



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

June 12, 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.

Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia

NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

Refugee Week celebrations across Australia

Refugee Week 2008 is just about to commence and promises to be an excellent series of events, focusing on the theme "A Place to Call Home". We are delighted that events are happening all over Australia, with more than 125 events listed on the Refugee Week calendar on our website. Official launches are being held in Sydney (June 13), Adelaide and Melbourne (both June 16) and a major World Refugee Day celebration is being held in Brisbane (June 22) – along with many local celebrations, seminars, arts events and community activities. Many of the events highlight the talents, skills and contributions of some of the 700,000 former refugees who have made Australia their home since 1945. Among them are the main guest speakers at the Adelaide and Sydney launches - Hieu Van Le, Lieutenant Governor of South Australia, and Les Murray AM, SBS broadcaster and Australia's voice of football ("the world game" variety of football, that is). The Refugee Week events calendar can be viewed at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/refugeeweek.html>

Australian guest trainers support refugee cultural orientation

A Karen community worker from Sydney and the director of Canberra's torture and trauma service have been chosen for a pilot program to provide support to trainers involved in the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program for refugees. Victor Saw, whose work with the Karen community includes support to new arrivals through ACL and NSW Refugee Health, and Kathy Ragless, director of Companion House, travelled to Kuala Lumpur last week for a one-month placement with the AUSCO program in Malaysia and Thailand. Their role is to assist the local AUSCO trainers in South-East Asia to refine their content and presentation with up-to-date information on the practical realities of refugee settlement in Australia. AUSCO is conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with funding and curriculum development provided by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). IOM conducts five-day AUSCO classes at venues across Asia, the Middle East and Africa. It also conducts similar orientation courses for refugees being resettled to USA and Canada. Kathy and Victor are the first guest trainers to be recruited from Australia by RCOA through an agreement with DIAC and IOM. Future opportunities for people to participate in this guest trainer program will be advertised in this bulletin and the RCOA website.

For those interested, the AUSCO Global Coordinator's position (based in Bangkok) is currently being advertised, as the incumbent Genevieve Dooley prepares to retire in January. For details, see: http://iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/about_iom/recruitment/SVN_2008_37.pdf

Parliamentary Inquiry Into Immigration detention

The Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Migration has decided to investigate immigration detention in Australia, with submissions due on July 18. For more information, see:

<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/detention/index.htm>

Four NSW councils join growing list of Refugee Welcome Zones

Four NSW local councils have recently decided to declare themselves Refugee Welcome Zones, increasing the number of councils which have done so to 68. It is a simple gesture of support for

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

refugees, promoted by the Refugee Council since 2002 – a valuable way of promoting understanding within local communities. The four newest Refugee Welcome Zones are Dubbo, Coffs Harbour, Port Macquarie Hastings and Penrith. In each case, the council responded to positive prompting from local residents. To find out more about this initiative – and to see whether your local council has taken the pledge – see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/general/RWZ.pdf>

We need your support to continue our work

As a small not-for-profit organisation with no core funding, the Refugee Council needs continuing support from the public, through membership and donations. In a changing political environment, the need for an informed and independent voice on refugee policy is more important than ever. For more information about making a tax-deductible donation to support our work or becoming a member of the Refugee Council, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/index.html>

COMING EVENTS

Refugee Week – June 15-21

There is so much happening in Refugee Week 2008 that we couldn't hope to list them in this bulletin. To find out what is happening in your area, view the national events calendar at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/refugeeweek.html>

Monday 2 June to Sunday 29 June - Adelaide

'Here & Now' Touring Photographic Exhibition

A poignant exhibition of photographs and oral histories telling the stories of families of refugee background settled by the MRCSA in South Australia

Venue: City of Marion Chambers Gallery, 245 Sturt Road, Sturt

Details: Open to the public during office hours. Contact Vassi Coutsoumbes on (08) 8375 6891 or vac@marion.sa.gov.au

Thursday 19 June – Sydney

NAATI's New Interpreters Project: Community Information Session

The aim of this project is to increase the number of interpreters in new and emerging languages in metropolitan areas and languages where there are shortages in rural and regional areas. Eligible applicants will attend a 15-hour workshop to help them prepare to work as an interpreter and apply for a 'NAATI Accreditation' test and/or 'NAATI Recognition'. In New South Wales, workshops are planned for Sydney, Coffs Harbour and Wagga Wagga. For information about community information sessions and workshops in other states, please visit www.naati.com.au or contact the NAATI Office in your capital city.

Venue: NAATI NSW Office, Level 5, Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280-282 Pitt St

Details: 3.00pm to 4.00pm; Contact the NAATI NSW Office to register your interest, please email nswinfo@naati.com.au or phone: (02) 9267 1357

Sunday 22 June – Sydney

5th Birthday Celebrations of the Bridge for Asylum Seekers Foundation. The Hon Tanya Plibersek, Federal Member for Sydney and Minister for Housing, will speak. Refugee Prossy Tusabe will tell a little of her story.

Venue: Circle Café, 344 Darling Street, Balmain

Details: 2.00 pm to 5.00 pm. RSVP essential by 12 June to Kate Maclurcan on (02) 9810 5826 or katemaclurcan@hotmail.com

Wednesday 25 June – Melbourne

Seminar: Removing Failed Asylum Seekers: Australian and International Practice

With Mr. John Gibson, President, Refugee Council of Australia.

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner St, Brunswick

Details: Registration 5.00pm, seminar 5.30pm to 6.30pm, RSVP to (03) 9388 0022

Thursday 26 and Friday 27 June – Adelaide

Conference: Making a Difference – Social Inclusion for New and Emerging Communities

Hosted by the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia

Venue: Banquet Room, Adelaide Festival Centre, King William Road, Adelaide

Details: Register by Wednesday 14 May for 'early bird' prices, otherwise by Wednesday 4 June, For any further information and registration forms please contact Matti Spellacy, Migrant Resource Centre of SA, Tel: (08) 8217 9510, Fax: (08) 8217 9556, Email: matti@mrcsa.com.au

Tuesday 1 to Friday 4 July – Byron Bay, NSW

International Conference: Activating Human Rights and Peace

Venue: Byron Bay Community and Cultural Centre, Byron Bay, NSW

Details: For further information and registration details please visit:

http://www.scu.edu.au/research/cpsi/human_rights/index.html

Friday 1 August and Saturday 2 August – Launceston, Tasmania

Conference: Social Inclusion and Exclusion of Culturally Diverse Communities: Experiences and Strategies.

Venue: University of Tasmania, Launceston Campus

Details: Registration closes on Friday 18 July. For further information about submission of papers and participation in discussion panels, please visit: <http://adcet.dev.visualeyes.net.au/diversity/>

Wednesday 13 August to Saturday 16 August

International Unity in Diversity Conference – Townsville, Queensland

Early Bird booking closes by June 30

For further details contact: Ika Tewu, Office of Cultural Fest 08, International Unity in Diversity

Conference, Phone (07) 4772 4800, Fax (07) 4772 1840 unityindiversityconference@bigpond.com

and <http://www.culturalfest.org/unityindiriversityconference.htm>

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

New Book: 'Assessing the Costs and Impacts of Migration Policy: an International Comparison'

Published by IOM and Eurasyllum, the book explores some of the key issues, at a policy and practical level, relating to the design, implementation and outcomes of public evaluation systems in the field of migration policy. It reviews the ways migration policies are evaluated in several EU member states, the USA, Canada, the European Commission, IOM and UNHCR, and provides a range of recommendations for improving the design and implementation of evidence-based and accountable policies in the field of migration and asylum. For further information please [click here](#).

Interpreters and Translators Needed

The Language Services Division of the NSW Community Relations Commission provides interpreting and translation services to government departments, private and commercial organisations. CRC are currently seeking interpreters and/or translators in the following languages: Albanian, Amharic, Assyrian, Auslan, Bengali, Bosnian, Cook Islands Maori, Croatian, Dinka, Fijian, Filipino, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Lao, Lithuanian, Malay, Maltese, Punjabi, Pushto, Russian, Samoan, Serbian, Sudanese Arabic, Tamil, Tigrinya, Tongan and Urdu. For more information and to obtain an information pack please refer to www.jobs.nsw.gov.au and see job reference: CRC08/152.

Documentary: A Nun's New Habit

By Robyn Hughan, this documentary film follows the story of Sister Carmel Wauchope who she met on a visit to the Baxter Detention Centre in 2004. Sister Carmel talks about the hardships faced by refugees who were detained in Baxter and says the ongoing psychological damage and trauma the refugees suffer after their release is arguably just as profound. *A Nun's New Habit* first screened back in March, but it be screened again during Refugee Week 2008 in Fremantle WA. Please visit <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/refugeeweek.html#w> for further details.

Calls for Arabic-speaking health professionals to participate in research

FECCA works in partnership with the National Prescribing Service (NPS) to promote the safe use of medicines to culturally and linguistically diverse Australians. We are currently seeking bilingual health professionals (doctors, pharmacists, and nurses) working with Arabic-speaking clients and able to undertake an interview regarding issues around the safe and effective use of medicines amongst

Australians from Arabic-speaking communities. If you are a health professional and able to be interviewed, or are interested in acquiring more information about this research, please contact Corinne Dobson at FECCA on 02 6282 5755, or via email mcqum2@fecca.org.au.

Call for donations: Second-hand school books for Sierra Leone

Sierra Unite is calling for donations of second-hand goods including school books, computers, teaching aids and children's books to send to junior schools, high schools and libraries in Sierra Leone. For further information and details about collection points, please visit: <http://www.sierraunite.org/>

REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

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)

MP 'stirred up racial hostility'

A confidential report prepared by the Immigration Department obtained under freedom of information shows that racial harassment of African refugees and migrants increased in the period between October and November 2007, following public comments made by former Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews. (*The Age*, 31 May)

Refugees in rural areas positive: report

A report commissioned by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) has found that successful settlement in rural and regional areas provides health, economic and social advantages both to the refugees the community in which they settle. The report also highlighted some of the problems and challenges encountered by refugees in regional communities including racism, discrimination and difficulty in finding employment. (*The Age*, 31 May)

Christmas Island detainees cost \$32 million a year

Immigration Minister Chris Evans has said that the Christmas Island detention centre costs \$25.1 million a year to run when empty and this would increase to \$32 million if the centre again became operational with up to 30 detainees. Despite calls for an end to offshore processing for asylum seekers, Senator Evans has said, "We have inherited this facility and, given the \$400 million cost to build the centre, it would be irresponsible not to use it now that it has been completed." (*The Age*, 30 May)

Amnesty raises concerns over Australia

The annual report, *The State of the World's Human Rights*, released by Amnesty International raises concerns about Australia's treatment of Dr Mohammed Haneef, David Hicks and the Northern Territory intervention in indigenous communities. Amnesty also acknowledges the positive steps made by the Rudd Government in abolishing the Temporary Protection Visa, ending the 'Pacific Solution' and making an apology to the Stolen Generations. (*ABC World News Online*, 28 May)

At least 135 wrongly detained

The Immigration Department has told a Senate estimates hearing that it could be "at some risk of legal liability" in at least 135 detention cases. The Department indicated it had made contact with 121 of the people and 54 had been sent a letter advising them they could be eligible for compensation. 27 people indicated they had already sought legal advice and the Department said eight cases had been resolved, totalling about \$620,000 in compensation. (*News.com*, 28 May)

Evans overturns 187 visa decisions

Immigration Minister, Chris Evans, has told a Senate estimates hearing that he used his discretionary powers under section 417 of the Migration Act to grant 187 visas during the first three months of this year. Of those, 116 were refugee applications which had been previously been rejected by the Refugee Review Tribunal. Minister Evans said that he will request visa decision figures from his department each quarter which would be released publicly. He also said he still intended to overhaul the visa applications process to divest himself of some of his intervention powers. (*ABC World News Online*, 28 May)

Sudanese tears hit home

Sudanese refugees in Australia are facing even greater anguish as they learn about the fate of family, friends and loved ones following recent violence by militias that has driven over 100,000 people from the township of Abyei. Houses, markets, schools, offices and shops have been burned to the ground and looted and many people shot dead in their street or their homes. Fearing a further escalation of violence and reignition of civil war, 400 members of Melbourne's Dinka community marched for peace outside the Victorian Parliament calling on the Australian Government and the UN to protect their family members in Sudan. *(The Age, 28 May)*

New mental illness hits refugees

Psychiatrists say they have identified a new form of mental illness affecting refugees and asylum seekers in Australia that is a combination of major depression, anxiety and psychosis with clinical symptoms similar to those associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. Melbourne University associate professor Suresh Sundram said the as yet unnamed syndrome is caused by "the chronic and prolonged stress, occasional acute distress and repeated 'rejections and humiliations' attached to their situation". Dr Fiona Hawker who treated detainees has identified a "Baxter syndrome" which affected all but one of 70 patients with symptoms of "episodes of agitation and violence, reduced appetite, nightmares and disturbed sleep, anger, anxiety, auditory and visual hallucinations and severely damaged short-term memory". *(The Age, 28 May)*

Immigration Minister rejecting asylum requests by three to one

Figures released by the Department of Immigration show that in the first three months of this year, Immigration Minister Chris Evans granted visas to 116 of a total 392 cases applying for ministerial intervention under s417 of the Migration Act. David Manne of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre said that the process of ministerial intervention is "arbitrary, whimsical and unwieldy. Essentially the minister is the personal gatekeeper of some of the most important human rights treaty obligations we have." *(The Australian, 28 May)*

Detainees protest on Villawood roof

Following announcements from Immigration Minister Chris Evans that they were among the long-term detention cases to be rejected by the Minister, two asylum seekers climbed on to the roof of the Villawood detention centre in protest against their impending deportation. It was reported that one of the asylum seekers claimed to be a Falun Gong practitioner and feared for his safety if returned to China. *(Sydney Morning Herald, 27 May)*

Refugee's story of revenge supported

The case of a rejected asylum seeker from Sierra Leone has been supported by reports published in Sierra Leone's New Vision newspaper. The case has been rejected by the Refugee Review Tribunal and Immigration Minister Chris Evans has refused to intervene. The asylum seeker is expected to be returned to Sierra Leone with a month. Supporters of the asylum seeker have called the decision a "miscarriage of justice" *(Sydney Morning Herald, 27 May)*.

Asylum review under attack

Refugee and asylum advocacy groups have criticised the recent review by Immigration Minister Chris Evans of long-term detention cases saying they are concerned about the welfare of returned detainees. *(The Australian, 24 May)*

Australia seals fate of long-term detainees

In finalising his review of long-term detention cases Immigration Minister, Chris Evans has said that, of Australia's 72 long-term detainees, only 31 will be granted visas or considered for visa grants while another 24 have already left the country or will be expected to as they have no valid reason for remaining. *(Radio Australia, 23 May)*

New use sought for Christmas Island detention centre

Christmas Island Shire President, Gordon Thompson, has urged the Australian Government to use the now empty facility for something useful such as a scientific research centre. The centre which cost US\$382 million to build is currently being maintained by 20 security staff and 20 cleaners. Immigration Minister Chris Evans said the centre will remain as it is until needed. *(Radio Australia, 23 May)*

Budget puts pressure on Australia's borders

Shadow Immigration Minister Chris Ellison has said the Labor's cuts to the immigration budget will have serious implications for border security. *(Media Release Shadow Immigration Minister, 20 May)*

Attack on migrants

Police in Sydney's west have claimed they are powerless to act against the distribution of racist leaflets that viciously attack Sudanese refugees. The pamphlet includes contact details for the Australia First Party but spokesman Jim Saleam has denied issuing the leaflet. Refugee Council of Australia CEO, Paul Power, has said the leaflet is "extremely distressing for African refugees". *(Sunday Telegraph, 18 May)*

Volunteers help settler Sudanese speak the word of hope

While volunteer programs to assist refugees provide much needed support with English language tuition, the demand for the programs highlights significant gaps in government-funding settlement services. In the aftermath of Kevin Andrews' comments about African integration last year, many who provide settlement support for refugees have been heartened by the offers of assistance from philanthropic trusts and community groups. *(The Age, 17 May)*

Race row we didn't have to have

Former Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews was acting contrary to the advice of his department when he made comments that African refugees were engaged in criminal activities and were failing to integrate. A briefing prepared for Mr Andrews said that it was not ethnicity that determined criminal behaviour but a combination of socio-economic problems and other disadvantage and that "whatever the background of the perpetrators, it would be wrong to blame all people from a particular migrant group for the behaviour of a few". *(The Age, 17 May)*

Australia under scrutiny from UN on torture stance

In the latest report from the United Nations Committee Against Torture, the international body has criticised the Australian Government for not having a specific offence of torture and for the continued policy of mandatory detention of unauthorised arrivals. The Committee has welcomed, however, the Government's apology to the Stolen Generations and the end to the detention of children and end of the 'Pacific Solution'. *(ABC News Online, 17 May)*

Australia finalises 'Pacific Solution' asylum cases

Immigration Minister, Chris Evans says he has nearly finalised the cases of a large number of detainees who have been held for up to six years. *(Radio Australia, 16 May)*

1000 refugees celebrate dropping of temporary visa

The abolition of temporary visas for recognised refugees will bring long-awaited relief and certainty for up to 1000 people who have languished in the community without the full suite of settlement supports, English language tuition and the right to be reunited with their families. *(The Age, 16 May)*

Government warns of refugee boat arrival 'season'

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has defended the Rudd Government's immigration policies against accusations from the Coalition that Australia's borders are "open for business", but has also warned that boat arrivals could be expected as the "season" for them was approaching *(AAP Newswire, 15 May)*

Australia praised for new refugee policy

The UN refugee agency and human rights groups have congratulated the move by the Rudd Government to abolish Temporary Protection Visas. Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes said that the TPV created "an unjust two-tiered system for refugees and has caused undue suffering and distress for many people trying to escape persecution". *(AP, 15 May)*

Funding will aid refugees

The Victorian State Government has announced \$19.7 million in funding for interpreting services and the creation of a Refugee Support Strategy which will focus on health, education and justice initiatives.

The funding will also provide for an expansion of the Refugee Health Nurse program. (*Dandenong Star*, 15 May)

UN refugee agency welcomes the end of TPVs

UNHCR Regional Representative, Richard Towle, has welcomed the Government's announcement to abolish the TPV and THV, saying that the visas "perpetuated uncertainty for refugees who had already suffered enormous hardship, impeding their ability to restart their lives and prolonging the separation of families". (*UNHCR Regional Office website*, 14 May)

Troops home and a refuge for some

While focusing on resettling Iraqi refugees in Australia, the Government has also announced \$13.7 million in funding over three years to the Australian Federal Police to train 240 Iraqi police in Australia. The funding which will focus on leadership and forensic science training and the additional 500 refugee places for Iraqis form part of the Rudd Government's humanitarian and capacity-building support for Iraq. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 May)

Minister announces commitment to improve detention

The Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has announced a \$1.1 million feasibility study of the Villawood detention centre as part of an overall commitment to improve detention facilities. The Government also announced a 12-month extension to the Case Management and Community Care Pilot. Capital works have been completed on the Christmas Island detention facility which will remain the primary processing centre for future unauthorised boat arrivals and detention centres remain in operation in Brisbane, Melbourne and Villawood. (*Immigration Minister Media Release*, 13 May)

Government offers lifeline to Iraqi refugees

The announced increase in refugee numbers for 2008-09 will be a one-off increase designed to assist the large numbers of Iraqi refugees and there will be a permanent increase in the humanitarian program in 2009-10 of 750 places. In a statement, Immigration Minister Chris Evans said, "we are committed to helping people in vulnerable situations from around the world, in particular Iraqi nationals and refugees in Africa who are unable to return to their homes". (*The Age*, 13 May)

Refugee program to expand by 500

The annual intake of refugee and humanitarian entrants will be increased by 500 places to 13,500 in 2008-09 with 6,500 set aside as refugee places and the remaining 7,000 for other humanitarian entrants. Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans said there would continue to be refugees from Africa, Asia and the Middle East with a focus on Iraqis and Burmese refugees. The Minister also announced an end to the controversial Temporary Protection Visa. (*The Age*, 13 May)

The door opens for Aladdin Sisalem

After spending 18 months in the Manus Island Detention Centre and the last four years on a Temporary Protection Visa, Aladdin Sisalem has been informed that he can immediately apply for permanent residency in Australia. (*The Age*, 12 May)

Mind your language

With more than 32,000 refugees settling in Victoria in the last 10 years, it is becoming more recognised that greater tangible assistance is required that goes beyond offering English language classes and that refugees need opportunities to develop an understanding of Australian culture. While most refugees will have access to 510 hours of English language tuition, for many it is not enough and some refugees are needing to enrol in a further 800 hours of tuition in order to acquire a reasonable level of practical English, particularly in relation to employment opportunities. (*The Age*, 12 May)