA related to the indefinite nature of mandatory detention and its impacts on those detained. By 20 May 2011 (the last date for which detention statistics were released in 2010-11), the number of asylum seekers in detention had grown to 6520, of whom only 564 were in community detention. Of those in immigration detention, 68 per cent had been detained for more than six months. This growth in immigration detention had many effects, most particularly an alarming growth in rates of self-harm and many complications in the settlement process for people given permanent protection after extended periods of detention.

In the public discussion of refugee policy, in our submissions and statements and in our private discussions with the Government and with Parliamentarians, we maintained our focus on three key points our membership wanted to see reflected in government policy:

- An end to the indefinite nature of mandatory detention, with any period of detention for asylum seekers who arrive without a visa limited to identifying risks associated with identity, health and security.
- A serious focus on building regional cooperation in Asia-Pacific on refugee protection, not on Australia shifting its responsibilities for asylum seekers to neighbouring states.
- An end by the major political parties to the destructive debate about asylum seekers, which was continuing to undermine public confidence in Australia's refugee and humanitarian program.

In our annual submission to the Australian Government on the 2011-12 refugee and humanitarian program, we looked at issues for refugees in the Asia-Pacific region and outlined a series of strategies for regional cooperation on refugee protection. The issues which prompt asylum seekers to move on to Australia by boat, we emphasised, are complex regional and international issues and cannot be solved by simplistic unilateral moves by Australia which focus purely on national political objectives. The submission was based on views gathered through a national consultation process, which received strong support from RCOA member organisations in all states and territories.

During 2010-11, RCOA completed another nine public submissions to the Federal Government, in which we put our members' views regarding detention policy, settlement policy, human rights issues and the need for an Asia-Pacific regional refugee protection framework. We also gave direct feedback to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to its requests for feedback on the Settlement Grants Program, Complex Case Support and Departmental policies relating to children. Through presentations, letters, participation in formal meetings and private discussions, we provided input to a variety of Federal and State agencies about aspects of public policy which impact on refugees and asylum seekers.

In November, RCOA's Annual General Meeting was held in Queensland for the first time. While in Brisbane, RCOA also listened to members at a number of public forums and consultations. Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Kate Lundy, was guest speaker at the AGM and also attended a public forum on settlement issues. Senator Lundy commended the work of RCOA and its members as providing "a social dividend from which all Australians benefit".

A highlight of the year was RCOA's involvement with the University of NSW, UNHCR and other agencies in the staging of a conference in June to mark the 60th anniversary of the Refugee Convention. The conference drew 550 delegates from across Australia, the Asia-Pacific region and beyond, bringing together perspectives from former refugees and policy experts to reflect on many aspects of international and national support for refugees and asylum seekers.

RCOA's public profile was further enhanced with the unveiling of our new website, which provides improved access to statistics, publications and our submissions to government, as well as information on Refugee Week and A Just Australia. Refugee Week was our most successful on record with more than 200 events held throughout Australia. RCOA is increasingly using social media, like Facebook and Twitter to share positive stories about refugees in our communities and to mobilise support for events and campaigns.

The public financial support of RCOA's work in 2010-11 was higher than for any other year in the organisation's history. Our membership grew from its previous historic high in 2009-10 by 15 per cent to 717 – 150 organisations, 563 individual members and four honorary life members. Public donations grew by 14 per cent to \$98,877, a level which is more than double that received in 2008-09 or any year previous to that. Total income from memberships and donations exceeded \$145,000. RCOA's capacity to provide quality research and thinking on matters of refugee policy was supported by the Government's decision to increase core funding through DIAC to \$140,000. It is encouraging to see that the Government sees the value of fearless and constructive advice in what remains such a contested and often difficult area of public policy.

In November 2010, the RCOA Board and staff finalised a strategic plan for the five years to 2015. This plan is now informing all aspects of our work, supporting us in our efforts to work simultaneously on national and international matters of refugee policy, on public engagement and on building organisational capacity. We are indeed fortunate to have such an effective staff team, led by CEO Paul Power, supported by teams of interns and volunteers and by the active involvement of RCOA members. I am privileged to lead a Board which brings together much expertise on different aspects of refugee policy and ably reflects the diversity and energy of our membership.

While the year provided many reasons for despair, this annual report illustrates that, in 2010-11, RCOA and its members worked harder than ever. We remained true to the principles developed by RCOA's founders 30 years ago, in times when refugee policy involved many challenges but was much less controversial than it is now. Regardless of the external pressures and the many unwelcome controversies, we will continue to work tirelessly and constructively to seek the fairest possible treatment of people forced to flee their homelands because of persecution.

**John Gibson**  
*President*

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is a national, not for profit organisation with more than 700 organisational and individual members. Formed in November 1981, RCOA's purpose is to promote the adoption of humane, lawful and constructive policies towards refugees, asylum seekers and displaced persons by the Australian and other Governments and their communities.

To achieve this purpose, the RCOA has a number of key aims:

- (a) To act as a unifying organisation and to represent its members.
- (b) To promote the empowerment of refugee communities and individuals in Australia and internationally and support the capacity building of Australia's refugee sector.
- (c) To monitor, research and present information on issues relating to the needs and circumstances of refugees and asylum seekers.
- (d) To assist governments and inter-governmental organisations to formulate policy and improve support and services for refugees and asylum seekers.
- (e) To increase public awareness and media sensitivity towards refugees and asylum seekers.

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 offering protection and legal advice to refugees and asylum seekers.

RCOA maintains close ties to many international organisations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), Asia-Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) and refugee councils in other countries. Since 2009, RCOA has had Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. In 2011-12, RCOA is the NGO Focal Point for the global Working Group on Resettlement and the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement. 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, APRRN and ACFID.

## Strategic plan 2011-2015

In November 2010, the RCOA Board adopted a five-year strategic plan for the organisation. The plan is based around five goals and 17 objectives related to these goals:

### 1. Promoting better opportunities and improved services and support for refugees settling in Australia

- 1.1 Provide opportunities for refugee services and community organisations to inform RCOA about key settlement issues and to share information on issues, policy and practice.
- 1.2 Support refugee community representatives in their efforts to raise community concerns and ideas.
- 1.3 Conduct research into high priority refugee settlement issues, exploring examples of good practice in responding to the issues identified.
- 1.4 Maintain constructive dialogue with government on issues facing refugee and humanitarian entrants and the services which support them.

### 2. Promoting fairer government policies people seeking asylum in Australia

- 2.1 Maintain networks to provide members and supporters with opportunities to inform RCOA's work on asylum policy issues.
- 2.2 Monitor and conduct research into critical issues affecting people seeking asylum in Australia.
- 2.3 Maintain constructive dialogue with government on asylum policy issues.

### 3. Promoting more effective systems of international protection for refugees and asylum seekers

- 3.1 Gather information from national and international networks on issues of international refugee protection relevant to Australian policy and communities in Australia.
- 3.2 Maintain constructive dialogue with UNHCR and (as appropriate) other governments and international bodies on relevant refugee protection and resettlement issues.



*The Sierra Leone Cultural Performance Group performing at the Sydney launch of Refugee Week 2011 at Pitt Street Uniting Church.*

### 4. Promoting increased public support for refugees

- 4.1 Provide information on refugee issues to members, supporters and the general public, including through regular publications, websites, social networking and (as appropriate) emerging technologies.
- 4.2 Engage with the Australian media, encouraging balanced reporting of refugee and asylum issues and giving RCOA's perspectives on relevant issues of public interest.
- 4.3 Provide opportunities for supporters to become actively involved in supporting the work of RCOA and its members.
- 4.4 Inform Australians about international protection needs and enhance support for Australia's continued involvement in refugee protection and resettlement, through public activities (e.g. Refugee Week), awareness-raising strategies (e.g. promotion of Refugee Welcome Zones), presentations and provision of information to the public.

### 5. Enhancing the capacity of RCOA to achieve its organisational goals

- 5.1 Strengthen the financial viability of RCOA and ensure compliance with legal obligations.
- 5.2 Increase public financial support through membership and fundraising, working closely with the Australian Refugee Foundation.
- 5.3 Maintain an effective staff team, supported by a human resources strategy which monitors workload and provides appropriate training and support to staff.
- 5.4 Increase the board's capacity to undertake its roles in governance, policy setting and representing a diverse, national membership.

## **Executive Committee 2010-11**

### *President*

John Gibson  
Barrister-at-Law  
Principal, International Refugee  
Consulting, Melbourne Vic

### *Vice President*

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

### *Chairperson*

Esta Paschalidis-Chilas  
Program Manager, Child and Family  
Services, Metro Migrant Resource  
Centre, Marrickville, NSW

### *Immediate Past President*

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

### *Secretary*

Sky de Jersey  
Individual RCOA member, Sydney NSW

### *Treasurer*

Lionel Conyer  
Member of Institute of Chartered  
Accountants in Australia, Sydney NSW

## **Executive Committee members**

Maureen Adamson  
*Individual RCOA member, Hobart Tas*

Paris Aristotle AM  
*Director, Victorian Foundation for  
Survivors of Torture, Melbourne Vic*

Elizabeth Biok  
*Solicitor, Legal Aid Commission of NSW  
Member, International Commission of  
Jurists, Sydney NSW*

Sonia Caton  
*Migration agent, Brisbane Qld*

Phil Glendenning  
*Director, Edmund Rice Centre for Justice  
and Community Education, Sydney NSW*

Kevin Liston (to November 2010)  
*Team Leader, Community Capacity  
Development, Refugee Services, Families  
SA, Adelaide SA*

Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin  
*Manager, Settlement Partnerships, AMES  
Victoria, Melbourne Vic*

Jenny Semple  
*Director, South Eastern Region Migrant  
Resource Centre, Dandenong Vic*

Dr Judyth Watson  
*Board member, Coalition for Asylum  
Seekers, Refugees and Detainees, Perth  
WA*

Bobby Whitfield  
*Member, Queensland African  
Communities Council, Brisbane Qld*

## **Staff 2010-11**

As at 30 June 2011, RCOA had three  
full-time and four part-time staff

*Chief Executive Officer (Sydney)*

Paul Power

*Research Coordinator (Melbourne)*

Rebecca Eckard

*Communications Manager (Sydney)*

Kate Gauthier (until November 2010)

Sophie Peer (from December 2010)

*Information and Policy Officer (Sydney)*

Lucy Morgan

*Settlement Policy Coordinator*

*(Melbourne)*

Louise Olliff

*Administration and Projects Manager  
(Sydney)*

Eileen Wahab

*Accounting Officer (Sydney)*

Martyn Green

## **Volunteers and interns 2010-11**

Alicia Alford

Dora Anthony

Christie Britten

Phoebe Calder

Yu-yin Chang

Catheryn Cheetham

Amelia Christie

Carmen Dafner

Amie Davidson

Bethany Downes

Leila Druery

Anne-Line Giudicelli

Sanjib Goswami

Lydia Ho

Eliza Hovey

Clare Howell

Geraldine Hughes

Amanda Kami

Willow Kellock

Alisha Mathew

Luke McCann

Christopher Moysa

Tanya Muscat

Lucinda Nobis

Fitriana Nur

Serkan Ozturk

Alexandra Phfal

Johanna Power

Jaana Quaintance

Carly Saeedi

Rebecca Stanley

Ivy Susanti

Stella Szonn

Louise Marie Thorlund Nielsen

Ben Wandei

Jo Williamson

# Refugee settlement policy

To work towards the first goal in its strategic plan – to promote better opportunities and improved services and support for refugees settling in Australia – RCOA cooperated actively with member agencies, refugee communities and other peak bodies on seeking improvements to settlement support for recently arrived refugees. RCOA's work in this field was based on wide consultation with communities and settlement support agencies and active engagement with Federal and State government bodies.

## Submission on 2011-12 refugee program

In November and December 2010, RCOA conducted national consultations in preparation for our annual submission on Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program. Consultations were held in each State and Territory and incorporated feedback from more than 230 people, representing refugee and humanitarian entrants from at least nine different countries of origin and representatives from almost 100 organisations. In addition, discussions were held with 10 key NGO representatives from South-East and South Asia. The submission, presented to Immigration Minister Chris Bowen in January 2011, made 28 recommendations to the Australian Government. The recommendations addressed: planning of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program; developing a sustainable regional protection framework; humanitarian and family

reunion; and public discourse on Australia's refugee policies. The submission also identified a number of priority issues relating to refugee settlement and onshore protection.

## AGM in Brisbane

RCOA launched its consultation process with three meetings in Brisbane in November, held in conjunction with the RCOA Annual General Meeting. It was the first time RCOA had held its AGM in Queensland and the event was strongly supported by Brisbane-based members. Senator Kate Lundy, Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship, attended the AGM delivering a speech in which she acknowledged the valuable contribution to Australia of former refugees and of RCOA and its member organisations.

RCOA's engagement with Senator Lundy on refugee settlement issues began soon after her appointment as Parliamentary Secretary in September. RCOA president John Gibson presented a 10-point plan to Senator Lundy, highlighting the need for government action on family reunion processes, access to employment, housing affordability, support for young people and support for refugee and humanitarian entrants who would like to settle in regional areas.

## National Settlement Policy Network

The quarterly Settlement Policy Network teleconference provides an opportunity for members of RCOA and the Settlement Council of Australia to participate in planning joint advocacy on settlement issues.

Four teleconferences were held in 2010-11:

- Life after immigration detention: exploring the settlement experiences and challenges faced by former detainees
- Settlement and mobility
- The search for representation: Issues and ideas for migration advice in Australia
- Impact of Public Discourse on Australia's Refugee Policies.

Life after immigration detention brought together 30 participants from throughout Australia and discussed a range of issues including: settlement patterns, impacts of detention on settlement, mobility and access to services, employment, family reunion and separation, choice of resettlement location, young people, torture and trauma services and community detention alternatives. The Settlement and mobility teleconference discussed the need for accurate data on the mobility trends of recently-arrived humanitarian entrance as well as the push and pull factors relating to cities and regional areas.

## Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program, 2010-11

- Offshore refugee visas: 5,998
- Offshore Special Humanitarian visas: 2,973
- Onshore protection and humanitarian visas: 4,828
- Total refugee and humanitarian visas: 13,799
- Primary countries of origin for offshore refugee and humanitarian entrants were Iraq (2,151), Burma (1,443), Afghanistan (1,027), Bhutan (1001), Democratic Republic of the Congo (565), Ethiopia (381), Sri Lanka (289), Iran (271), Sudan (243) and Somalia (190). Regions of origin were Middle East and South-West Asia (39.9%), Asia (34.7%), Africa (25.1%), Europe and the Americas (0.3%).
- Countries of origin for onshore protection visas were Afghanistan (1,395), Iran (702), Stateless (501), Iraq (365), Sri Lanka (358), China (315), Pakistan (222), Zimbabwe (172), Egypt (142), Fiji (87), Other 559.

## Australia's refugee and humanitarian arrivals since Federation

Refugee arrivals 1901 to 1947 (estimate)	20,000
Offshore refugee and humanitarian arrivals 1948 to 2010	702,520
Asylum seekers recognised as refugees before 1996 (estimate)	15,000
Onshore protection visas issues 1996 to 2010	37,259
<b>Total</b>	<b>774,779</b>



*Refugees from Côte d' Ivoire rest at a school in Janzon, Liberia. As of late March 2011, more than 100,000 Ivorian refugees had crossed into eastern Liberia after violence erupted in Côte d' Ivoire in February.*  
© UNHCR/G. Gordon.

## Release of research reports

In July 2010, RCOA released three research reports on resettlement issues:

- What Works: Employment strategies for refugee and humanitarian entrants
- A Bridge to a New Culture: Promoting the participation of refugees in sporting activities
- Finding the Right Time and Place: Exploring post-compulsory education and training pathways for young people from refugee backgrounds in NSW.

The reports were launched by NSW State MP, Graham West, at Parramatta Town Hall.

## Contact with communities and interagencies

During the year, in addition to the annual consultation process, RCOA participated in meetings with a wide variety of refugee communities and community organisations including: Ahmadiyya Muslim Association of Australia; Australian Afghan Hassanian Youth Association; Bhutanese Community of Australia; Banyamulenge community; T'wic community; Association of Bhutanese in Australia; Hazara Women of Australia; Focus on African Development (Somali); Eritrean Australian Humanitarian Aid; the Sudanese community; and the Tamil community. Interagency meetings of NGOs working with refugees provide valuable information about issues of concern and examples of good practice. RCOA staff and interns participate regularly in interagency meetings in NSW and Victoria and keep in contact with networks around the country.

## Engagement with government agencies

During 2010-11, RCOA took up numerous opportunities to raise some of the many concerns of members about aspects of refugee settlement policy which needed greater attention. These opportunities include the formal bi-annual DIAC-NGO Dialogues (July and March) and regular meetings of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council, of which RCOA's CEO is a member. In response to requests from DIAC, RCOA responded to government discussion papers on the Settlement Grants Program, the Complex Case Support program for refugee families and the Department's review of its policies relating to children. RCOA staff also participated in formal DIAC meetings about orientation for refugees and provided input to meetings on the travel loans fund supported by DIAC and administered by the International Organization for Migration.

Centrelink is another important dialogue partner for RCOA. During 2010-11, RCOA staff participated in Centrelink's National Multicultural Advisory Group and gave several presentations to Centrelink staff on current settlement issues and on recent RCOA research. Other Federal agencies to which RCOA provided advice on request included the Department of Human Services and the Australian Securities and Investment Commission. RCOA's engagement with State Government bodies included participating in interagency meetings in NSW and Victoria and speaking at Victoria's Multiculturalism and Local Government conference in Wangaratta in August.

In September, RCOA wrote to the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to raise concerns about the impact of income management policies on refugee and humanitarian entrants in the Northern Territory. Many newly-arrived refugee and humanitarian families receive support from Newstart while they complete English language training or study for additional qualifications, meaning

they are automatically captured under the compulsory income management regime. RCOA expressed its concern that applying income management to refugee and humanitarian entrants could hamper the positive settlement experience of many families.

## Submissions

In March, RCOA made a submission to the public consultation on the issues paper A Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia. The submission celebrated the contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia's economic, social and cultural life and their key role in building a sustainable future. It also highlighted strategies needed to support successful and sustainable settlement, the fundamentally unsustainable nature of Australia's mandatory detention policy, the detrimental impact of the public debate on the development of a sustainable refugee policy, the importance of maintaining the strong humanitarian focus of Australia's offshore resettlement program and the need for a regional protection framework to address the root causes of the movement of asylum seekers. The Strategy was released in May and acknowledged the need to provide adequate support to new arrivals through the provision of intensive settlement support.

In April, RCOA completed a submission for the Joint Standing Committee on Migration (JSCM's) Inquiry into Multiculturalism, welcoming the new national multicultural policy and making some recommendations including a call for the Government to investigate ways to provide public information and education on multicultural and migration issues, including information on refugees and asylum seekers. The need for specific refugee-related and multicultural components as part of a national curriculum was also raised. Other recommendations called on the Government to engage directly with refugee community diasporas in developing bilateral and multilateral relations in regard to economic development and human rights issues and for DIAC to articulate a more detailed settlement framework explaining the goals of the settlement program and the respective roles of each funding program.

## Australian Cultural Orientation program

Again, RCOA assisted the International Organization for Migration (IOM) AUSCO Exchange Program. Since 2008, RCOA has worked with DIAC and IOM to coordinate exchanges between AUSCO trainers and refugee settlement service staff. In October, trainers from Malaysia and Kenya were hosted for two weeks by agencies in Melbourne and Sydney. Nadine Liddy from the Melbourne-based Centre for Multicultural Youth and Mohamed Baaruud from STARTTS in Sydney were also chosen to participate in the Exchange. The pair hosted AUSCO trainers and arranged meetings with representatives of refugee settlement and specialist youth services in Victoria and New South Wales and travelled to Malaysia, Kenya and Ethiopia to provide input to local AUSCO teams. The Exchange Program continues to strengthen



*Participants in an Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) training session in Bangkok, December 2010.*

the links between pre-arrival and post-arrival orientation programs for refugees through the exchange of personnel, focusing on issues faced by refugees from the Middle East.

The call for Expressions of Interest to agencies to participate in the AUSCO Program generated a strong field of applications for guest trainers to design and deliver settlement services and training programs for refugees and humanitarian entrants from the Middle East. Agencies selected to participate were: Navitas ACL and Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau (SCAAB). The two guest trainers nominated by these agencies were Daria Rzasa from ACL and Albert Aliander from SCAAB who were sent to Lebanon and Turkey.

## Engagement with other peak bodies

RCOA maintains close and highly cooperative relationships with other peak bodies, particularly those involved in other aspects of multicultural policy. During 2010-11, RCOA worked closely with the Settlement Council of Australia, sharing information on matters of refugee settlement policy, co-chairing a members' network to discuss matters of common concern, assisting SCOA in its involvement in the 2010 Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement in Geneva and giving practical organisational support to SCOA. RCOA's relationship with the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is also strong, with both organisations providing office space for staff of the other organisation during 2010-11 (FECCA in Canberra and RCOA in Sydney) and participating in common meetings with recently arrived refugees. RCOA's CEO is a member of the Reference Group for the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), formalising a relationship which sees RCOA and MYAN work together on policy matters affecting refugee young people and in supporting the orientation of newly arrived refugees.

# Asylum policy

Promoting fairer government policies for people seeking asylum in Australia – the second goal in RCOA's strategic plan – proved to be the most challenging aspect of RCOA's work in 2010-11. The year's events were largely framed by the campaign for the August 2010 Federal election, in which tough rhetoric about asylum seekers arriving by boat featured very prominently in the statements of both major political parties. RCOA worked tirelessly to raise members' concerns about a number of key issues, including promoting alternative models which enabled government to maintain prudent management while ensuring fair treatment of asylum seekers. The key issues were the impacts of indefinite mandatory detention for asylum seekers arriving by boat, the serious delays in security clearances for refugees recognised by Australia, procedural fairness in the refugee status assessment process, the Government's complementary protection legislation, limited support levels for community-based asylum seekers, Australia's memorandum of understanding with Afghanistan on forced returns, the need for an Asia-Pacific regional protection framework and the impact of the negative debate about asylum seekers.

The year was marked by a series of tragedies for asylum seekers, including the loss of more than 30 lives in a shipwreck on the coast of Christmas Island in December, five suicides in detention and hundreds of serious incidents of self-harm. These tragedies highlighted the urgent need for action on improving refugee protection systems through Asia-Pacific regional cooperation and for fundamental change to Australian immigration detention policy.

## Engagement with members

Throughout 2010-11, RCOA remained in close contact with members and with people affected by Australia's asylum policies, coordinating teleconference and face-to-face meetings



*Amina fled the Libyan capital Tripoli with her son and husband after gangs looted their house and threatened them with violence. The Somali family sought refuge in Choucha transit camp in Tunisia, established by UNHCR to provide shelter for 15,000 migrant workers fleeing violence in Libya. © UNHCR/ A.Branthwaite.*

with members, participating in interagency gatherings of asylum seeker support agencies in Sydney and Melbourne, visiting detention facilities and sharing information by phone and email. The key forum for members continues to be the Asylum Policy Network, which meets by teleconference every two months and gives members an opportunity to have direct input into RCOA's advocacy strategies. On the critical issue of immigration detention, RCOA held a roundtable of member agencies and key informants on May 4, bringing together more than 40 people through teleconference hubs in five cities. This roundtable developed strategies on alternatives to indefinite detention, improving conditions for detainees and procedural fairness, which informed RCOA's advocacy.

## Raising concerns with government

The concerns of RCOA's membership were emphasised repeatedly through formal meetings, correspondence and private discussions with Parliamentarians and government officials and through submissions to Parliamentary and other inquiries. During the Federal election campaign, RCOA wrote to all Labor and Coalition candidates to put forward constructive policies based on alternatives to detention and the development of a regional cooperation framework on refugee protection. In the weeks after his appointment as Minister for Immigration and Citizenship in September, RCOA met Chris Bowen to outline RCOA's policy concerns and to suggest steps he could take as Minister. These and other concerns were taken up with the Minister on another four occasions during the year. In October and again in March, RCOA coordinated visits of RCOA members to Canberra to meet with Labor, Coalition, Greens and Independent MPs and Senators and ministerial advisers.

In addition, RCOA met DIAC officials regularly to discuss asylum policy concerns. These included formal meetings such as the bi-annual DIAC-NGO Dialogue on Humanitarian Issues and quarterly meetings of the Onshore Protection Consultative Group and the NSW Asylum Seeker and Refugee Forum. Additional meetings were held to discuss the Government's expansion of community detention and its plans to send asylum seekers to Malaysia. These meetings were followed up with numerous private meetings and regular correspondence.

In June, RCOA and other NGOs from Australia and New Zealand participated in a roundtable in Canberra on alternatives to detention which was organised by UNHCR and the International Detention Coalition. This roundtable was also attended by DIAC officials and representatives of the governments of New Zealand, the United States and the United Kingdom.

## The Universal Periodic Review process

In July, RCOA drew attention to human rights issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers in Australia by making a submission to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Through the Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process – an examination of the human rights records of all 192 UN Member states every four years – RCOA raised a number of concerns including: immigration detention, offshore processing of asylum claims, the treatment of children and unaccompanied

humanitarian minors, health requirements for humanitarian entrants, anti-people smuggling legislation, the expansion of the income management scheme; discrimination and human rights legislation. The UPR made 145 recommendations to improve Australia's human rights protections, among them a call for Australia to safeguard the rights of refugees and asylum seekers and honour its obligations under the Refugee Convention, particularly in relation to non-refoulement and the treatment of asylum seekers who arrive without visas. The UPR also urged Australia to review its mandatory detention regime by limiting detention to the shortest time necessary, improving conditions in detention, considering alternatives to detention and addressing the detention of children. The review also recommended Australia continue to work with countries in the region to strengthen regional refugee protection frameworks.

RCOA later lodged a submission with the Attorney-General's Department on recommendations made to Australia through the UPR process. In the submission, RCOA welcomed the recommendations relating to mandatory detention, excised offshore places, the incorporation of Australia's international human rights obligations into domestic law and the need for regional cooperation to address irregular movement. RCOA's submission also called on the Government to implement these recommendations. The Australian Government's response accepted 90 per cent of the recommendations but rejected key ones relating to mandatory detention and excised offshore places. RCOA was disappointed that some of the recommendations the Government accepted were made on the basis they were already reflected in Australian law and policy, when in practice they were not.

A visit to Australia in May by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, provided RCOA and other NGOs the opportunity to raise concerns about aspects of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers. In a roundtable of NGOs, Ms Pillay heard about the impacts of indefinite mandatory detention, the lack of procedural fairness for refugees who had been denied security clearances by ASIO, Australia's plans to export asylum obligations to neighbouring countries and the toxic national political debate over asylum. Ms Pillay later conveyed these concerns to political leaders and also raised them at a public forum in Sydney.

## **Immigration detention**

Government policies on immigration detention were a major focus of RCOA's advocacy during 2010-11. In September, the new Government signalled its intention to expand immigration detention, announcing a new centre at Scherger RAAF Base near Weipa in Queensland and plans to expand the Curtin facility in Western Australia. In September, RCOA wrote to Minister Bowen, urging him to review the Government's policy of indefinite mandatory detention for asylum seekers who enter Australia without a visa. RCOA asked the Minister to frame the Government's approach to all asylum seekers in line with its 2008 New Directions in Detention policy, which directs decision-makers to justify why a person should be detained rather than released to live independently in the community. Under this

policy, only those people who pose a demonstrable risk to the community should be detained. RCOA asked the Government to consider risk assessment models used in countries like the United States, Sweden, South Africa and New Zealand.

RCOA was further dismayed by the Government's announcement in March that it would expand immigration detention facilities in Darwin – a new 1500-bed centre at Wickham Point and an expansion of the Darwin Airport Lodge by 400 beds. RCOA pointed out that the expansion of detention centres was contrary to the Government's own detention policy for using such centres "as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time". Australia's approach remains at odds with detention policies successfully applied across Europe and North America where asylum seekers are released into community arrangements after identity, health and screening processes are undertaken. In April, the Government announced the development of another immigration detention facility – at Pontville, Tasmania – prompting RCOA to call on the Government to overhaul its immigration detention strategy instead of building new centres.

The escalating costs of maintaining an expanding immigration detention network and managing asylum seekers arriving by boat were outlined in a RCOA analysis of the Federal Budget. In 2011-12, immigration detention will cost \$800 million while \$1.058 billion was allocated to the Offshore Asylum Seeker Management program. Most of this allocation was budgeted to implement the mandatory detention policy. The allocation to this program has tripled in two years. RCOA also drew attention to the fact that the Australian Government's asylum policies had resulted in a 1400 percent increase in long-term detention in just one year. While the overall number of immigration detainees grew by 196 percent, those detained for longer than six months grew seven times faster – from 258 in March 2010 to 3901 in March 2011. RCOA reminded the Government it had been warned by its advisory bodies, mental health specialists and refugee organisations that an increase in long-term detention would result in more incidents of self-harm and increased unrest in detention centres.

RCOA released a statement in June, calling on the Australian Government to replace its policy of indefinite mandatory detention with one that uses detention purely for the purposes of managing genuine risk. The statement outlines a set of principles which should inform Australia's approach to immigration detention. These include restricting detention of asylum seekers to a maximum of 30 days in which time an analysis of identity, health and security checks can be undertaken; granting an appropriate bridging visa for those asylum seekers posing no risks and providing adequate support to live in the community; ensuring that anyone not released within 30 days has their case for continued detention reviewed independently; and presuming against the detention of children and families and working to develop a practical model that sees families undergo prompt health, security and identity checks.

The Federal Government made some progress in shifting children out of immigration detention. In June 2011, Minister Bowen announced that, since October 2010, 62 per cent of

children in immigration detention had been moved into community-based arrangements. He also announced the closure of the detention facilities at Virginia Palms in Brisbane and the Asti Hotel in Darwin. While this was welcome news, RCOA remained concerned that a large proportion of children continue to be held in immigration detention facilities more than eight months after the expansion of community detention started.

### **Submissions on detention issues**

In December, RCOA made a submission to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs Inquiry into the Commonwealth Commissioner for Children and Young People Bill 2010. In the submission, RCOA supported the establishment of a Federal Office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and strongly endorsed the mandate of the Commissioner to promote and protect the rights of children and young people in immigration detention or whose parents and guardians are in immigration detention, and to act as the legal guardian of unaccompanied minors. RCOA recommended that the Office of the Commissioner adopt practices that maximised the inclusion of children and young people from refugee, asylum seeker and humanitarian backgrounds and consult with community sector agencies that specialise in working with young people from multicultural backgrounds.

RCOA's submission in March to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security's Review of Administration and Expenditure in Australian Intelligence Agencies expressed concern about the length of time taken to complete ASIO assessments for people seeking refugee protection, the impact on individuals of adverse findings and the absence of any independent review mechanism or capacity to respond to a negative assessment. The submission recommended that the Government implement strategies to expedite security assessments relating to protection claims, ensure that all assessments are conducted within a reasonable timeframe, develop procedures to release from detention asylum seekers deemed not to pose a security risk, and amending legislation to allow Protection Visa applicants who have received a negative security assessment to appeal the decision.

In June, RCOA prepared a submission for the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee inquiry into the Migration Amendment (Strengthening the Character Test and Other Provisions) Bill 2011. RCOA took issue with the Bill in its entirety, advising that the proposed amendments would not "fix" the problem of unrest in detention centres but would likely do more harm to vulnerable groups. Instead of amending the character test, RCOA recommended the Government consider how to alleviate the pressures of immigration detention. Although the Committee acknowledged these concerns, it argued that DIAC had been able to clarify most of the issues and recommended the Bill be passed without amendment.

In June, RCOA supported many of the provisions of a Bill put forward by the Greens which sought to amend the Migration Act by repealing provisions relating to mandatory detention and excised offshore places, enshrining in law key principles to inform Australia's approach to immigration detention and introducing a

system of judicial review of detention beyond 30 days. RCOA welcomed the proposed amendments and made several recommendations for additional amendments, including the introduction of a requirement for security assessments for asylum seekers within a maximum time period and the inclusion of a clear time limit restricting immigration detention to a period of no longer than six months. RCOA's submission included detailed case studies and examples demonstrating the urgent need for reform of Australia's immigration detention policy.

### **High Court decision on refugee assessments**

On November 11, the High Court handed down a landmark ruling on Australia's offshore refugee status assessment process. The Court ruled that two Sri Lankan asylum seekers were denied procedural fairness in the review of their claims under the processing arrangements that applied to asylum seekers entering Australia through excised offshore territory. In a unanimous decision, the High Court ruled that any review of a refugee status assessment must be bound by the provisions of the Migration Act and the decisions of Australian courts. RCOA welcomed this decision as a critical step towards a fairer and more rigorous system. However, the Australian Government's response, in January, failed to address the fundamental unfairness of maintaining separate processes for asylum seekers who reach the Australian mainland and those who arrive through excised offshore territories. The Government announced a series of changes which sought to address the lack of procedural fairness in the processing of asylum applications under the excision policy while maintaining separate systems for applications managed through the mainland and excision processes.

### **Legislative and regulatory changes**

In September, the Australian Government lifted the suspension of asylum claims from Afghan citizens, ending an almost six-month freeze. There was further welcome news in November with the Government announcing that children and their families would be released progressively from immigration detention facilities. RCOA has long advised governments of alternatives to placing children and families in detention. RCOA welcomed the introduction of a new Bill designed to improve Australia's processes for protecting non-refugees from persecution and torture. The Migration Amendment (Complementary Protection) Bill 2011 established a formal administrative process for assessing the claims of persons who do not fit the Refugee Convention's formal definition of a refugee but who would still be at grave risk of persecution, torture or death if returned to their country of origin. It enabled asylum seekers to apply for protection on the basis they would suffer "significant harm" if returned to their country of origin. Prior to the introduction of the Bill, the fate of such people lay solely with the Immigration Minister who can consider the case only after a lengthy system of applications, refusals and appeals. The Bill was passed by the House of Representatives in May and was passed by the Senate in September 2011.

# International links

RCOA worked towards its third goal in its strategic plan – promoting more effective systems of international protection for refugees and asylum seekers – by active engagement with its members and involvement in international NGO networks on matters of mutual concern. Issues raised by members and by refugee communities in Australia were taken up by RCOA's International Policy Network through national and international contacts with UNHCR in cooperation with such international networks as the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network and the International Council on Voluntary Agencies. In 2010-11, RCOA prepared to take on the coordination in 2011-12 of NGO

involvement in the tripartite discussions (government, NGOs and UNHCR) on refugee resettlement.

## International Policy Network

In 2010-11, RCOA convened eight meetings of the International Policy Network. Three meetings were held in 2010, focusing mostly on feedback and outcomes from the 2010 UNHCR Standing Committee meeting, UNHCR-NGO Consultations and Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement. Network members discussed strategies for undertaking further research and advocacy on a range of issues arising from these meetings including the need for increased refugee representation at the meetings, strategies for implementation of resolutions, children at risk, urban refugee policy and the protection of people with a disability. The Network also coordinated Australian NGO involvement in the 2010 UNHCR Executive Committee meeting and discussed strategies to enhance Australian engagement with members of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network. Five meetings were convened between February and June 2011 to plan for UNHCR's June Standing Committee meeting, UNHCR-NGO Consultations and the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement.

## International dialogue on refugee resettlement

Throughout 2010-11, RCOA played a very active role in the international dialogue on refugee resettlement, as we prepared to take on the NGO Focal Point role for the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) and the Working Group on Resettlement (WGR). In July 2010, RCOA CEO Paul Power and Board members Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin and Paris Aristotle participated in the ATCR meeting in Geneva. Bringing together 85 government representatives from 32 countries, 47 NGO reps, 71 UNHCR staff and 11 other inter-government organisational reps, the overarching theme of ATCR was "Global Resettlement Needs: 10 of 100 resettled", with the Swedish Government (which chaired the meeting) repeatedly pushing the point that only 10% of the refugees identified by UNHCR as being in priority need of resettlement actually find resettlement places. Unfortunately, an attempt to push discussion about the need for governments to commit to more resettlement did not result in any additional commitments being made at the meeting. The conference had useful discussion and feedback on: settlement needs by region of the world; integrating protection into settlement practices; and the concept of "protection sensitive migration" as a complementary solution.

Paul Power represented RCOA at the January 2011 WGR meeting, as he prepared to take on the NGO Focal Point role from the 2010-11 focal point, Refugee Council USA. As the financial year closed, he was involved in a series of meetings with senior officials of DIAC's Humanitarian Branch to develop plans for Australia's chairing of the ATCR and WGR in 2011-12.

### UNHCR global refugee statistics, 2010

Refugees under UNHCR mandate	10.55 million
Refugees under UNRWA mandate (Palestinians)	4.82 million
<b>Total</b>	<b>15.4 million</b>
Internally displaced persons	27.5 million
Asylum seekers	837,478
Stateless persons (UNHCR estimate)	12 million

### Top host countries for refugees, 31 Dec 2010

1 Pakistan	1,900,621	8 China	300,986
2 Iran	1,073,366	9 United States	
3 Syria	1,005,472	of America	264,574
4 Germany	594,269	10 United	
5 Jordan	450,915	Kingdom	238,150
6 Kenya	402,905	46 Australia	21,805
7 Chad	347,939		

*Includes refugees under UNHCR mandate and people in refugee-like situations.*

### Asylum seekers recognised as refugees, 2010

1 Kenya	81,361	7 United States	19,043
2 Ethiopia	45,903	8 Liberia	18,273
3 Syria	22,223	9 Canada	12,305
4 Malaysia	22,050	10 Sudan	11,463
5 Congo	21,118	27 Australia	3,859
6 Yemen	19,520		

### Refugees resettled, 2010

1 United States	71,362	7 New Zealand	631
2 Canada	12,098	8 Finland	541
3 Australia	8,516	9 Denmark	495
4 Sweden	1,786	10 Germany	469
5 Norway	1,097	Others	
6 United Kingdom	715	(12 countries)	1,051

### Australia's role in refugee protection, 2010

	Global total	Australia	
Refugees being hosted	10,549,412	21,805	0.21% (46th)
Asylum applications	1,058,318	10,955	1.04% (25th)
Asylum seekers recognised	440,409	3,859	0.88% (27th)
Refugees resettled	98,761	8,516	8.62% (3rd)

## UNHCR Executive Committee

The 61st session of the UNHCR's Executive Committee was held in Geneva in October. RCOA president John Gibson attended the meeting as an NGO representative on the Australian Government delegation, along with James Thomson (Act for Peace Policy and Advocacy Director) and Carmel Guerra (Centre for Multicultural Youth CEO). RCOA Information and Policy Officer Lucy Morgan attended as an NGO observer. The meeting concentrated on the need to find durable solutions for refugees in protracted situations, the challenges posed by mixed migration flows and the need to support countries of first asylum in refugee protection practices. There was also considerable focus on refugees and other persons of concern with disabilities. During the meeting, Australia announced it intended increasing its core contribution to the UNHCR next year. In response, High Commissioner Antonio Guterres paid tribute to the role of Australia's civil society in protecting and supporting reintegration programs for resettled refugees.

## UNHCR NGO consultations

A team of Australian NGO and refugee community representatives travelled to Geneva in June to attend UNHCR's June Standing Committee meeting, annual NGO Consultations and a series of meetings with senior UNHCR officials and Geneva-based government representatives. The NGO Consultations brought together 415 NGO representatives from 73 countries and included discussion of refugee situations in different regions of the world, alternatives to detention, the role of faith-based organisations in refugee support, responses to the needs of urban refugees, statelessness among children and

youth, land and property rights for refugees who return home and the struggle for durable solutions for internally-displaced people. RCOA CEO Paul Power led discussions on overcoming barriers to resettlement within resettlement countries, as part of a forum on the use of resettlement as a protection tool. The highlight of the consultations was the involvement of 10 representatives of regional refugee women's dialogues. This was the first time that a significant and representative group of refugee women had played such an active role in the gathering while still living in difficult situations in countries of first asylum. The women also addressed the UNHCR Standing Committee in the week before the NGO Consultations.

As in previous years, RCOA worked with UNSW's Centre for Refugee Research in supporting refugee community representatives from Australia to take part in the UNHCR NGO Consultations and as NGO observers at the UNHCR June Standing Committee in the week prior. Parsuram Sharma-Luitai, president of the Bhutanese Community in Australia, and Wah Wah Naw, the representative of the Australian National Committee on Refugee Women, raised issues of concern to refugee communities in Asia through these formal meetings and through private meetings with senior officials UNHCR and the UN Human Rights Council.

## Third Asia Pacific Consultation on Refugee Rights

The third conference of the Asia-Pacific Refugee Rights Network was held in Bangkok in November, focusing on the theme Strengthening Local Effectiveness Together. RCOA CEO Paul Power attended the conference and presented at a workshop on building national networks for refugee rights.

Other key focus issues included: statelessness; urban refugees; durable solutions; regional approaches to refugee protection; immigration detention and barriers to refugee protection in South and South-East Asia.

After the conference, Paul travelled to the Thai-Burma border with Dr Graham Thom, Refugee Coordinator of Amnesty International Australia, to observe conditions in refugee camps, in temporary shelters for people newly displaced by the internal conflict within Burma and for Burmese nationals living without status in Thailand's border provinces.

## Asia Human Rights Forum

In February, the Asia Center for Human Rights in South Korea invited Rebecca Eckard, RCOA's Research Coordinator, to speak at its Asia Human Rights Forum in Seoul and to conduct a workshop for young human rights activists.

## Regional refugee protection concerns

During the 2010 Federal election campaign, RCOA coordinated a statement on behalf of 21 major Australian refugee support organisations and aid



*At the 2011 UNHCR-NGO Consultations in Geneva, RCOA CEO Paul Power presents a statement urging UNHCR to condemn the Malaysia transfer deal, developed during the 2011 Refugee Conference in Sydney, to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres.*

agencies, calling on the Government and Opposition to focus on international cooperation on refugee protection. The statement warned there was no quick fix to the complex causes of asylum seeker movements and emphasised that asylum issues cannot be resolved unilaterally. The statement outlined a set of minimum standards to which Australia's approach must adhere including compliance with all international human rights standards and rejection of approaches involving removal of asylum seekers from Australian territory for processing in a third country or detention of refugees in a third country.

The arrest and detention in Bangkok of 86 refugees and asylum seekers of Pakistani origin in December highlighted the difficulties faced by many people seeking protection from persecution. The 86 members of the Ahmadiyya faith – nearly all of them UNHCR-recognised or registered asylum seekers – were arrested in a dawn raid and taken to the Bangkok Detention Centre. At least 30 of the detainees were children. RCOA joined 25 other agencies from 13 countries in signing a statement condemning the actions of the Thai authorities and calling for the release of the arrested refugees and asylum seekers. RCOA also called on the Australian Government to help international efforts to secure their release, which happened in June.

In January, RCOA joined 46 other organisations and 16 individuals in expressing grave concerns over a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the governments of Afghanistan and Australia and the UNHCR. The MoU allowed for the involuntary repatriation of failed Afghan asylum seekers from Australia to Afghanistan, including unaccompanied minors and other Afghan children who had become separated from their families. RCOA highlighted the ongoing violence and security threats in Afghanistan and the continuing persecution faced by many Afghans, including members of the Hazara ethnic minority. The RCOA statement called on the Australian Government to address its humanitarian obligations and provide leadership and asylum for people fleeing from Afghanistan.

## Offshore policy revival

In May, Australia brokered an asylum seeker transfer deal with Malaysia, despite the Malaysian Government's record of mistreatment of asylum seekers and refugees. The deal would result in 800 asylum seekers who enter Australia by boat being sent to Malaysia in return for Australia resettling 4000 additional refugees from Malaysia over the next four years. RCOA was dismayed that Australia would enter into such an arrangement with a country which was not a Refugee Convention signatory and had a long record of abuse and mistreatment of people seeking protection, including arbitrary arrest, detention and caning of asylum seekers. RCOA strongly advocated for the development of a more effective regional framework to better address the protection needs of refugees – a framework based on the sharing of responsibility for refugees, not on Australia shifting its responsibilities to other nations. The Malaysia announcement was swiftly followed by confirmation the Australian Government was negotiating with



*Burmese refugees living in temporary shelters at Mae Kon Ken, near Mae Sot, Thailand, after fleeing post-election violence in Burma during November 2010. Pictured is Dr Cynthia Maung, founder of the Mae Tao Clinic which provides health services to displaced Burmese populations on the Thai-Burma border.*

Papua New Guinea to reopen a detention centre on Manus Island. RCOA expressed concerns that this represented a return to the Pacific Solution and that it undermined efforts to progress a regional refugee protection framework in South-East and South Asia.

In June, Australian NGOs called on the Australian Government and Opposition to abandon policies aimed at punishing asylum seekers and to instead focus on addressing protection concerns in South-East and South Asia. In a joint statement coordinated by RCOA, the 17 NGOs argued that neither indefinite detention in the Pacific nor sending asylum seekers to uncertainty in Malaysia could be presented as a just or credible response to the needs of people seeking refugee protection in Australia. The signatories urged policy makers to shift the focus from how to "stop the boats" to how to ensure that refugees in Asia-Pacific can receive effective protection. The statement recommended the Government and Opposition work cooperatively to develop a regional framework to protect people fleeing persecution. NGOs in Asia-Pacific and around the world joined the condemnation of the refugee transfer deal with Malaysia. The Asia-Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) expressed concern about the potential violation of Australia's obligations under the Refugee Convention and Malaysia's record of violating refugee rights. It called on Australia, Malaysia and UNHCR to work towards strengthening international commitments to the rights of refugees.

The Malaysia transfer deal figured heavily at the UNHCR-NGO Consultations held in Geneva in June. RCOA CEO Paul Power questioned Antonio Guterres about UNHCR's role in the proposed asylum seeker transfer deal between Australia and Malaysia. Mr Guterres replied that he was unsure whether UNHCR would support the deal, noting that the signing of the agreement had been delayed due to UNHCR being "intransigent in relation to a certain number of clear protection principles".

# Information and community education

RCOA's fourth goal in its strategic plan is to promote increased public support for refugees. In the current national environment, this is certainly a challenge but one to which RCOA devoted considerable resources during 2010-11. Throughout the year, our interaction with the media increased significantly. Not only did the organisation produce more media releases than ever before – 27 during the course of the year – but staff and Board members participated in hundreds of interviews with press, radio, television and online media. Much of our work with the media is focused on providing background information, relevant contacts and balanced perspectives, in an attempt to counter the many skewed opinions expressed publicly about asylum seekers and refugees.

A critical form of communication between RCOA and its members and supporters is the monthly email bulletin, which is sent directly to more than 3000 people and forwarded to thousands more. This bulletin provides a summary of changes in refugee policy, coming events, new research papers and opportunities for action, as well as a summary of media coverage of refugee issues over the previous month.

## Refugee Week

More than 200 events were held to mark Refugee Week in June, making it the most successful celebration on record. Events included film and documentary screenings, music, dance, art and photographic exhibitions, morning teas, sporting events, prayer services, seminars, information sessions, rallies, book and project launches, workshops and public forums. Major launches were held in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide with keynote speakers including UNHCR Canberra Senior Protection Officer Ellen Hansen, former refugee and Wollongong Young Citizen of the Year Gracia Ngoy, AFL North Melbourne player Majak Daw, former refugee Najeeba Wazefadost, author and former refugee Carina Hoang, RCOA President John Gibson and South Australia Minister for Multicultural Affairs Grace Portolesi.

The 2011 Refugee Week poster was designed by Shaun Tan, a Melbourne-based freelance artist and author, best known for his award-winning picture books such as *The Rabbits*, *The Lost Thing*, *The Arrival* and *Tales from Outer Suburbia*. Shaun was also the winner of an Academy Award for Best Short Animated Film for *The Lost Thing* and the prestigious Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

## Refugee Conference

The University of NSW hosted the 2011 Refugee Conference in June, bringing together more than 550 delegates from Australia and around the world, to reflect on past achievements, identify ongoing issues of concern and develop recommendations to be taken forward to the Australian Government and UNHCR. Conference highlights included the Refugee Women's Dialogue which brought together women from refugee backgrounds to discuss settlement challenges and strategies for reform. Other features included a Youth Forum and presentations. On the final day, delegates developed a statement urging UNHCR to condemn the proposed transfer

deal between Australia and Malaysia. The statement was presented to UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres at the UNHCR NGO Consultations in Geneva.

## Education resources

RCOA joined forces with SBS and Amnesty International Australia to develop a resource for secondary school teachers. The pack included information to dispel myths about asylum seekers and refugees and to provide factual and accessible information relevant to curriculum across the nation. Every school in the country received a pack, and a printable version was made available on our website. The pack was released to coincide with the SBS series, *Go Back To Where You Came From*. RCOA also worked with SBS and the production company Chocolate Liberation Front in the development of *Asylum: Exit Australia*, an online simulation of the asylum experience. The online simulation put the participant in the shoes of an asylum seeker, exposing the difficult situations and decisions that are faced by people who are forced to flee their home country.

## A Just Australia campaign

A Just Australia (AJA), RCOA's public campaign on asylum seeker issues, continues to provide updates and opportunities to support RCOA positions on critical issues. During the year, the AJA campaign focused particularly on immigration detention issues, inviting supporters to express their concerns to elected representatives. AJA also promoted constructive responses to common myths and misinformation about asylum seekers and refugees, as well as promoted and supported events in which individuals could take part, particularly during Refugee Week.

## Refugee Welcome Zones

RCOA approached local councils that have signed the Refugee Welcome Zone declaration to find out what policies, projects, activities and services they had implemented to welcome refugees to their communities. The information will be used to develop online resources to support councils who have become Refugee Welcome Zones. In June, Griffith City Council, became the 74th Refugee Welcome Zone. Griffith Mayor Councillor Mike Neville signed the Refugee Welcome Zone declaration at a Refugee Week event in June. Griffith is the 34th local government area in NSW to sign the declaration.

## New website

During the year, RCOA launched a new-look website. It provides better access to information on refugee and asylum issues, including RCOA publications, statistics, resource lists, personal stories from former refugees and responses to common myths. The sister sites for the A Just Australia campaign, Refugee Week and the Australian Refugee Foundation were also revamped. Thank you to John Hardaker and Brett Enman for their help in designing the website, and to Tim Seeto for providing IT support.

# Our organisation

The fifth and final goal of RCOA's strategic plan is to enhance the agency's capacity to achieve its organisational goals. In this regard, 2010-11 was a year of sound progress and growth – the stability of RCOA as an organisation being a positive contrast to the ever-changing and difficult environment in national refugee policy. The focus and sense of purpose of the organisation was enhanced by the completion in November 2010 of a five-year strategic plan for the organisation, which is providing the framework to plan and review all of RCOA's activities.

In November, the RCOA Board regretfully accepted the resignation of long-serving Board member, Kevin Liston, who stepped down after 16 years' service because of health reasons. Kevin has provided valuable guidance to the organisation, including nine years as Vice-President, drawing on more than 25 years' experience as a leader of the refugee sector in South Australia.

Also in November, RCOA farewelled our Communications Manager, Kate Gauthier, who went on leave prior to the birth of her second child. In June, she resigned to take up a position with the Australian National University's Migration Law Project. For six years, Kate played a pivotal role in national advocacy on asylum policy, for five years as National Coordinator of A Just Australia (AJA) campaign and then throughout 2010 as RCOA Communications Manager following AJA's merger into RCOA.



People displaced by violence in Libya wait for tents in a transit camp in Tunisia. More than 140,000 people fled into neighbouring countries in just two weeks after the violence erupted in Libya in February 2011, while thousands more were waiting to cross. © UNHCR / A. Ducloux.

During 2010-11, public support for RCOA's work continued to grow. In 2010-11, the membership of RCOA grew to its highest level in the organisation's 30-year history. Total membership grew by 88 to 717 – 150 organisational members (up from 141 in 2009-10), 563 individual members (up from 484 the previous year) and four honorary life members. RCOA's donation income in 2010-11 totalled \$98,877 – an increase of 14% on the previous year and 125% on 2008-09. Membership income also grew, with continued growth in organisation and individual membership contributing to a 37% increase on 2009-10 and 48% increase on the previous year.

## Our sources of income

RCOA relies on support from a diverse range of sources to maintain its work. In 2010-11, our income came from:

Donations and memberships	\$145,616	28%
Core funding from Federal Government	\$140,000	27%
Federal Government contracts	\$72,715	14%
Consultancies	\$68,570	13%
Grants from non-government sources	\$56,070	11%
State and local government grants	\$25,000	5%
Interest and other income	\$7,285	1%

**TOTAL** **\$515,256**

Apart from the core funding received from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the main grants, contracts and consultancies received by RCOA during 2010-11 were from:

- Department of Immigration and Citizenship (\$72,715) for the community consultation and submission on Australia's 2011-12 Refugee and Humanitarian Intake;
- International Organisation for Migration (\$65,070) for the Australian Cultural Orientation Program's exchange with settlement service providers;
- Australian Refugee Foundation (\$37,070) for the support of RCOA's research and policy work;
- Victorian Multicultural Commission (\$20,000) for coordination and promotion of Refugee Week in Victoria.

Other financial supporters of Refugee Week 2010 included SBS (\$5000), NSW Community Relations Commission (\$5000), City of Sydney (\$4000), NSW AMES (\$3000), AMES Victoria (\$3000), ACL (\$2500) and Leichhardt Council (\$1000).

## Add your support to our work

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](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)

## Honorary life members

Paul A. Cullen (deceased)  
Harold Grant  
Marie Bashir  
Rev G. S. Parish (deceased)  
Tuong Quang Luu  
Kenneth Rivett (deceased)  
Barbara Young

## Organisational members

\*4walls Ltd, Woolloongabba Qld  
ACCES Services Inc, Woodridge Qld  
Act for Peace (National Council of Churches), Sydney NSW  
ActionAid, Camperdown NSW  
\*Aftercare, Rozelle NSW  
Ahmadiyya Muslim Association of Australia Inc, Marsden Park NSW  
AMES Victoria, Melbourne Vic  
Amnesty International Australia, Broadway NSW  
\*Anglican Diocese of Adelaide, North Adelaide SA  
Anglicare North Coast, Grafton NSW  
Anglicare Sydney (Migrant Services), Parramatta NSW  
Anglicare WA, Perth WA  
\*Arcadia University, Carlton Vic  
Armidale Sanctuary Humanitarian Settlement, Armidale NSW  
Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors, Perth WA  
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, West Melbourne Vic  
Asylum Seeker Welcome Centre, Brunswick Vic  
Asylum Seekers Centre, Surry Hills NSW  
\*Asylum Seekers Christmas Island, Christmas Island WA  
Auburn Diversity Services, Auburn 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, Alexandria NSW  
Australian Karen Foundation, Upper Ferntree Gully Vic  
Australian Karen Organisation, Guildford NSW  
Australian Lutheran World Service, Albury NSW  
Australian National Committee on Refugee Women, Sydney NSW  
Australian Red Cross, North Melbourne Vic  
Australian Refugee Association, Underdale SA  
Balmain for Refugees, Balmain NSW  
\*Bhutanese Community in Australia, Hadfield Vic  
\*B'nai B'rith Australia/New Zealand, Kings Cross NSW  
Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia, Lakemba NSW  
Canberra Refugee Support Inc, Weston Creek ACT  
Caritas Australia, Sydney NSW  
\*CASE for Refugees, Perth WA  
Catholic Immigration Office Sydney, Liverpool NSW  
Catholic Religious Australia, Sydney NSW  
CatholicCare Sydney, Annandale 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 (WA), Perth WA  
Coalition for Asylum Seekers Refugees and Detainees, Perth WA  
Community Qld Ltd, Bardon Qld  
Companion House, O'Connor ACT  
Diversitat, Geelong West Vic  
Ecumenical Migration Centre (Brotherhood of St Laurence), Fitzroy Vic  
Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, Homebush West NSW  
Edmund Rice Centre, Mirrabooka WA  
\*Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Edgecliff NSW  
Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, Cabramatta NSW  
Foundation House (Victorian Foundation of Torture and Trauma Survivors), Brunswick Vic  
Fremantle Multicultural Centre, Fremantle WA  
Friends of the Earth Australia, Fitzroy Vic  
\*God's Dwelling Place Bethany City Church Inc, South Hurstville NSW  
Good Shepherd Mission and Justice, Abbotsford Vic  
Gowrie Community Services (WA), Karawara WA  
Horn of Africa Relief and Development Agency, Homebush West NSW  
Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project, North Melbourne Vic  
\*House of Welcome, Carramar NSW  
Illawarra Multicultural Services, Wollongong NSW  
Immigrant Women's Speakout, Harris Park NSW  
Immigration Advice and Rights Centre, Sydney NSW  
International Commission of Jurists, Australian Section, Haymarket NSW  
International Society for Human Rights, Thomastown Vic  
Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, Kings Cross NSW  
Jewish Aid, Malvern Vic  
\*Josephite Community Aid, Seven Hills NSW

\*Life Without Barriers, Rockdale NSW  
 Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre, Liverpool NSW  
 Liverpool Women's Health Centre, Liverpool NSW  
 \*Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services, Bendigo Vic  
 \*Lutheran Community Care, Kilburn SA  
 Macarthur Diversity Services, Campbelltown NSW  
 Melaleuca Refugee Centre, Nightcliff NT  
 Melbourne Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office, East Melbourne Vic  
 \*Mercy Family Services, Banyo Qld  
 Mercy Works Inc, Lewisham NSW  
 Metro Migrant Resource Centre, Campsie NSW  
 Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre, Mirrabooka WA  
 \*Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, Canberra ACT  
 Migrant Resource Centre Northern Tasmania, Launceston Tas  
 Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia, Adelaide SA  
 Migrant Resource Centre of Southern Tasmania, Hobart Tas  
 Milpera State High School, Chelmer Qld  
 Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Justice and Peace Centre, Erskineville NSW  
 Multicultural Development Association, Woolloongabba Qld  
 Multicultural Services Centre of WA, North Perth WA  
 \*Multilink Community Services Inc, Logan Central Qld  
 \*Nepean Migrant Access, St Marys NSW  
 New Hope Foundation, Prahran Vic  
 \*New Life Christian Fellowship, Narrabri NSW  
 Northern Settlement Services, Hamilton NSW  
 NSW Community Relations Commission, Sydney South NSW  
 \*NSW Council for Civil Liberties, Sydney South NSW  
 NSW Refugee Health Service, Liverpool NSW  
 NSW Teachers Federation, Surry Hills NSW  
 Oromia Support Group in Australia, Noble Park Vic  
 Oromo Relief Association Australia, Noble Park Vic  
 Oxfam Australia, Carlton Vic  
 Pax Christi, Sydney NSW  
 Pratt Family Foundation, Southbank Vic  
 \*ProEmpowerment International, Yeronga Qld  
 Queanbeyan Multilingual Centre, Queanbeyan NSW  
 Queensland African Communities Council, Yeronga Qld  
 Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma, Yeronga Qld  
 Refugee Advice and Casework Service, Sydney NSW  
 Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, Fitzroy Vic  
 Refugee and Immigration Legal Service, West End Qld  
 Refugee Claimants Support Centre, Windsor Qld  
 Refugee Health Queensland, Woolloongabba Qld  
 Romero Centre, Buranda Qld  
 Salvation Army, Sydney NSW  
 Sanctuary Australia Foundation, Coffs Harbour NSW  
 Save the Children Australia, Fitzroy Vic  
 SCALES Community Legal Centre, Rockingham WA  
 Sisters of Charity, Bondi Junction NSW  
 Sisters of St Joseph of California, Sans Souci NSW  
 \*Social Justice Commission, Diocese of Toowoomba, Toowoomba Qld  
 South Australian Refugee Health Network, Bedford Park SA  
 South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, Dandenong Vic  
 Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre, Preston Vic  
 Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau, Springvale Vic  
 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, Petersham NSW  
 \*St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland, South Brisbane Qld  
 \*St Vincent de Paul Society WA, Sorrento WA  
 Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors, Fairfield NSW  
 Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families, Corrimall NSW  
 Sudanese Online Research Association and Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning Program, Melbourne Vic  
 Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service, Adelaide SA  
 Sydney Multicultural Community Services, Daceyville NSW  
 SydWest Multicultural Services Inc, Blacktown NSW  
 The Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre, Parramatta NSW  
 The Smith Family Community Settlement Service Scheme, Burwood NSW  
 Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Support Service, Toowoomba Qld  
 Townsville Multicultural Support Group, Aitkenvale Qld  
 Uniting Care Cutting Edge, Shepparton Vic  
 Uniting Church National Assembly, Sydney South NSW  
 Uniting Justice Australia, Sydney South NSW  
 Victorian Arabic Social Services, Broadmeadows Vic  
 Victorian Multicultural Commission, Melbourne Vic  
 Werribee Community and Education Centre, Werribee Vic  
 Western Sydney Community Forum, Parramatta NSW  
 \*Whittlesea Community Connections, Epping Vic

*\*New member in 2010-11*

# Individual members

\*Ian Abbott  
Maureen Adamson  
Joan Addison  
\*Camuran Albanoi  
\*Fran Alexander  
Susan Allender  
James Altman  
Dennis Altman  
Ian Anderson  
Robyn Andrew  
Chris Ansted  
\*Carlota Arias  
\*Des Arnolda  
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Humphrey Arundel  
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\*John Ball  
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 John Marlton  
 Vicky Marquis  
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 \*Anne Tonkin  
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 Sally Trevena  
 Jack Trezise  
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 Marina Tyndale-Biscoe  
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 \*John Van Der Ende  
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 \*Joyce Vasta  
 \*Bala Vigneswaran  
 \*Joel Vincent  
 \*Penny Vine  
 \*Frances Voon  
 Rohan Vora  
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 Eileen Wahab  
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 Sheila Walkerden  
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 Jill Williams  
 \*Robert Wilson  
 Aija Wilson  
 Marion and Gratton Wilson  
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 Sylvia Winton  
 Bishop Clyde and  
 Mrs Margaret Joan Wood  
 \*Daisy Wouters  
 Martin Wright  
 Peter Yeldham  
 \*Joseph Youhana  
 Anne Yuille  
 \*Tessa Yyanovich  
 Ann Zevis  
 Daniel Zu  
 Roxana Zulfacar  
 \*Dewi-Inala Zulkefli  
 \*New member in 2010-11

# financial report

Refugee Council of Australia Inc – ABN 87 956 673 083

## Profit and loss statement – for the year ended 30 June 2011

	2011 \$	2010 \$
<b>Income</b>		
Consultancies	68,570	44,279
DIAC Contracts	212,715	192,705
Donations from Australian Refugee Foundation	37,070	-
Interest income	2,822	3,557
Member subscriptions	46,739	34,002
Grants	44,000	155,805
Donations	98,877	86,613
Other income	4,463	1,223
<b>Total income</b>	<b>515,256</b>	<b>518,184</b>
<b>Less: Expenses</b>		
Auditors remuneration	2,200	2,382
Bank charges	3,184	2,221
Board expenses	17,822	14,096
Computer expenses	7,391	3,209
Consulting and grant direct expenses	6,454	14,207
Depreciation	3,401	3,412
Electricity and water	1,838	2,203
Insurance	2,666	3,829
Office rent (Sydney and Melbourne)	28,955	28,648
Leave pay	8,823	797
Postage	5,068	2,170
Printing and stationery	10,454	8,411
Refugee Week expenses	9,839	12,646
Seminar and conference expenses	432	10,565
Repairs and maintenance	2,640	919
Salaries	302,164	326,761
Subscriptions	2,265	1,894
Sundry expenses	7,967	2,696
Superannuation contributions	27,195	29,949
Telephone and fax	9,967	9,404
Travel expenses	11,471	7,878
Workers compensation insurance	3,058	2,472
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>475,254</b>	<b>490,769</b>
<b>Profit before income tax</b>	<b>40,002</b>	<b>27,415</b>

## Statement of Financial Position – 30 June 2011

	2011 \$	2010 \$
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Current assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	64,389	144,035
Trade and other receivables	164,617	27,058
Other assets	1,681	-
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>230,687</b>	<b>171,093</b>
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	8,518	5,939
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>8,518</b>	<b>5,939</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>239,205</b>	<b>177,032</b>
<b>LIABILITIES</b>		
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	40,994	107,646
Provisions	27,377	18,554
Other Liabilities	80,000	-
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>148,371</b>	<b>126,200</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>148,371</b>	<b>126,200</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>90,834</b>	<b>50,832</b>
<b>EQUITY</b>		
Retained earnings	90,834	50,832
<b>Total equity</b>	<b>90,834</b>	<b>50,832</b>

### Audited financial statements

The Refugee Council of Australia accounts for 2010-11 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/about/annualrpts.php](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/about/annualrpts.php)



Refugee Council  
of Australia

**How to contact the Refugee Council**

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Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.



[www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)