



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

5 November 2009

Welcome to the latest bulletin from the Refugee Council of Australia. We welcome feedback, ideas or information worth sharing. Please contact us at info@refugeecouncil.org.au.

Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia

If you no longer wish to receive this bulletin, please email unsubscribe@refugeecouncil.org.au

NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

RCOA urges thoughtful and considered approach to asylum seekers

Throughout the often shrill public debate about asylum seekers arriving by boat, RCOA, through countless media interviews, has been urging a thoughtful and considered approach which respects the rights of vulnerable people. RCOA president John Gibson addressed the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) Congress in Shepparton on October 29, outlining the features of Australia's treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, including the movement away over recent years from a punitive system based essentially on deterrence. He built on a public statement RCOA issued on October 17 warning against scaremongering about asylum seekers. RCOA has expressed the view that any new regional arrangements between Australia and Indonesia must involve UNHCR and include minimum standards of fair and humane reception, credible refugee status determination (including guaranteed non-refoulement) and resettlement within a reasonable timeframe for those found to be refugees. For details, see John Gibson's speech to FECCA's Congress [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/JGibson at FECCA Congress.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/JGibson%20at%20FECCA%20Congress.pdf) and our October 17 statement http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2009/091017_Scaremongering.pdf

RCOA's AGM to feature discussions on South-East Asian cooperation and cultural orientation

Pressing asylum seeker and refugee settlement issues will be discussed when RCOA holds its Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Public Forums on Tuesday 17 November 2009 in Melbourne. The day's program will begin with a morning forum (10.30am-12.30pm) on the topic "*Australian cooperation in South-East Asia: disaster or opportunity?*" Speakers will include Dr Savitri Taylor, Senior Lecturer, School of Law, Faculty of Law and Management, La Trobe University; Professor James Hathaway, Dean and William Hearn Chair of Law at the Law School, University of Melbourne; and Dr Elizabeth Biok, Refugee Lawyer, International Commission of Jurists and RCOA Board Member. This will be followed from 12.30pm to 1.30pm with RCOA's AGM. From 2pm to 4pm, discussion will turn to settlement issues with a forum on the topic "*Cultural orientation for refugees: a five-day course or years of learning?*" Speakers will include Hailaeluel Gebre-Selassie, 2008 Churchill Fellow; Annerose Reiner, Service Innovation Program, Coordinator Family Strengthening Strategy, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture; and Margaret Neil, Director, Social Participation & Settlement Services, A.C.C.E.S. Services Inc.

Venue: The Multicultural Hub, 506 Elizabeth Street (opposite Queen Victoria Market), Melbourne. For information about the AGM and the day's program, including nomination forms for board positions, please visit www.refugeecouncil.org.au/who/agm.html; Please RSVP for the forums and/or the AGM to (02) 9211 9333 or admin@refugeecouncil.org.au by Wednesday 11 November.

RCOA commences annual consultation process on refugee and humanitarian intake

During November, RCOA will be holding its annual community consultations on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, with meetings with refugee community members and service providers being planned for cities around the country. These consultations will inform RCOA's submission to the Australian Government on the 2010-11 humanitarian program. For this year's consultation process,

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Phone: (02) 9211-9333 • Fax: (02) 9211-9288
info@refugeecouncil.org.au • Web: www.refugeecouncil.org.au
Incorporated in ACT • ABN 87 956 673 083

The Refugee Council of Australia represents
non-government organisations and
individuals working with and for refugees
in Australia and around the world

RCOA will be particularly seeking views on how the planning of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program can be improved and how the many pressures on the program (such as the need for resettlement of refugees from protracted situations and for family reunion) can be balanced. Views will also be sought on settlement planning, post-arrival cultural orientation and which refugee settlement issues should be given highest priority by government and refugee support services. For information about the consultation process (including venues), see www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/consultations.html

Two-way exchange between settlement services and Australian Cultural Orientation program

During 2008-09, RCOA coordinated an exchange between Australian settlement service workers and trainers involved in the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program, the five-day pre-departure course for refugees and humanitarian migrants preparing for resettlement in Australia. In partnership with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (which funds AUSCO) and the International Organization for Migration (which has the contract to present the course around the world), RCOA is now seeking expressions of interest from settlement service workers and service providers interested in participating in a two-way exchange with AUSCO trainers in early 2010. The exchange will see two settlement service providers each host an AUSCO trainer from either Nepal or South-East Asia for 10 to 12 days in February or March. In April or May, a staff member from each of the chosen settlement service providers will participate for a 10-12 day deployment with the AUSCO trainer's colleagues (in Nepal or South East Asia), assisting in the presentation of an AUSCO course and sharing information about the practicalities of settlement in Australia. We are looking for settlement service workers with excellent knowledge of refugee settlement and good training skills who are working for settlement services with the capacity and commitment to host an AUSCO trainer for 10-12 days. In hosting the AUSCO trainer, the settlement service will be required to develop a program for the visiting trainer which enables her/him to meet, learn about and share information with a wide variety of local services involved in supporting recently arrived refugees. Expressions of interest for this program close on December 4. For further detail, see www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/ausco.html

New International and Refugee Settlement policy networks for RCOA members

In November, RCOA is launching two new policy networks, to increase opportunities for its members to remain informed and to contribute to RCOA's policy development and advocacy.

On Thursday 5 November, the **International Refugee Policy Network** will meet by teleconference, to discuss Australia's engagement in the Asia-Pacific region on refugees, plan Australian NGO involvement in UNHCR and international refugee policy gatherings and to discuss the nexus between refugee protection and humanitarian aid. Further meetings are being planned for early next year. To participate in this network, please contact Lucy Morgan on (02) 9211 9333 or admin@refugeecouncil.org.au

On Tuesday 10 November, the first meeting of the **Refugee Settlement Policy Network** will take place, replacing RCOA's occasional settlement policy teleconferences with a new quarterly network hosted jointly with the Settlement Council of Australia. Given the breadth of issues of interest to people in refugee settlement, each teleconference will have a particular focus. The November 10 teleconference will focus on refugee youth issues, with keynote presenter Professor Howard Nicholas, Senior Lecturer in Language Education and Director of the Centre for Regional Education at La Trobe University (Victoria). He will provide an overview of some of the key issues for refugee young people with regards to education with a particular focus on young people in the older age groups who arrive with a background of disrupted education, as well as changes, opportunities and gaps in education policy. Details about this network, including documents relating to the topic under discussion, can be found at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/spn.html

Channel Nine taken to task over baseless claims about Centrelink costs

On Monday 19 October, Channel Nine aired a news item making a series of unsubstantiated claims about the costs of Centrelink benefits for refugees and humanitarian entrants. RCOA was one of a number of organisations which raised concerns with Channel Nine about factual errors in the story and baseless mathematical extrapolations presented as authoritative information. The gross inaccuracies of the story were highlighted the following week on ABC-TV's Media Watch. A transcript of the Media Watch report is available at <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s2724620.htm>.

Australian Human Rights Commission releases Christmas Island report

The Australian Human Rights Commission has reiterated its concerns about the detention and processing of asylum seekers on Christmas Island in its latest report on immigration detention on the

island. The report, compiled after the Commission's visit to Christmas Island in July, raises concerns about asylum seekers being held on a remote territory with limited access to essential services such as legal assistance, health care, torture and trauma counselling and religious support. The Commission recommends the scrapping of the policy which sees asylum seekers arriving in excised offshore places barred from the mainland's refugee status determination system, noting that asylum seekers in excised zones go through a 'non-statutory' process with no access to the Refugee Review Tribunal and very limited access to courts. The report is at:

www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/immigration/idc2009_xmas_island.html

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, responded to the Australian Human Rights Commission report with a statement confirming the Government's intention to retain the excision policy: <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09098.htm>

Government establishes Council for Immigration Services and Status Resolution

The Australian Government has established a new Council for Immigration Services and Status Resolution to provide independent advice on the implementation of the government's immigration policy initiatives, including New Directions in Detention and the national rollout of the Community Status Resolution Service. The council will be chaired by Paris Aristotle AM, director of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture and a former member of Immigration Detention Advisory Group. For details on the council, see <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09094.htm>.

Prime Minister champions 'sharing responsibility' at UNHCR Executive Committee meeting

UNHCR's recent Executive Committee meeting in Geneva – the main annual meeting of the body which governs UNHCR – opened with an address by video conference from Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. In his speech, Prime Minister Rudd commended the work of the UNHCR and highlighted that "Governments must continue to work together and support the efforts of UNHCR. ... We must support them, and indeed each other, by sharing the responsibility". The Prime Minister again reiterated the need for sharing responsibility and sharing the burden in his concluding remarks: that nations "face a challenging future. But one thing we do know from experience is that lasting solutions can be achieved through global cooperation. Working together with UNHCR - sharing responsibility and sharing the burden - we can build on the legacy of achievements to date, to meet the challenges of displacement and give people back their normal lives". The text of Mr Rudd's speech is available at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/unhcr.html#2009>

Australian Ambassador elected to chair UNHCR Executive Committee

Australia's Ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Caroline Millar, has been elected as Chair of UNHCR's Executive Committee for the coming year. Ms Millar said she will actively engage with UNHCR to support its efforts in finding practical solutions to restore normality to the lives of the displaced of the world. Ms Millar has wide-ranging experience in refugee issues. She is the outgoing Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee and was previously Australia's Ambassador for People Smuggling. "From these roles I have gained an understanding of the impact of displacement on people's lives and the tragedy that can occur when some of the world's most vulnerable people are subject to exploitation," said Ms Millar. "I will work with UNHCR and the international community to address protracted refugee situations and to find durable solutions to existing situations."

Tender release for IHSS planned for January 2010

DIAC has revised its timetable for tenders for the next round of Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) services, announcing that it will open tenders in January. It is expected that tenders will close in March.

NSW Health expands services to asylum seekers

NSW Health has revised its policy on medical treatment of asylum seekers, approving fee waivers for specified public health services to community-based asylum seekers who are Medicare ineligible. Inclusions are: emergency care for acute medical and surgical conditions (including admission); elective surgery for conditions listed as Clinical Priority Categories 1 and 2; ambulatory and outpatient care required to maintain health status of asylum seekers with acute and chronic health conditions (e.g. diabetes); maternity services, including antenatal care; and mental health services (inpatient and community based). Compliance by Area Health Services with the new policy is mandatory. A copy of the policy is available online at http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/policies/pd/2009/PD2009_068.html.

COMING EVENTS

Thursday 29 October to Sunday 15 November - Nationally

Palestinian Film Festival 2009

14 unforgettable award-winning and inspiring films.

Session details: [Sydney: Palace Norton Street, Leichhardt](#) (Thu 29 Oct - Sun 1 Nov); [Melbourne: Cinema Nova, Carlton](#) (Thu 12 Nov - Sun 15 Nov); [Adelaide: Mercury Cinema, Adelaide](#) (Fri 13 Nov - Sun 15 Nov)

Saturday 7 November 2009 - Melbourne

Cambodian Association of Victoria fundraiser film

The Cambodian Association of Victoria youth group invites you to view a fundraising screening *The Red Sense*, a timely and significant film in light of the Khmer Rouge tribunals. The youth group is fundraising for the Khmer Well-Being Fund, which seeks to help people suffering from post-war trauma.

Details: 6.45pm and 9.30pm; \$16 for adults, \$12 concession; for more info, contact: the Drum Theatre on (03) 9771 6666.

Saturday 7 November 2009 - Melbourne

Launch of the Renew and Preserve Karen Culture project

The Renew and Preserve Karen Culture project aims to promote, maintain and preserve the value of Karen culture. All are welcome to attend the launch of this project and enjoy traditional Karen performance, hand crafts and finger foods.

Details: 4:00pm to 7:00pm; \$10 per person; Casey Lecture Theatre, RMIT Campus, Bowen Street, Melbourne.

Sunday 8 November 2009 - NSW

Musical Afternoon fundraiser

A fundraising event to support the work of Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families (SCARF), a locally based, volunteer managed charity providing services to assist the successful resettlement of refugees. A program to delight lovers of classical music, featuring renowned local artists. Tickets include post-concert refreshments.

Details: 2.00pm; General Admission \$20, SCARF Members and Volunteers \$10; Conservatorium of Music Auditorium, Gleniffer Brae entrance, Murphy's Ave, Keiraville; parking available; to book tickets or for more information, contact Sharyn Mackenzie on (02) 4285 2952, 0437 395 578 or scarf1@optusnet.com.au.

Tuesday 10 November 2009

National Settlement Policy Teleconference

RCOA and the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA) will convene the National Settlement Policy Teleconference. The keynote presentation will be by Dr Howard Nicholas, Senior Lecturer in Language Education and Director of the Centre for Regional Education at La Trobe University (Victoria). He will provide an overview of some of the key issues for refugee young people with regards to education with a particular focus on young people in the older age groups who arrive with a background of disrupted education, as well as changes, opportunities and gaps in education policy.

Details: Visit <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/spn.html>

Tuesday 10 November 2009 - Melbourne

Sri Lanka: Human Rights Issues and Media Representation

As boatloads of asylum seekers put their lives at risk trying to find refuge, attention is shifting to the conditions that are forcing so many people from their homes. The war in Sri Lanka has finished, but the persecution of its Tamil minority has not. The forum will consider these issues, addressing what led to the current situation, how we understand it, where it stands, and what might be done about it. This forum has been endorsed by Amnesty International, a number of prominent local human rights organisations and the Victorian Trades Hall Council.

Details: 6.00pm to 8.00pm; Lecture Theatre K321 (Halstead Theatre), 3rd floor, Building K, Monash University Caulfield; for information: David Feith: (03) 9903 4397 or david.g.feith@gmail.com

Wednesday 11 to Tuesday 24 November 2009 - Fremantle

Exhibition of paintings by Nathalie Haymann

Paintings by Nathalie Haymann based on "A Certain Maritime Incident – The Sinking of SIEVX" by award winning author Tony Kevin. The exhibition's 36 artworks visually document the journey of 430 asylum seekers, mostly from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, who sought refuge in Australia in 2001.

Details: Opening night 11 November; 6.30pm to 8.30pm; Kidogo Arthouse, Bathers' Beach, Fishermans' Harbour off Mews Road Fremantle, WA (on the beach). RSVP for opening night to (08) 9652 2063 by 2 November. Download the flyer <http://www.safecom.org.au/temp/2009-sievx-art-exhibition.pdf>

Thursday and Friday 19 & 20 November 2009 - Melbourne

International Conference on 'Migration, Citizenship and Intercultural Relations'

This conference proposes to examine outcomes of migration and immigration as essential dimensions for contextualizing discussions about national identity, intercultural relations and citizenship, and the formation and representation of cultural identity.

Details: Deakin University (Melbourne Campus at Burwood); for more details, visit <http://www.deakin.edu.au/arts-ed/icg/events/conf-2009.php>

Friday 20 November 2009 - Melbourne

Families in Transition: IHSS and SGP Forum

The IHSS/SGP Action Group, auspiced by AMES, is arranging a forum on Families in Transition, focusing on newly arrived refugee and humanitarian families. The forum will target workers from services funded by DIAC under the IHSS and SGP programs, as well as other interested parties (police, government, community and legal centres). Newly arrived community members will speak from first hand experience of their family dynamics before and after arrival to Australia and will provide insights to helpful strategies.

Details: 9am to 1pm (lunch will be provided); Multicultural Hub, 508-510 Elizabeth St, Melbourne (Corner of Therry and Elizabeth Streets, opposite Victoria Market); Spaces are limited to 60, to secure your attendance please RSVP to barici@ames.net.au by 13 November 2009.

Until Sunday 22 November 2009

Handing on the Key: Palestinians in Australia

For the majority of Palestinians in Australia, there is no lived experience of Palestine. Handing on the Key explores how the link to homeland is passed from one generation to the next through acts of memory. The changing identity of the Palestinian community through generations reveals the different and often emotional connections that Australians of Palestinian heritage have to Palestine.

Details: Adult \$8, child/concession free. Immigration Museum, 400 Flinders Street, Melbourne; open daily 10am to 5pm. Information: 13 1102 or www.museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum

Tuesday 24 November 2009 - Melbourne

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre open day

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre is hosting an open day to inform service providers of its programs, exchange information with other agencies and provide the opportunity for organisations to witness first hand the way in which the centre runs on a day to day basis.

Details: 10.15am–2pm; Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, 12 Batman St, West Melbourne; RSVP by Friday 6th November, (03) 9326 6066

Friday 27 & Saturday 28 November 2009 - Melbourne

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P): Prevention and intervention in response to mass atrocity crimes

The purpose of this conference is to explain the parameters of this new principle of international law and political practice, to address the practicalities and problems of its implementation, to consider its potential application in the Asia-Pacific region, and to tackle again the vexed question of military intervention for humanitarian purposes.

Details: \$250 or \$125 (Student concession); Christ Lecture Theatre; Australian Catholic University, 17 Young Street, Fitzroy Victoria; Only 140 places are available; registrations close: 20 November 2009; registration and payment: www.acu.edu.au/R2P; for more information: ils@acu.edu.au.

Thursday to Wednesday 3 to 9 December - Melbourne

Parliament of the World's Religions

The world's largest and most diverse interfaith gathering with over 500 inspiring programs and many inspirational leaders including His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

For information or to register, visit www.parliamentofreligions.org or call 1300 852 156

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Peter Yeldham novel explores Tampa era

Peter Yeldham's new novel *A Distant Shore* follows Katerina as she grows up from a bewildered six year old Greek migrant to become a vivacious Aussie girl who gives up a highly paid job in a law firm to work with a lawyer attempting to assist refugees during the era of the Tampa episode. The span of the story covers some turbulent periods in Australia, from the 1950s to 2004. The author says: "The day I saw a photograph in The Sydney Morning Herald of three young girls who had drowned when an Indonesian fishing boat sank was the day I felt compelled to write this novel Our country was split on the subject of boat people and the treatment of refugees, and politicians on both sides took populist positions". <http://www.peteryeldham.com/web/pageid/30595>

Release of Refugee Crisis in America: Iraqis and Their Resettlement Experience

Georgetown Law's Human Rights Action, in partnership with the Human Rights Institute at Georgetown Law, released their report: *Refugee Crisis in America: Iraqis and Their Resettlement Experience*. This fact-finding mission took place over nine months in four cities in the US and in Jordan. Students interviewed scores of refugees as well as representatives from UNHCR, IOM, the U.S. Government, and NGOs to better understand what happens to Iraqi refugees once they are resettled to the U.S. as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of the U.S. resettlement program in helping to ensure long-term refugee self-sufficiency and integration. Australia's language program is highlighted in the report, which can be accessed at: <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/cle/RefugeeCrisisInAmerica.pdf>.

UNHCR launches new policy statement on refugee protection in urban areas

UNHCR has launched a new policy statement on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas. It can be accessed at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4ab356ab6.pdf>. The broader issue of urban displacement will be discussed at the December 2009 meeting of the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges. For details, go to <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a12a4a26.html>.

Supporting positive parenting in refugee families

The Australian Centre for Child Protection has released the Working with Refugee Families Project. The first of its kind in Australia, the research brings together quantitative government data with qualitative input from refugee communities and child protection workers. Funded by the South Australian Department for Families and Communities, the project looks at why recently arrived refugee families are presenting to the child protection system and identifies culturally appropriate strategies for prevention and intervention. The report is at www.unisa.edu.au/childprotection/documents/RefugeeReport.pdf and www.dfc.sa.gov.au/research

New Good Food for New Arrivals website online

Good Food for New Arrivals commenced in 2001 and is a joint project between ASeTTS and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Good Food for New Arrivals aims to improve access to nutrition information available to newly-arrived humanitarian and refugee families with young children, as well as enhance the cultural competencies and skills of service providers in understanding and supporting individuals and their families. For more information regarding any aspect of Good Food for New Arrivals, please contact ASeTTS on (08) 9227 2700 or email nutrition@asetts.org.au. Training materials and resources are now available at: www.asetts.org.au/nutritiontraining

A Place to Call Home submission released

The Catholic Education Office, Sydney and the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW have pooled first hand knowledge and expertise to produce this submission in response to the Australian Human Rights Commission discussion paper, "African Australians: A Report on Human Rights and Social Inclusion Issues". The submission shares the voice of the students, families and individuals of African refugee backgrounds who access the specialised programs and services run by the two organisations, including stories, quotes and information gathered from participants in the agencies' services. The report is at

<http://vinnies.org.au/files/NSW/Services/SPARK/SVDP%20NSW%20and%20CEO%20SYDNEY%20Human%20Rights%20Commission%20Submission%20July%202009.pdf>

OPPORTUNITIES

Call for papers for Researchers for Asylum Seekers (RAS) Conference

Asylum Seekers: The Policies, Practice and the Rhetoric Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference 2009 will be held on Thursday 26 November 2009 from 10am - 3pm at the University of Melbourne. The RAS conference is designed for postgraduate students from Australia and New Zealand to interact and share their current research/work among peers in a friendly and stimulating environment. The theme for this year's conference is intended to accommodate postgraduate researchers – past and present – as well as practitioners, policy makers and advisors working in this area. Abstracts addressing any broad interpretation of the topic are welcome. Abstract submissions of 200-300 words for papers of 20 minutes duration are requested. Please send your submissions and a brief biography to ghanji.surjeet@gmail.com.

Reconnecting People Assistance Package

Funded by the Department of FaHCSIA, support is available to help Australian citizens or permanent residents who have been adversely affected as a direct result of their inappropriate immigration detention in Australia. Eligibility to those who have been held in inappropriate immigration detention, been an Australian citizen or permanent resident at the time of detention and were adversely affected by the period of inappropriate immigration detention. Ongoing applications accepted. http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/communities/progserv/pages/rpa_package.aspx.

Financial support for humanitarian entrant living in Hobart

Hobart City Council is offering one Bursary (financial support) available to a humanitarian entrant living in the Hobart city area and preferably studying in a local government related area of business, marketing, engineering, environmental design, fine arts, surveying and spatial sciences or tourism. The value of the bursary is \$3,500 per year for up to four years. Applications for 2010 close on 31 October 2009. Apply at <http://www.studentcentre.utas.edu.au/scholarships/AwardDetails.aspx?AwardId=400>

National organisation for refugee and migrant women

The Network of Immigrant and Refugee Women of Australia Inc. (NIRWA) is an independent body seeking to advocate for immigrant and refugee women at a national level by working to achieve cultural, social, economic, educational and gender equality for all immigrant and refugee women living in Australia and to work with other women's organisations to advocate collectively on common issues affecting all women. NIRWA invites organisations which are operated by and involve CALD immigrant and refugee women and those working with CALD women as well as individual women who wish to be engaged in the work of NIRWA, to become members. For more information, visit www.nirwa.org.au or email woman@nirwa.org.au.

RISE Music Workshops

Would you like to learn music, write songs and be part of recording a CD in workshops with RISE music team? Unleash your creativity in a relaxed environment making art with other young refugee artists. The RISE Music Program is a creative and safe space for underemployed young refugees to build up their own style of music. Workshops are open every Tuesday from 7pm to 9pm. For more information contact RISE on (03) 9639 8623 or email admin@riserefugee.org.

Stand Up 4 Rights

Stand Up 4 Rights is a project run by diverse young people and the Centre for Multicultural Youth to tackle racism and discrimination through stand-up comedy. If you live in the Shire of Melton, are aged between 16 and 25, have the desire to laugh and make others laugh and meet lots of young people and famous comedians along the way, then contact Jules Kornaat from CMY on 0411 566 387 or email jkornaat@cmy.net.au by Thursday 19 November 2009. The project will run from November 2009 until April 2010 and is free to participate in. Limited places are available.

Opportunities for people to train as translators and interpreters

The **National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters** (NAATI) is administering a new national project, the New Interpreters Project, funded by the Australian Government. The project aims to increase the number of NAATI interpreters in both metropolitan and selected regional areas around Australia. The Project will target these areas to increase the number of interpreters in the languages of new and emerging communities, rarer languages and languages for which there are shortages in rural and regional areas. For information, contact the NAATI National Office on 1300 557 470 (calls within Australia) or (02) 6260 3035 or at info@naati.com.au. Details: www.naati.com.au

RMIT University in Melbourne is currently recruiting for its translating and interpreting course, seeking people fluent in any of the following languages and English. Diploma of Interpreting – Languages offered in 2010: Auslan, Dari, Dinka, Hazaragi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Tamil. Advanced Diploma of Translating and Interpreting – Languages offered in 2010: Arabic, Auslan, Cantonese, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Vietnamese. For details, phone (03) 9925 2328 or visit www.rmit.edu.au/translatinginterpret and for direct applications go to www.rmit.edu.au/programs/applications/forms.

Employment and volunteering opportunities

Please visit <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/volunteer.html> for employment and volunteering opportunities.

REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

A busy person's digest of some recent media coverage of refugee issues:

(Inclusion in this summary does not imply that RCOA agrees with the article's content or vouches for its accuracy)

Sri Lankan asylum seekers aboard Australian vessel refusing to disembark

The 78 Sri Lankan asylum seekers aboard the Oceanic Viking have threatened to kill themselves rather than walk off the ship and be interned in Indonesia. They told their story by throwing messages in plastic bags tied to empty plastic water bottles into the water. "If your country doesn't want find us a good solution better we will close our life in here," the unsigned letter said. The Oceanic Viking has been anchored off Bintan for two days. Indonesian immigration officials and an Australian Customs officer boarded the ship on October 27. (*The Australian, 28 October*)

No deal on fate of latest asylum boat

The stand-off between Australia and Indonesia over the fate of 78 asylum seekers is continuing as Prime Minister Rudd prepares to hold talks with Indonesia's President later today. The asylum seekers were picked up by the Australian Customs vessel the Oceanic Viking after sending out a distress signal from international waters in Indonesia's search and rescue zone at the weekend. Prime Minister Rudd is in Jakarta for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's inauguration and is expected to meet with him to discuss both country's efforts to combat people smuggling. Opposition immigration spokesman Sharman Stone says Indonesia must take the asylum seekers, of which there are five women and five children. The boat is now moored in a port in Western Java, where the Tamil asylum seekers are refusing to leave the boat. (*ABC News Online, 20 October*)

Australia seeks Indonesia asylum-seekers agreement

Prime Minister Rudd is considering trying to stem a flood of would-be asylum-seekers through a new alliance with Indonesia. The Weekend Australian newspaper reported Australian aid would be massively increased and used to fund detention centres in Indonesia. The plan, which would also involve broader intelligence sharing, will be discussed next week when Rudd travels to Jakarta to attend President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's inauguration for his second term. A key part would be Australian assistance to resettle asylum seekers already in detention in Indonesia, the paper said. (*Reuters, 17 October*)

UNHCR comments on Australia's border policy

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR's) regional representative Richard Towle has said that Australia should not apologise for being renowned as a country that offers fair protection to those seeking asylum from their own countries. Asked if the change of immigration policies had influenced the number of boat arrivals to Australia, Mr Towle told ABC radio: "I think perceptions of policy can certainly play a role in people-smuggling." It was understood that Australia was a place where refugees can get fair and effective refugee protection, he said. "But I think we need to be careful about apologising for

that. If Australia is renowned as a country that does the right thing, that offers fair and effective protection for those who need it and requires those that don't need it to leave the territory then I don't think the apology is needed". Mr Towle labelled as "pretty simplistic" the Opposition's view that asylum-seekers shouldn't be rewarded by being allowed to come to Australia. (AAP, 16 October)

Australia orders more asylum accommodation

The Australian Government has announced further plans to boost the capacity of its Christmas Island detention centre well beyond a limit of 1,400 people. After ordering bunk beds and portable lavatories, Immigration Minister Chris Evans has confirmed his department is now transporting 81 demountable buildings to Christmas Island. The minister says that they are mainly mining camp-style temporary accommodation. Senator Evans says the government is also looking at creating space at defence sites if the Christmas Island and Darwin detention centres are full. (Radio Australia, 15 October)

Rudd's call stops boat

Indonesia's navy intercepted a boatload of 260 Australia-bound asylum seekers after Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made an extraordinary personal plea to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. The boat, which was carrying Sri Lankan men, women and children, was intercepted by an Indonesian warship, with another three Indonesian warships dispatched to help transport the Sri Lankans back to a port on western Java. It is believed Mr Rudd called President Yudhoyono on Saturday after Australian Federal Police and intelligence agents learnt the large vessel was to head for Australian waters. After the call, the Australian Defence Force immediately began work with the Indonesian navy to pinpoint the boat in open sea. Mr Rudd's personal intervention is his first since becoming Prime Minister and is a measure of the growing pressure on the Government caused by the surge in people-smuggling boats. (The Age, 13 October)

Protection visas granted to 42 Afghan asylum seekers

The 42 Afghan asylum seekers who survived the explosion and fire on their boat at Ashmore Reef five months ago will be given refugee status. Officials say the asylum seekers' claims for refuge were thoroughly examined and all had rigorous health, security and identity checks. "The granting of protection visas will help the group, who have undergone a traumatic ordeal, to settle in the community and recover their physical and mental health," the officials said. After a lengthy investigation, Northern Territory police said this month they did not have the evidence to charge any of those who had been on the boat identified as SIEV (suspected illegal entry vessel) 36, where five asylum seekers were killed and several others were injured. An inquest in January is expected to find out more about what happened. Reports say that if any of the asylum-seekers are convicted of serious charges as a result of the inquest, Immigration Minister Chris Evans is prepared to cancel their visas and deport them. (The Age, 12 October)

Sri Lanka accuses Tamil asylum seekers of being fighters

Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to Australia claims that large numbers of his countrymen seeking asylum are former members of the Tamil Tigers. His claim comes as Australia steps up its campaign to stem the recent flow of people from Sri Lanka who have attempted to enter Australia by boat and attempt to be granted residency. (ABC Radio Australia, 7 October)

Ad campaign to target people smugglers

The Australian Government is paying for an advertising campaign in Sri Lanka to try to deter boat arrivals. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are being spent on the campaign to warn Sri Lankans about the dangers of using people smugglers to try to get to Australia. Home Affairs Minister Brendan O'Connor said the campaign will use posters, street theatre and the help of Catholic priests to educate people. He said the campaign is needed to stop the spread of misinformation about Australia's immigration policy. The campaign will also educate locals about how to successfully migrate to Australia. (ABC Online, 6 October)

Sri Lankans face forced removal

Nine Sri Lankan men are set to become the first asylum seekers to be forcibly returned home since the Rudd government was elected. The men were part of a group of 12 whose boat reached Shark Bay, 800km north of Perth. Two of the men have already returned home voluntarily, while one man from the group remains on Christmas Island where he is appealing the rejection of his asylum claim through the

Federal Court. Immigration Minister Chris Evans said none of the men would be in danger when returned to Sri Lanka. All nine men appealed against the department's decision to the Refugee Review Tribunal but were unsuccessful. They then lodged claims for the minister to intervene and allow them to stay but this was also rejected. The appeals lodged by the men were only possible because they were found so close to shore and classified as mainland arrivals. Asylum-seekers found outside Australia's migration zone do not have such appeal rights. (*The Australian*, 2 October)

Joyce claims that boat people are bluffing

Nationals Senate leader Barnaby Joyce has claimed that a large proportion of the boat people now on Christmas Island appear to be economic migrants, not refugees facing persecution. In comments made during a parliamentary visit to the island, Senator Joyce said all the people he had seen "seem very happy here – which is a concern". He said people he saw were "very health conscious – many have arrived with their multi-vitamin tablets. They don't fit the general picture of refugees under pressure".

"No doubt there is a proportion who are refugees by dispossession and persecution," he said. But a majority appeared to be economic migrants. Senator Joyce's claims are at odds with the results of processing by Australian authorities.

(*The Age*, 29 September)

Federal Court judge finds fault with the Refugee Review Tribunal

An Australian Federal Court judge has denounced the Refugee Review Tribunal for its treatment of a gay Bangladeshi couple, finding it twisted facts and ignored evidence as it heard their claim for asylum. Justice John Spender said the tribunal's ruling that the men were not homosexual and would therefore not face persecution in their homeland was "not an exercise in honest fact finding". The men even took DNA tests to disprove claims they were related, but the judge said the tribunal had "irrationally and indefensibly" found the results indicated they might be cousins. The men arrived in Australia in 1999 and applied for protection visas. The Justice said that the material sought by the tribunal had "the flavour of interrogation" and that the treatment of the DNA tests had been "contrived to support a predetermined result. The tribunal was guilty of bias, in the sense that it was predisposed to making its ultimate finding that the appellants were not in a homosexual relationship," Justice Spender said.

(*The Australian*, 28 September)