



# Refugee Council of Australia

## **BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS**

**August 20, 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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#### **Australia's new prison-like immigration detention centre**

RCOA's CEO Paul Power was one of 43 NGO and government representatives who participated in a tour of immigration detention facilities on Christmas Island on August 13. It provided the first opportunity for many to see the new \$400 million immigration detention centre built at Christmas Island's North West Cape. The visit was organised at the request of Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, who has expressed his wish to see immigration detention facilities more open for public scrutiny. While those taking part in the visit expected to see a new prison-like detention centre, the visitors were shocked by the scale of the security measures, with wire, caging, security grilles and surveillance equipment throughout the complex. Construction of the centre began in 2005, at the same time as substantial changes to immigration detention were commencing in the wake of the Palmer and Comrie inquiries. And yet, apart from the removal of facilities for children, there was no significant change made to the centre's plans to reflect the changes in detention policy. As a result, the Australian Government has spent \$400 million on a centre which is manifestly unsuited for the purpose for which it was built. After the visit, RCOA and eight other NGOs wrote to Minister Evans to express our concerns about the new centre – see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/media.html>

The Minister's intention is to use the detention facilities on Christmas Island for the processing of people who arrive by boat without valid visas – people who, in most cases, will be asylum seekers. The existing older facilities on Christmas Island will be used wherever possible. These include very basic accommodation at the Phosphate Hill detention centre (which has had much of its fencing removed), the adjacent construction workers' accommodation and a series of duplexes and units in Christmas Island's main settlement areas. The new detention centre at North West Cape, which can accommodate 400 people (or 800 at "surge capacity") will be used, the Minister says, only when the number of people being processed exceeds the capacity of the other facilities on the island.

#### **RCOA welcomes new set of values for immigration detention**

On July 29, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, announced a series of policy changes for the conduct of Australia's immigration detention centres. While the policies of mandatory detention and the excision of offshore islands from the migration zone remain, the Minister has outlined a set of values he wants applied to the conduct of detention centres. These changes are aimed at ending indefinite and non-reviewable detention and at limiting immigration detention to a measure of last resort. RCOA immediately welcomed the changes, as a practical step towards ensuring respect for the rights of vulnerable people – see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/media.html> The Minister's speech is at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/speeches/2008/ce080729.htm>

#### **Burma leading source country in 2007-08 humanitarian program**

The statistics on the 2007-08 Refugee and Humanitarian Program have been released. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship slightly exceeded its annual target, issuing 13,014 refugee and humanitarian visas. Of these, there were 6004 offshore refugee visas issued, 4795 Special Humanitarian Program visas and 2215 onshore protection visas (issued to people who sought asylum within Australia). The primary countries of origin for offshore refugee and humanitarian visas were

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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

Burma 2961, Iraq 2215, Afghanistan 1185, Sudan 1158, Liberia 410, Democratic Republic of Congo 348, Burundi 303, Iran 302, Sierra Leone 267 and Sri Lanka 243. The primary countries of origin for onshore protection visas were Sri Lanka 434, China 412, Iraq 219, Pakistan 117, Iran 96, Zimbabwe 87, Burma 55, Bangladesh 42, Egypt 37 and Afghanistan 32. The Minister's announcement is at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08080.htm>

### **Settlement strategies and global refugee issues explored at UNHCR gatherings**

In June and July, four representatives of RCOA – Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Paris Aristotle, Jenny Semple and Anna Samson – participated in two key UNHCR meetings in Geneva. The annual NGO Consultations brought together more than 100 NGOs from around the world while the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR) involved governments and NGOs from countries involved in refugee resettlement. Issues canvassed at the NGO consultations included the Iraqi refugee crisis, the situation of urban refugees, protection mechanisms for internally displaced people, statelessness and NGO cooperation in Asia-Pacific. At the ATCR gathering, Melika Sheikh-Eldin co-facilitated (with Anna Samson) a session on strategies for sustainable employment, drawing on her experience as a manager with AMES Victoria's refugee settlement program, while Paris Aristotle, director of Foundation House, led discussion about the role of mental health support in refugee settlement strategies. Melika has since been invited by UNHCR to assist in the trial among Eritrean refugees in Africa of a new approach to assessing refugees most in need of resettlement. This approach was developed by Australian NGOs (UNSW Centre for Refugee Research, Foundation House and Austcare). A short report on the UNHCR meetings is at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/international.html#08atcr>

### **Merit-based selection for Refugee Review Tribunal members**

Senior members of the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) and Migration Review Tribunal (MRT) will face a merit-based selection process, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, has announced. The Minister has chosen not to reappoint five members but to invite them to reapply through an open recruitment process. RCOA has raised concerns with the Minister about past RRT appointment processes and strongly supports a shift to merit-based selection. The Minister's announcement is at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2008/ce08074.htm>

### **Review of Adult Migrant English Program**

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has released a discussion paper on future directions of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). The paper is part of a review which aims to examine the strategic goal and objectives of AMEP, better ways of integrating language learning and employment needs, language assistance for newly arrived teenagers and more effective performance management and benchmarking of the program. The discussion paper can be viewed at: [http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/amep\\_discussion\\_paper.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/amep_discussion_paper.pdf)

### **Position vacant – National Policy Director, RCOA**

RCOA is seeking applications for the position of National Policy Director. Based in Sydney, the National Policy Director leads RCOA's research and policy team and assists the CEO on national and international advocacy on refugee issues. Applications close on Monday, September 1. For details, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/employment.html>

## **COMING EVENTS**

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Please note that events can be subject to change. To avoid disappointment, please check the details with the event organiser.

### **Wednesday 20 August – Sydney**

**Forum: Impact of Ongoing Conflict in Eastern Burma** with keynote speaker Jack Dunford MBE  
*Venue: DT Anderson Lecture Theatre, Heydon-Laurence Building, Science Road, University of Sydney.*  
*Details: 6pm to 7.30pm; free event; for registration and details please contact (02) 9351 7686, [arts.cpacs@usyd.edu.au](mailto:arts.cpacs@usyd.edu.au)*

### **Thursday 21 August – Melbourne**

**Forum: Ongoing Emergency – Refugees and the Displaced People of Burma** with keynote speaker Jack Dunford MBE

Venue: Carrillo Gantner Theatre Basement; Sidney Myer Asia Centre; Swanston St, University of Melbourne.

Details: 6pm to 7.30pm; free event; for registration and details please contact Janet Cousens on (02) 8259 0832 or at [jcousens@ncca.org.au](mailto:jcousens@ncca.org.au)

### **August 25-31**

#### **Migrant and Refugee Week**

The Catholic Church in Australia is celebrating Migrant and Refugee Week from August 25. The focus this year is on Young Migrants. For more information see <http://www.acmro.catholic.org.au/index.htm>

The week's events culminate in Refugee and Migrant Sunday on August 31 (see below).

Brisbane's Catholic Centre for Multicultural Pastoral Care is promoting two events – a Migrant and Refugee Week gathering on Thursday, August 28 at 7.30pm at its office in Paddington (Qld); and Brisbane's Multicultural Mass at St Stephen's Cathedral on Sunday, August 31 at 2pm. Details of both events can be found at <http://www.multiculturalcare.org.au>

#### **Tuesday 26 and Wednesday 27 August – Sydney**

**Community Relations Symposium** – presented by the NSW Community Relations Commission

An invitation to showcase your community project at the Symposium and network with other community professionals

Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, Parramatta

Details: For further information please contact the Symposium Coordinator, Maria José Fernandez on (02) 8255 6799 or via email at [maria.fernandez@crc.nsw.gov.au](mailto:maria.fernandez@crc.nsw.gov.au)

#### **From 27 August - Refugee camp in your city**

In August 2008, following a successful 13-year run in 13 countries around the globe, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Australia is launching the first Australian tour of **Refugee Camp In Your City**. A recreation of a refugee camp and its facilities, **Refugee Camp In Your City** aims to create a better understanding of the vulnerability of life for displaced people and refugees who have fled their homes. Free and open to the public, this innovative outdoor event is fully interpreted by MSF Australian returned field workers who have witnessed life in a refugee camp first-hand. Their free guided tours will educate and enlighten visitors on the experiences and everyday life of displaced people around the world.

**Brisbane:** Conservatorium Green, South Bank (as part of Riverfestival 2008); **27- 31 August**

**Western Sydney:** The Overflow, Sydney Olympic Park; **5-9 September**

**Sydney CBD:** Martin Place (between Pitt & Castlereagh Sts); **13-17 September**

**Canberra:** Glebe Park (Cnr Akuna & Bunda Sts); **20-24 September**

#### **Thursday 28 August – Sydney**

**Seminar: Iraq – Unheard Voices: Australia's role in Iraq's growing refugee crisis.**

Venue: The Footbridge Theatre, Parramatta Rd, Sydney University

Details: 6pm; for details contact Cyril O'Connor (02) 9299 2215 or [coconnor@ncca.org.au](mailto:coconnor@ncca.org.au)

#### **Sunday, August 31**

##### **Refugee and Migrant Sunday**

The National Council of Churches in Australia is encouraging all Christian churches to hold local celebrations of Refugee and Migrant Sunday. The focus this year is on the humanitarian crisis created by the war in Iraq. The NCCA site – [http://www.ncca.org.au/cws/rdp/refugee\\_and\\_migrant\\_sunday](http://www.ncca.org.au/cws/rdp/refugee_and_migrant_sunday) - includes an education kit and worship resources.

#### **Tuesday 4 September – Melbourne**

**Lecture: Habeas Corpus, Procedural Rights, and Fundamental Law** with speaker Larry May, Washington University, St Louis USA.

Venue: Monash University Law Chambers, 472 Bourke Street, Melbourne

Details: 6pm to 7.30pm; RSVP to [castan.centre@law.monash.edu.au](mailto:castan.centre@law.monash.edu.au) or (03) 9905 3327

#### **Wednesday 3 September – Melbourne**

**Seminar: Families caring across borders:** How migrants and refugees care for ageing parents across distance. Presented by La Trobe University Refugee Health Research Centre with **Dr Raelene Wilding**, Lecturer, Sociology La Trobe University

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner Street, Brunswick

Details: Registration 5pm, Seminar: 5.30pm to 6.30pm; for further information contact [rhrc@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:rhrc@latrobe.edu.au) or Tel: (03) 9479 5874 or visit [www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html)

#### **Thursday 11 September – Sydney**

**2008 Refugee Ball Fundraiser** – to raise funds for international and domestic projects being supported by Friends of STARTTS.

Venue: Dockside, the Balcony Level, Cockle Bay Wharf, Sydney

Details: 7pm; to book tickets please visit: [www.raffle.org.au](http://www.raffle.org.au) and for any further details, please email: [refugeeball@friendsofstartts.org](mailto:refugeeball@friendsofstartts.org).

#### **Tuesday 30 September to Friday 3 October – Sydney**

**Conference:** The 4Rs - Rights, Reconciliation, Respect, Responsibility

Venue: University of Technology, Sydney

Details: for all registration and details visit: [www.the4rsconference.org](http://www.the4rsconference.org)

#### **Wednesday 1 October – Melbourne**

**Seminar: A space to speak** – challenging representations of culturally diverse communities

Presented by La Trobe University Refugee Health Research Centre with **Caitlin Nunn**, Research Officer, The Refugee Health Research Centre, La Trobe University/Foundation House

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner Street, Brunswick

Details: Registration 5pm, Seminar: 5.30pm to 6.30pm; for further information contact [rhrc@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:rhrc@latrobe.edu.au) or (03) 9479 5874 or visit [www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html)

#### **Friday 10 October**

**Seminar: The Crisis of Human Rights in Sri Lanka** with Professor Ivan Shearer, Shiva Pasupati and Dr Manuepillai, Paul Dominic, Dr Brian Seniveratne

Venue: Professorial Board Room; Main Quad, Sydney University Campus, Broadway

Details: 3pm to 5pm; RSVP to [law.scil@usyd.edu.au](mailto:law.scil@usyd.edu.au) Free seminar

#### **Wednesday 26 November – Melbourne**

**Seminar: Researching services for survivors of torture and trauma** – a preliminary investigation about recovery outcomes. Presented by La Trobe University Refugee Health Research Centre with **Dr Colleen McFarlane** and **Dr Ida Kaplan**, The Refugee Health Research Centre, La Trobe University/Foundation House

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner Street, Brunswick

Details: Registration 5pm, Seminar: 5.30pm to 6.30pm; for further information contact [rhrc@latrobe.edu.au](mailto:rhrc@latrobe.edu.au) or Tel: (03) 9479 5874 or visit [www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html)

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

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### **New report: Harnessing Diversity – Addressing racial and religious discrimination in employment.**

A joint project of Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and Victorian Multicultural Commission, this report explores the experience of culturally and linguistically diverse job-seekers in the employment market in Victoria. The report also recommends some key strategies for the Commonwealth and State Governments in addressing systemic discrimination in the employment market. A full copy of the report can be accessed at:

<http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/pdf/Harnessing%20Diversity%20report.pdf>

### **New report: Regional Settlement in Australia**

Produced by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), this report examines the settlement experiences of refugees in regional Australia with a particular focus on identifying factors which contribute to the successful settlement of humanitarian entrants in regional Australia. For a full copy of the report see:

[http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/\\_pdf/evaluation-regional-settlement-australia.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/government-programs/settlement-planning/_pdf/evaluation-regional-settlement-australia.pdf)

**New paper: Working with Wasim – A convergence of community**

By Anne Pedersen, Mary Anne Kenny, Linda Briskman and Sue Hoffman, this is a paper about an asylum seeker who entered Australia in a dinghy, as published in The Australian Community Psychologist, Vol 20 No 1, June 2008. The full paper can be downloaded from <http://www.safecom.org.au/wasim-paper.htm>

**Briefing paper: Sri Lanka - Protracted Conflict: Protection Challenges for Humanitarian Agencies**

By Hazel Lang and Anita Knudsen. Internal displacement in Sri Lanka exists in the context of protracted war. Humanitarian agencies seeking to enhance the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) confront operational realities of working in a difficult - politicised and insecure - environment. Based on field interviews with humanitarian agencies in Eastern Sri Lanka, this briefing paper examines challenges and obstacles of humanitarian protection in protracted conflict. To download the paper please visit: <http://www.austcare.org.au/media/56973/arcsrilankabp-lowres.pdf>

**HREOC expands web resources on refugee and migration issues**

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has updated its human rights web pages on immigration, refugees and asylum seekers. The new web pages include: a what's new section; a new fact sheet on the impact of bridging visas restrictions on asylum seekers; questions and answers on immigration detention and human rights, and asylum seekers, refugees and human rights; and links to the range of HREOC work related to immigration, asylum seekers and refugees. To visit the site, go to [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/human\\_rights/immigration/index.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/immigration/index.html)

**New report: Climate Change and Human Rights: A Rough Guide**

From the International Council on Human Rights Policy, published in June 2008; this report argues that human rights principles can guide climate change policy by focusing on individual suffering and exposure to risk. [http://www.ichrp.org/en/zoom-in/climate\\_change\\_new\\_report](http://www.ichrp.org/en/zoom-in/climate_change_new_report)

**New paper: Local Integration: An Under-reported Solution to Protracted Refugee Situations**

Published by UNHCR in June 2008 (New Issues in Refugee Research Paper, no. 158), this report examines and highlights the role of local integration as a durable solution to refugee influxes in countries of first asylum. For a full copy of the article please visit: <http://www.unhcr.org/research/RESEARCH/486cc99f2.pdf>

**New report: Failed Responsibility: Iraqi Refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon**

Produced by the International Crisis Group in July 2008, this report focuses on the experiences of Iraqi refugees and the reception they have received in their host countries. The report also makes a series of recommendations towards enhancing the capacity of receiving countries, donors and other parties to adequately respond to the growing refugee crisis in the region. For a full copy of the report, please visit: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5563&l=1>

**Australian Migration Archive to go online**

The 'Making Australia Home' project was recently launched at the National Archives and will catalogue millions of migration records since Federation. The catalogue can be found at: [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au)

**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)

**People smuggling on Australian minister's agenda**

When Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans meets with officials in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, the issue of people-smuggling and regional cooperation will be among the key topics of discussion. (*Radio Australia, 5 August*)

### **Former asylum seeker's death won't change Government stance**

Immigration Minister Chris Evans has said that the death of Palestinian former asylum seeker, Akram al Masri, will not change Australia's approach to refugee determination and return. *(ABC News, 5 August)*

### **Plea to save family of killed Palestinian deportee**

The uncle of Akram al Masri, the former asylum seeker killed in Gaza recently, has asked the Federal Government to intervene to bring his family to Australia for their safety. *(The Age, 5 August)*

### **Resettled Iraqis left feeling dumped**

Former Iraqi interpreters who were resettled in Australia two months ago have said they feel short-changed by the Government. While they say they were promised housing and jobs, many are finding they will need to retrain in order to gain employment. Some have described needing to scrounge for furniture and others are still living in hotels. *(The Age, 5 August)*

### **Most think past asylum policy was not too tough**

A poll conducted by Essential Media has shown that less than a quarter of respondents (24%) said past policy on asylum seekers had been too tough, while 62% said it had been right or not tough enough *(The Age, 5 August)*

### **Eddie McGuire urges giving migrants a fair go**

Television presenter Eddie McGuire has highlighted the issues faced by many refugees and migrants in participating in the social and economic fabric of Australian society. He says that, if we are serious about giving migrants and refugees a fair go, there needs to be a greater emphasis on providing the right sort of assistance in gaining access to meaningful employment and training. Eddie McGuire also focuses on the work of the Brotherhood of St Laurence's 'Given the Chance' program that has a 70% success rate in finding employment and training positions for refugees. *(The Herald Sun, 3 August)*

### **Expelled detainee killed in Gaza**

A former Palestinian asylum seeker who was deported by the Howard Government has been killed in Gaza. He was part of a case taken to the High Court that led to the release of other detainees and found that Akram al Masri was illegally imprisoned and could not be held indefinitely in unresolved detention with no prospect of deportation. In 2002, a deal was struck with Israeli authorities allowing him to be sent back. The Immigration Department has been asked to investigate the death. *(The Age, 2 August)*

### **Nauru accepts \$29 million aid package**

The Nauruan Government will receive humanitarian aid and assistance of up to \$29 million in the coming financial year. Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith says this takes into account the closure of the immigration detention centre earlier this year. *(ABC News, 31 July)*

### **Africans face racism, says Finance Minister**

Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner, in delivering the 2008 Redmond Barry lecture, said that young African-Australians experienced significant racism and discrimination, particularly in the employment market, despite having Australian tertiary qualifications. *(The Age, 31 July)*

### **The new chief justice who can't be judged**

Justice Robert French has been appointed by the Federal Government to the position of chief justice of the High Court commencing in November. While Justice French was one of the judges who upheld the Howard Government's move in 2001 to block refugees on the Tampa from entering Australia, Attorney-General Robert McClelland has said that Justice French is noted for his record of interpreting the law literally, rather than being a judicial activist. *(Sydney Morning Herald, 31 July)*

### **Clash looms over asylum-seeker detention policy**

While the Government requires the full support of the Greens, Family First and independent Senator Nick Xenophon in order to pass legislation in the Senate, Immigration Minister Chris Evans has said that many of the recent policy changes could be achieved through 'tweaks' to regulation and departmental policy. While supporting the recent changes as a positive step, the Vice-President of RCOA, William Maley, has called for work rights to be granted to those with strong refugee cases to avoid the reliance community-based asylum seekers have on charitable organisations. *(The Australian, 30 July)*

### **Detention policy improvements reliant on improvement in Immigration decisions**

Susan Harris Rimmer of Australian Lawyers for Human Rights says that, for the announced detention policy changes to be truly effective, an 'exponential improvement' in the ability of the Immigration Department to reach correct primary-decisions must be achieved. (*The Canberra Times, 30 July*)

### **Rudd owes asylum reform to Howard government, says Ruddock**

Former Immigration Minister, Philip Ruddock has said that the only reason the Rudd Government has been able to soften immigration detention policy is because of all the hard work and gains made under the Howard government. The Opposition has said it will not support any changes to detention policy, saying that, despite being rejected by the voting public, the policies of the previous government "were the right thing to do." (*The Age, 30 July*)

### **Waiting for apology as a 'stolen' human being**

A former immigration detainee has expressed scepticism about the capacity of departmental officials to complete identity, health and security checks for asylum seekers in a short period to allow their release into the community. There have also been renewed calls for a broad apology to former detainees for the damage caused to people's physical and emotional wellbeing. (*The Age, 30 July*)

### **Mandatory detention policy overturned**

Opposition Immigration Spokesperson, Chris Ellison, has said the Rudd Government's recent changes to detention policy would weaken Australia's borders and invite thousands of boat arrivals. Former Liberal backbencher and current head of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council, Bruce Baird, has applauded the changes saying they "will ensure a more realistic approach to immigration processing, as well as the humane treatment of vulnerable immigrants, not least refugees and asylum-seekers." The changes have also received support from RCOA and the Law Council of Australia. (*The Canberra Times, 30 July*)

### **Government to dump mandatory detention for most asylum seekers**

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans responds to concerns about the three-monthly internal departmental review of immigration detention cases and the lack of legislative capacity of recommendations made by the Commonwealth Ombudsman. With regard to the expansion of review rights for asylum seekers detained on Christmas Island, Senator Evans is asked about why consideration has not been given to returning to pre-1994 Labor policy where refugees or asylum seekers arriving in Australia had immediate access within 48 hours to an independent judicial review by a magistrate and then ongoing review until the case was determined. (*ABC TV, 7.30 Report, 29 July*)

### **Sweeping changes to mandatory detention announced**

Immigration Minister, Senator Chris Evans today announced significant changes to the management of immigration detainees to ensure that only those who are assessed as posing a threat to the community will be detained. In addition, the circumstances of those who are detained will be reviewed every three months, at which time the onus will be on the Department of Immigration to make the case for their continued detention. Unauthorised boat arrivals will continue to be detained on Christmas Island, but will have access to legal assistance and the right to appeal decisions made in relation to their applications for protection. (*ABC News Online, 29 July*)

### **More money for displaced Iraqis**

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has announced an additional \$6.45 million in assistance for international aid projects that will ease the plight of refugees fleeing from Iraq into Syria. Some of the funds will be used to provide support and assistance to women who have fled sexual violence and to combat growing concerns about exploitation and women being forced into prostitution. The additional funding will bring the Government's assistance for Iraq in 2008-09 to more than \$16 million. (*The Age, 28 July*)

### **Concerns about drug taking in detention**

Following the release of photographs allegedly taken by detainees at the Villawood Detention Centre showing the use of 'ice' and marijuana, the Immigration Minister, Senator Chris Evans has said that

anyone with information about the use of illicit drugs at the centre should take their information to police. (*The Age*, 25 July)

### **Detainees released**

15 people have been released from immigration detention after it was determined that they were improperly detained on character grounds. The decision of the Federal Court overturns a decision of the former Immigration Minister to cancel the visas. (*Border Mail*, 23 July)

### **Andrews' agenda was 'anti-Islam'**

A senior Muslim leader has criticised the former Immigration Minister, Kevin Andrews for pursuing an anti-Islamic agenda by boosting numbers of Christian refugees from the Middle East. (*The Australian*, 21 July)

### **Irish university offers online courses to Burmese refugees**

Refugees in Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border are being offered the opportunity to study online through the Dundalk Institute of Technology in Ireland. Refugees with suitable levels of English are being offered the opportunity to study politics, sociology and community development as part of a degree or certificate course. (*London Sunday Times*, 20 July)

### **ASIO told to show why men were a danger**

The full bench of the Federal Court has overturned an appeal by ASIO regarding the release of information relating to adverse security and character assessments made against two former asylum seekers and a US peace campaigner. The lawyer for the two former asylum seekers has said that "we need to know the merits of the case. We need to have determined whether ASIO was justified in making the assessments." (*The Age*, 19 July)

### **Refugee tells Parliamentary inquiry about time in detention**

A refugee and former Woomera detainee has given evidence to the Parliamentary Inquiry into conditions in detention and has spoken about one of the darkest periods in Australia's immigration history when detainees sewed their lips together and many witnessed acts of self-harm and attempted suicide. Some critics have suggested that, while the current Government has made a number of improvements, another inquiry will not improve the situation. (*The Age*, 19 July)

### **Brotherhood urges specialist support for refugee children**

Many refugee children are in need of specialised assistance as their parents are often experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder and many families are headed by single mothers. The Brotherhood of St Laurence is urging the Federal Government to include a settlement support model especially for refugee children. (*The Age*, 18 July)

### **Visitors locked up after revealing asylum plans**

Four African pilgrims who travelled to Australia for World Youth Day have been detained at Villawood Detention Centre after revealing to Sydney Airport immigration officials that they would be seeking asylum. An advocate from a support group, Balmain for Refugees, has said the men were highly distressed at being detained while their claims are assessed and felt as though they were being treated as criminals. (*The Canberra Times*, 16 July)

### **Restrictions placed on Iraqi World Youth Day pilgrims**

Christian pilgrims travelling from Iraq to Australia for World Youth Day have had restrictions placed on their visas that clearly indicate their intent to return to Iraq after the event. The Catholic News Agency has said that stipulations on the 21 visas were to prevent Iraqi Christians from seeking asylum in Australia. (*Cairns Post*, 15 July)

### **Immigration Minister orders Villawood drug use probe**

A former employee at Sydney's Villawood Immigration Detention Centre has made allegations to a parliamentary inquiry that there is widespread illicit drug use among detainees at the Centre. (*ABC News Online*, 15 July)

**Minister will shed some of his power**

Immigration Minister, Senator Chris Evans, has welcomed the findings of a review examining his powers under section 417 of the Migration Act which allows for Ministerial intervention on individual cases. Elizabeth Proust, who was commissioned to undertake the review, has recommended the Minister only use his discretionary powers in 'one-off' cases. (*The Age, 10 July*)

**Man arrested in Indonesia for alleged people-smuggling**

An Iraqi national has been arrested by Indonesian authorities in Jakarta for alleged involvement in the smuggling of 900 asylum seekers to Australia between 1999 and 2001. It has not yet been decided if the man will face charges in Indonesia or whether he may be extradited to Australia. (*ABC News Online, 10 July*)

**Faster Afghan visas urged**

Refugee advocate Frederika Steen from the Brisbane-based Romero Centre has called on the Australian Government to fast-track approval for residency visas for the family members of Afghan refugees living in Australia. The call has come amid growing concerns about the security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. (*The Australian, 9 July*)

**MP labels island detention centre a waste of money**

Federal Member for Melbourne Ports Michael Danby MP has said that the Christmas Island Detention Facility is a "white elephant" resembling a German prisoner of war camp. As the head of a parliamentary committee visiting the island, Mr Danby said that spending by the previous government of \$396 million on the new centre was a waste of public money, particularly considering it remains empty. (*The Age, 9 July*)