



# Refugee Council of Australia

## **BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS**

**April 9, 2008**

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](mailto:info@refugeecouncil.org.au).

*Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia*

### **NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL**

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#### **Refugee agencies promote positive change agenda in Canberra**

From March 18 to 21, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) joined representatives of six other agencies in a combined lobbying effort at Parliament House, Canberra. In the three days, 26 MPs and Senators and four ministerial advisers were visited – the Parliamentarians principally being newly-elected or Government and Opposition members in new roles relevant to refugee policy. The lobbying effort was coordinated by A Just Australia (AJA), with other participating organisations being Uniting Justice, Amnesty International, National Council of Churches, Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project and Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. RCOA worked with AJA to prepare a two-page policy brief, outlining the 12 issues of concern presented by RCOA to Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, at the humanitarian sector's annual meeting with the Minister on February 28. The purpose of the lobbying effort was to familiarise Parliamentarians with the constructive agenda for change being presented by NGOs to the new Government. The agenda includes preparing for an expansion of the humanitarian program, asylum policy concerns, settlement issues and options for broadening Australia's international engagement on refugee protection issues.

The response from the Parliamentarians visited was very positive, with many keen to engage more on the issues outlined. Parliamentarians from the Government, Opposition and cross benches expressed interest in building on the immigration detention reforms commenced in 2005 and improving settlement outcomes for refugee and humanitarian entrants. The policy brief prepared for the lobbying visit can be viewed at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/0803MPbriefing.pdf>

#### **Former Liberal MP to lead government resettlement body**

The appointment of former Liberal MP, Bruce Baird, as chair of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (RRAC) by the new Labor Government is another sign of a more constructive and less divisive political environment for refugee policy. RRAC is a body which meets twice a year to provide strategic advice to the Australian Government on refugee resettlement issues. Other new appointees are Paul Power (CEO, RCOA), Samia Baho (member of African Think Tank, Melbourne), Mohammed Issa (Iraqi community, Sydney), Jenny Semple (South-Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre, Melbourne and RCOA Board) and Daniel Zingifuaboro (ACCES Services Inc, Brisbane). Reappointed members are Paris Aristotle (Foundation House and RCOA Board), Carmel Guerra (Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues), Kevin Liston (Australian Refugee Association and RCOA Board) and Margaret Piper (consultant, formerly RCOA Executive Director). The announcement of the RRAC membership by Laurie Ferguson MP can be viewed at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/media-releases/2008/lf08019.htm>

#### **Strong response for AUSCO Guest Trainers program**

In our March bulletin, we advertised opportunities for people with a strong background in refugee settlement services to participate in one-month placements with the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) Program in South-East Asia. The AUSCO program is the pre-departure program offered to refugee entrants to Australia, provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. We received 52 applications for the three available positions and now have the very difficult task of choosing from an outstanding field of applicants. Those who applied will be informed of the outcome as soon as a decision is made.

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

For those who are unsuccessful this time and for those who did not apply in this round, all is not lost. DIAC has indicated its wish to continue this program in 2008-09. We hope to be recruiting again later this year. Any future rounds will be advertised in this bulletin and on the RCOA website.

### **Concerns about Complex Case Support Network tenders**

RCOA has been having discussions with settlement service providers around Australia about the tendering process for the new Complex Case Support Network (CCSN) and raising these concerns with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson MP. The CCSN is being developed to enable DIAC to work flexibly with specialist agencies to respond to the needs of humanitarian entrants who face crises which require responses beyond the existing settlement service arrangements. The CCSN raises questions about whether we have the right configuration of settlement service tenders and grants (an issue canvassed by RCOA in our submission on the 2008-09 Refugee and Humanitarian Intake). However, the immediate concerns relate to how the tendering of this service skewed the process and created significant confusion about DIAC's intentions. Some organisations, despite being well-placed to assist refugees with complex needs, decided not to tender while others reported submitting tenders despite significant misgivings.

### **Centrelink is seeking Interpreters**

Centrelink is currently seeking NAATI-accredited, recognised and experienced interpreters to join its register of contract interpreters in areas where languages are in demand. For more information contact the Language Services Coordinator in your state or territory: NSW/ACT (02) 8512 0989; Victoria (03) 9963 9172; Queensland (07) 3000 3233; WA (08) 9464 2258; SA (08) 8401 3258; Tasmania (03) 6222 3435 or NT (08) 8936 3775.

## **COMING EVENTS**

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### **Wednesday 2 April – Melbourne**

**Seminar: Investigating Traditional Medicine Use: A Study of Karen Refugees at the Thai-Burma Border** with Prof. Gerry Bodeker, Senior Faculty in Public Health, University of Oxford, UK.

*Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner St, Brunswick*

*Details: Registration 5pm, seminar 5.30pm to 6.30pm, RSVP to (03) 9388 0022*

### **National Youth Week - Saturday 5 to Sunday 13 April**

For a range of events coordinated by the City of Bankstown and Bankstown Multicultural Youth Service visit [www.bankstown.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bankstown.nsw.gov.au)

For information, events and activities nationally, please visit: <http://www.youthweek.com/>

### **Monday 7 April – Sydney**

**Public Forum: UN Independent Expert on Minority Rights.**

With Gay McDougall, the UN Independent Expert on Minority Rights and Chair of the Coordinating Committee of UN Human Rights Special Procedures and organised by the National Association of Community Legal Centres, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, the Australian Human Rights Centre and Kingsford Legal Centre.

*Venue: Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Level 61, Governor Phillip Tower, 1 Farrer Place, Sydney*

*Details: 6.00pm to 8.00pm, RSVP essential to 02 8898 6500 or [kaki@piac.asn.au](mailto:kaki@piac.asn.au)*

### **Tuesday 8 April – Sydney**

**Public Forum: The fight against racism and for the rights of minorities in the 21st century**

With Gay McDougall, the UN Independent Expert on Minority Rights and Chair of the Coordinating Committee of UN Human Rights Special Procedures organised by Amnesty International, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, the Sydney Centre for International Law and the Sydney Democracy Forum.

*Venue: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Level 8 Piccadilly Tower, 133 Castlereagh St,*

*Details: 5.30pm, RSVP essential by Tuesday 1 April to Li Zhou at [lizhou@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:lizhou@humanrights.gov.au) or 02 9284 9696*

### **Sunday 4 May – National**

#### **Final date for submission of entries to the 2008 Triumphant Refugee Film Festival**

The films will be screened at a special event on 19 June to celebrate Refugee Week.

For all entry details please visit: [www.triumphant.org.au](http://www.triumphant.org.au)

### **Thursday 29 and Friday 30 May, 2008**

#### **Conference – Best Practices for Refugee Status Determination 2008 - Italy**

Venue: Monash University, Prato Centre, Italy

Details: For further information and registration forms please visit:

<http://www.conorg.com.au/conferences2008/index.html>

### **Friday 30 May – Sydney**

#### **Art for Refugees Exhibition and Sale**

Organised by the Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) team at the University of Western Sydney, this exhibition will raise money for Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families (SCARF) projects. The organisers are also looking for artists to exhibit their paintings, sculpture, photography, textiles, woodwork or ceramics.

Venue: Ian Turbott Building, University of Western Sydney, Parramatta Campus

Details: For further information please visit: [www.scarf1.org.au](http://www.scarf1.org.au) or contact Stephanie Borg via email at [15931476@uws.edu.au](mailto:15931476@uws.edu.au)

### **Wednesday 25 June – Melbourne**

#### **Seminar: How Best to Remove Failed Asylum Seekers: Australian and International Practice**

With John Gibson, President, Refugee Council of Australia.

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner St, Brunswick

Details: Registration 5pm, seminar 5.30pm to 6.30pm, RSVP to (03) 9388 0022

## **NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS**

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### **Call for abstracts: QIRCH National Refugee Primary Health Conference, Nov 2008**

This national conference aims to inform, educate, stimulate debate, network, inspire, and provide peer support for those health care practitioners and other service providers working with people of a refugee background in the primary health care context. Abstracts are due by 31 May 2008. For further information please contact Claire Brolan, Clinic Manager, Queensland Integrated Refugee Community Health Clinic by email [Claire.brolan@mater.org.au](mailto:Claire.brolan@mater.org.au) or (07) 3163 2880

### **Call for papers: 4Rs Conference: Rights, Respect, Reconciliation, Responsibility, Sep 30 to Oct 2**

The 4Rs Organising Committee invites submissions for papers, panels, presentations, performances and other forms of participation. The conference is designed around the four themes and their interaction- human rights, Indigenous advancement, inter-communal relations, and active citizenship.

**First Round Papers are due by April 15.** For further information and submissions please visit: <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/ocs/index.php/4Rs/>

### **Immigration Minister's speech to Refugee and Migration Review Tribunals Annual Conference**

Senator Chris Evans characterised the Vivian Solon and Cornelia Rau cases as “an obscene low water mark” in Australian public administration and that his job now was to “restore integrity and public confidence in our immigration system”. The Minister also outlined policies and recent changes to enhance Australia's intake of skilled migrants and “will continue to look at ways to prevent, deter and enforce compliance to preserve the integrity of Australia's migration program, while treating individuals humanely.” He also highlighted his concerns regarding ministerial intervention acknowledging the lack of appeal, inconsistency in decision making and the discretionary nature of the process. He highlighted his support for, “independent, transparent and appealable decision making in the resolution of Immigration matters,” and has asked the Department to prepare an analysis of the way in which applicants move through various stages of the system. This will form a basis for future initiatives which may include the establishment of a refugee determination tribunal. A full copy of the Minister's speech is at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/speeches/2008/ce08-29022008.htm>

### **Ninth Annual Manning Clark Lecture – Julian Burnside**

On March 10, Julian Burnside QC gave the Ninth Manning Clark Lecture at the National Library of Australia on “*Citizens’ rights and the rule of law in a civil society: not just yet*”. For a copy of Julian Burnside’s lecture, see <http://www.manningclark.org.au/papers/index.html#lecture>

### **New Novel: Boat People**

By Maurice Whelan, this recently launched novel brings to life the real, human story of the plight of child refugees and the mark their experience leaves on them and the world. ‘*In this refreshing novel, Maurice Whelan addresses with bravery and skill the eternal reality of Australia, that we are a nation of refugees.*’ – Tom Keneally. For details, see [www.ginninderrapress.com.au](http://www.ginninderrapress.com.au)

### **New Website Launched: Hope**

On 18 March, a website was launched to promote the documentary “Hope”, which focuses on the 2001 SIEV X disaster in which 353 asylum seekers died. March 18 was also the second anniversary of one of the SIEV X survivors, Amal Basry, whose story is featured in the film. The website is not simply a promotional tool for the documentary but is intended as a useful resource on the SIEV X and related issues. Its development was made possible by funding support from the Shark Island Documentary Fund and the Melbourne Community Foundation. The site is [www.hopedocumentary.com.au](http://www.hopedocumentary.com.au)

### **A Small Town Welcome – Compass, ABC TV, Friday 21 March**

This documentary tells the story of the experience of eight Sudanese families settling in the town of Dorrigo. Following the controversial decision in 2006 by the Tamworth Council to say no to further settlement of refugees, locals from Dorrigo extended their welcome to the Sudanese families through the Sanctuary Network. For further details please visit: <http://www.abc.net.au/compass/s2198467.htm>

## **REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA**

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### **A busy person’s digest of some of the recent Australian 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)

#### **Rudd to visit UN as ties improve**

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will meet the UN Secretary General to discuss East Timor and continuing security issues in Afghanistan. The Rudd Government has highlighted issues of disarmament, international security, human rights and development as priorities for discussions with UN personnel. (*The Age*, 26 March)

#### **Regional resettlement of young refugees reduces crime risk, police say**

Senior Victorian police are advising the Immigration Department to settle refugees from African backgrounds in regional centres such as Mildura or Swan Hill to minimise the risk of young refugees getting caught up in street crime in the city. African Think Tank President, Berhan Ahmed has said that rural settlement helps refugees with integration, find work and avoid drugs, alcohol and crime. (*News.com*, 25 March)

#### **Labor selects former Liberal MP as advisor on refugees**

Former Liberal MP and refugee advocate Bruce Baird has been selected by the Rudd Government to chair the government appointed Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council. Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, Laurie Ferguson said that Mr Baird had “a fairly impressive record in raising these issues in the last government, possibly to his own detriment.” (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 March)

#### **‘White flight’ from schools concentrating refugees**

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, Laurie Ferguson has said that refugees should be settled across a wider spread of locations to avoid the ‘white flight’ phenomenon, which sees parents of some students sending their children to private or alternative state schools because of a high concentration of students of different racial backgrounds in some schools. “Deliberate policy decisions” needed to be made to diversify the location of housing for refugees and humanitarian entrants,

including many settlers from Africa whose children grew up in refugee camps and had limited education, Mr Ferguson said. *(News.com, 21 March)*

### **Migration plan to ease skills crisis**

Changes to the 457 visa scheme will enable businesses and state governments to fast track the employment of people in the mining and health industries to fill current skill shortages. The Rudd government is also looking at options to resettle climate refugees from Pacific Island at threat of flooding due to rising sea levels. *(The Age, 20 March)*

### **Howard wrong on UN: Hill**

Former Liberal minister, Robert Hill has reiterated the Rudd Government's concerns that Australia needs to repair its relationships with the UN and that the previous government kept the UN at arms length, particularly on issues relating to refugees and human rights. Mr Hill said that it will become increasingly important to engage with the UN, particularly in seeking solutions to the issues of climate change. *(The Canberra Times, 20 March)*

### **Iraqi asylum seeking doubles, lifting global total**

During 2007, the number of Iraqis seeking asylum in developed countries has doubled to 45,200 applications. For the first time since 2002, the global total of asylum seekers has risen to 338,000. *(Reuters, 18 March)*

### **Film-maker to focus on refugee experience**

Former Young Australian of the Year Khoa Do is embarking on the production of his third film, "Missing Water", which tells the story of a young Vietnamese refugee fleeing by boat at the end of the Vietnam War. *(The West Australian, 18 March)*

### **UN bid to mend fences with Canberra**

Senior UN officials have met members of the Rudd Government in an effort to repair relationships that deteriorated under the Howard Government. The Rudd Government has indicated its willingness to give stronger support to the work and function of the UN, in contrast to the previous government who often dismissed criticism from UNHCR and the Human Rights Commissioner. *(The Age, 17 March)*

### **Immigration policy 'must be balanced'**

Liberal backbencher Simon Birmingham has welcomed the Government's review of long-term detention cases but called for a balanced approach to compassion while maintaining strong border security. Greens Senator Bob Brown said the Howard years would be remembered by children behind razor wire and that it was appalling that someone could remain in detention for more than six years. *(The Age, 13 March)*

### **Push for temporary visa system to be abolished**

Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes, has called on the Australian Government to give serious consideration to abolishing all forms of temporary visas. Following on from recent reports from the Commonwealth Ombudsman which details the cases of 61 long-term detainees, the Rudd Government has committed to resolving these cases by the end of April. The Human Rights Commissioner has joined with other advocates urging the Government to go further by putting an end to temporary visas that limit people's right to work and access to support services. *(ABC News, 13 March)*

### **Aussie runs from crime and death**

A young Sudanese refugee Duer Yoa has been selected as part of a 22 member team to compete in the World Cross Country Championships in Scotland later this month. The 18-year old from Ballarat arrived in Australia during 2002 and is emerging as one of Australia's most prominent runners with his coach saying he will be a great symbol of success and hope for the African community in Australia. *(Fox Sports, 13 March)*

### **Payout for 'hell ride' to Baxter**

A Nigerian man has been awarded \$20,000 compensation for degrading treatment suffered during a seven-hour transfer by bus from Maribyrnong to the Baxter Detention Centre in South Australia in 2004. Four other detainees who travelled the same trip are also set to receive compensation following

investigations by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission that revealed the men were subject to degrading and abusive treatment by GSL guards, who run Australia's detention facilities. (*The Age*, 13 March)

### **Government reviews long-term detention cases**

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has announced a review of 61 long term detention cases. The review follows the latest report from the Commonwealth Ombudsman and will examine ways to resolve the cases by the end of April. "I am deeply concerned that so many detention cases have taken so long to resolve," Senator Evans said. "The Howard Government paid little attention to the Ombudsman's reports and recommendations," Senator Evans said. "We need to take a more pro-active approach to the prompt resolution of these cases." (*ABC News*, 13 March)

### **Security thinking waits for the big shift – Opinion**

Academic and author Anthony Burke examines the Rudd Labor Government's approach to national security and issues such as 'illegal immigration' saying that despite an apparent softening of policy towards asylum seekers, the continuation of the Christmas Island detention centre demonstrates an inability for the Rudd Government to make "the big shift in thinking that is required". (*The Canberra Times*, 12 March)

### **Children's mental health 'at risk' under Immigration policy**

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner Graeme Innes has told an international conference that, while the policy of mandatory immigration detention remains, children will continue to be at risk of psychological damage. While there are currently no children in immigration detention, there was nothing in place to prevent them from being detained in the future, particularly with the new detention facility on Christmas Island. (*ABC News Online*, 12 March)

### **Bhutan refugees bid farewell to Nepal**

The first Bhutanese refugees have departed Nepal for third country resettlement in the United States. Approximately 30,000 out of 108,000 refugees have applied for resettlement elsewhere following a drive by the US last year to encourage resettlement in western countries. (*The Peninsula, Qatar*, 11 March)

### **Anonymous letters push racist views**

Concerns have been raised that the internet is being used to escalate racist views against African refugees in Wagga. A refugee settlement volunteer, who has been the recipients of racist letters and phone calls, has called on the authors of the letters to come forward and not hide behind anonymity. (*The Blacktown Sun*, 10 March)

### **UNSW helps UN reveal plight of refugees**

A report from the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research, released as part of the Refugee Consultations Bangladesh project, has highlighted issues facing Burmese refugees living in camps on the Burma-Bangladesh border. UNHCR Regional Representative, Richard Towle said that "We need to make clear that this is an international crisis that has been left unsolved for more than 40 years." (*The Australian*, 10 March)

### **Fears our crime being Imported**

The Crimes Victims Support Association has called for the immediate deportation of immigrants who commit a first offence, claiming that immigrants are not screened properly and that groups who commit fewer crimes should be favored over "high crime" nationalities. The claims come following the release of Victoria Police statistics that show people born overseas committed one in seven crimes in Victoria last financial year. 2006 Census data also shows that 26% of Victoria's population was born overseas and are therefore proportionally committing fewer crimes than Australian born residents. Immigration Minister, Chris Evans has said that no group of entrants would be discriminated against and that the Government planned to streamline employment services to further assist successful settlement for new immigrants to Australia. (*Herald Sun*, 9 March)

### **African humanitarian intake continues, despite speculation**

The intake of refugees from Africa through the humanitarian program has continued despite former Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews' negative comments about African immigration. From July 2007 to January 2008, only 2100 of the 2007-08 year's quota of 4000 visas to African refugees had been issued. Immigration Minister, Senator Evans said there was no freeze in place. "African migration continues and we want to do more next year," he said. "The previous minister's comments were politically motivated." As a result of Mr Andrews' comments, Australia has "a job to do rebuilding confidence and our international reputation". (*Sydney Morning Herald, 9 March*)

### **Rudd's chance to rebuild ties with the Pacific – Opinion**

David Peebles, former ALP advisor and author, writes about the need for Australia to make changes to its refugee and humanitarian program to accommodate people affected by future environmental displacement. With projected climate change patterns it is estimated that Tuvalu will be one of the first islands in the Pacific to be evacuated due to flooding or salt water contamination and by mid-century it is likely that up to 80% of Kiribati will be flooded. (*The Canberra Times, 6 March*)

### **The buck stops with the Immigration Minister – Opinion**

Academic Mary Aldred writes that Immigration Minister Chris Evans should maintain his discretionary powers when intervening in individual cases and that greater decision-making by public servants would not result in greater transparency. (*The Age, 3 March*)

### **Doctors rally to offer free care for refugees**

A team of doctors and dentists across Sydney are providing free GP, specialist medical and dental services to refugees and asylum seekers who are not eligible for Medicare. Through the Red Cross Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme, clients are referred to doctors and dentists in the community that have offered their services on a pro bono basis. The program is also seeking support from pharmaceutical companies to provide necessary medications. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 3 March*)

### **Government to sign UN treaty against torture**

To fulfill a long-held policy of the Labor Party, the Federal Government has announced it will move to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture. The Optional Protocol will formalize Australia's commitment to the obligations of the Convention and as a signatory Australia may be subject to inspection of prisons and immigration detention centres. (*ABC News online, 1 March*)