



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

September 29, 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

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NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

As a national umbrella body for refugees and the organisations and individuals who work with them, RCOA provides many opportunities for people to comment on issues of concern and strategies for improving support for refugees and asylum seekers. These issues and ideas are then taken up by RCOA in discussion with government and international bodies, in formal submissions and in public advocacy. RCOA is currently involved in three national consultation processes, as outlined below.

Annual consultations on Australia's refugee and humanitarian program

Each year, RCOA conducts consultations across Australia to gather information for a submission for the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship on issues to consider in developing the next financial year's Refugee and Humanitarian Program. These consultations provide an opportunity for people to comment on all aspects of Australia's refugee program – from the processing of refugee and humanitarian visas, cultural orientation, travel to Australia, on-arrival settlement services, onshore protection visa issues and long-term refugee settlement issues. Face-to-face consultations will be held in 11 cities during October and November, with dates and venues currently being finalised. In addition, a series of five teleconferences will be held to gather opinion from different areas of rural and regional Australia. See <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/consultations.html> for more information about the consultation process. This page will be regularly updated in coming weeks.

Joint consultations with A Just Australia on high priority asylum issues

RCOA is working with A Just Australia (AJA) to consult agencies involved in services for asylum seekers about high-priority issues to take up with the Federal Government. Last week, consultations were held in Sydney and Melbourne, with representatives of agencies from other states joining by phone. These consultations follow up on similar consultations held last December to set agreed high-priority issues to take up with the newly-elected government. From those consultations, seven high priority issues were nominated and a joint advocacy approach developed. With progress at least partly achieved on six of those issues, AJA and RCOA agreed it was time to consult again to focus future advocacy. Researchers for Asylum Seekers will be assisting the agencies in preparing briefs on some of the critical issues identified in the consultations.

Invitation to comment on refugees' access to Federal Government services

RCOA has been invited by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to provide advice on how Federal Government agencies have been faring on issues of access and equity for refugees and humanitarian entrants, as the Government prepares its 2006-08 Access and Equity report. We are seeking feedback on ways in which Federal Government services of any kind (or the Federal Government's approach to funding services) fail to meet the needs of refugees and humanitarian entrants. We are also seeking examples of good practice by government agencies, examples which can serve as models of access and equity for other government agencies. If you have any feedback to offer, please contact Lydia Ho at RCOA by email to info@refugeecouncil.org.au or by phone (Wednesday to Friday) on (02) 9211-9333 – by Friday, October 10.

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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

Immigration detention concerns raised in submissions to Parliamentary Inquiry

RCOA and 130 other organisations and individuals have made submissions to the Federal Parliamentary committee inquiry into immigration detention. In our submission, we referred to the large body of material already uncovered about immigration detention in previous public inquiries and commented on offshore detention centres, initial detention arrangements, length of detention, review arrangements and alternatives to detention. The Joint Parliamentary Committee on Migration has been conducting hearings since May and has more hearings planned for coming weeks. Information on the inquiry, including all submissions and transcripts of public hearings held to date, can be found at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/detention/index.htm>

Immigration Minister to speak at RCOA annual general meeting

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, will be guest speaker at RCOA's annual general meeting at Parramatta (NSW) on Monday, November 17. Senator Evans will speak about national refugee policy one year after the election of the Rudd Government. The event will be held at Parramatta Town Hall, 182 Church Street Mall, from 2pm. To RSVP for the event, contact RCOA at admin@refugeecouncil.org.au or on (02) 9211-9333.

Staff changes at RCOA

Chris Nash, formerly Head of Policy and Advocacy at the European Council for Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), is RCOA's new National Policy Director. He has 11 years' experience in the refugee sector in Europe, as a lawyer working with asylum seekers in the UK and for the past four years with ECRE, Europe's umbrella body for 68 national refugee organisations in 31 countries. Chris replaces Anna Samson, who has done an excellent job over the past 15 months of coordinating RCOA's research and policy development on national and international refugee issues, and of representing the Australian sector's concerns at the international level. Last month, RCOA farewelled Annette McKail, who served as our Melbourne-based policy officer for the past 3½ years. Annette played a vital role in the coordination of advocacy on asylum issues and led a variety of research projects on key refugee settlement issues. In October, Rebecca Eckard, currently a Policy Officer with the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, will join the RCOA staff as Research Coordinator at our Melbourne office.

Sharman Stone appointed to shadow Immigration portfolio

New Federal Opposition Leader, Malcolm Turnbull, has reshuffled the Liberal-National Coalition's Shadow Ministry. The new Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship is Sharman Stone, Liberal MP for Murray (based in Shepparton, Victoria) and the new Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship is Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, a Liberal Senator from NSW. The former Shadow Immigration Minister, Senator Chris Ellison, did not seek reappointment to the frontbench and is retiring from Parliament.

With the recent swearing-in of the new Senate, the Greens' immigration portfolio has been taken up by Senator Sarah Hanson-Young from South Australia. She replaces Kerry Nettle, whose Senate term concluded in June.

Nominations closing for human rights awards

The Australian Human Rights Commission (formerly Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission) is inviting submissions for its 2008 Human Rights Medal and Awards. The awards aim to celebrate the contributions of individuals and organisations that have selflessly taken steps to address issues of human rights, social justice and equality. Apart from the major awards, the Human Rights Medal and Young People's Human Rights Medal, there are human rights awards in the following categories – individual, community organisation, law, literature (non-fiction), print media, television and radio. Nominations close on Friday, October 3. For information, see <http://www.humanrights.gov.au>

Education kit celebrates skills and resilience of refugees

The Australian National Committee on Refugee Women (ANCORW) and the Centre for Refugee Research (CRR) at the University of NSW have launched an education kit aimed at giving Australians a greater understanding of the stories of refugees who have made this country their home. The kit includes an excellent film of personal stories and reflections from refugees who have settled in Australia, a booklet with a collection of personal stories and a suggested training program. The "Celebration of Refugee Lives: Stories of Strength and Resilience" toolkit is available from CRR on (02) 9385 1961 or crr@unsw.edu.au

COMING EVENTS

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

Wednesday 1 October – Melbourne

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

Presented by Latrobe University Refugee Health Research Centre with **Caitlin Nunn**, Research Officer, Refugee Health Research Centre, Latrobe 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 or Tel: (03) 9479 5874 or visit www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html

Thursday 2 October - Melbourne

Lecture: How Universal is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? The Future of Human Rights in the 21st Century

The Centre for Dialogue's 2008 Annual Lecture will be delivered by Professor Hilary Charlesworth (Australian National University)

Venue: Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre, Bell St & St Georges Rd, Preston

7:30pm (please be seated by 7.15pm). RSVP (essential): dialogue@latrobe.edu.au

Saturday 4 October – Melbourne

Fundraising Dinner: Tantalising Tastes and Tales from Southern Sudan

This event aims to raise funds for South Sudan Development Agency (SSUDA) International to build an Education Centre in Yomding village in the Upper Nile region of Southern Sudan.

Venue: Monash University, Building 10, Clayton Campus

Details: 6.30pm; cost: \$50; RSVP to info@ssuda.org.au or (03) 9654 8314

Friday 10 October – Sydney

WEFT Launch – Women for Empowerment, Freedom and Textiles. This event will launch a new non-government organisation working with Burmese women refugees in generating their own income through the production of Karen textiles.

Venue: The Fair Trade Café, Glebe Point Road, Glebe.

Details: 6.30pm; for further details please visit www.weftshop.com

Friday 10 October – Sydney

Seminar: The Crisis of Human Rights in Sri Lanka with Professor Ivan Shearer, Shiva Pasupati, and Dr Manuelpillai, 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 Free seminar

Monday 27 to Thursday 30 October – Manila, PHILIPPINES

2nd Global Forum on Migration and Development "Protecting and Empowering Migrants for Development"

Details: Applications to attend are now on-going and you may access the application form at the GFMD 2008 official website, www.gfmd2008.org

Thursday 30 October – Adelaide

Exhibition opening: Truth Untruth

Peter Forward's exhibition in reaction to Australia's now abandoned "Pacific Solution" policy, invites viewers to express their views and contemplate Australia's role in global events.

Details: 6pm at Nexus Multicultural Arts Centre (Nexus Gallery), corner North Terrace & Morphett Sts, Adelaide. (08) 8212 4276

Friday 31 October and Saturday 1 November – Canberra

Conference: Centre for International and Public Law: 2008 Public Law Weekend

Venue: National Museum of Australia, Canberra.

Details: For all information and program details please [click here](#). Early bird rate cut off date of Friday 26 September 2008

Monday 17 November – Sydney

RCOA Annual General Meeting and Seminar

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, to speak about national refugee policy one year after the election of the Rudd Government

Venue: Parramatta Town Hall, 182 Church Street Mall, Parramatta

2pm. RSVP to admin@refugeecouncil.org.au or (02) 9211 9333.

Wednesday 26 November – Melbourne

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

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner Street, Brunswick

Details: Registration 5.00pm, Seminar: 5.30pm to 6.30pm; for further information contact rhc@latrobe.edu.au or Tel: (03) 9479 5874 or visit www.latrobe.edu.au/rhc/conferences.html

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

New Book: Human Rights Overboard

By Professor Linda Briskman (Curtin University), Professor Chris Goddard (Monash University) and Susie Latham (Curtin University) *Human Rights Overboard* is based on 200 first-hand accounts from former detainees that were collected as part of a 2005 'people's inquiry' into immigration detention. Professor Briskman has said that despite recent changes to Government policy, immigration detention remained in place and that there remain many questions unanswered about the way detention centres were run. *Human Rights Overboard* is published by [Scribe Publications](#).

New Report: Trends in Australian Political Opinion: Results from the Australian Election Study 1987-2007

Compiled by Australian National University researcher Professor Ian McAllister and Juliet Clark from Deakin University, this report provides a study and analysis of changing political and social opinion. Among the many topics discussed in the report, changing attitudes to immigration have also been documented. A full copy of the report can be found [here](#).

Call for Submissions: Victorian Multicultural Policy

Victorian Premier John Brumby has called for input on a new discussion paper outlining Victoria's Multicultural Policy. Submissions close on October 8 and a copy of the discussion paper can be downloaded from www.multicultural.vic.gov.au

UTS Access Scheme for Refugees

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) invites refugees and asylum seekers to apply for university study. This scheme is for refugees on permanent humanitarian visas who wish to apply for undergraduate or postgraduate UTS courses. Eligible applicants will receive a concession on the academic entry requirements of their course.

Special Admission Scheme Refugee application forms are due to UTS by Tuesday 30 September 2008. Applications can be downloaded from <http://www.equity.uts.edu.au/education/getting/special.html>

Applicants must also submit an application for university admission to the NSW Universities Admission Centre (UAC) by completing an on-line UAC application at www.uac.edu.au Applications to UAC are due by Tuesday 30 September 2008.

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)

Refugee crisis inspires political career

Australia's youngest parliamentarian, 26 year old Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, has said that the former Government's treatment of asylum seekers and policies of mandatory detention, particularly of children, drove her to begin a life in politics. (*Australian Financial Review*, 9 September)

Labor slow on asylum claims

Figures tabled in Parliament have shown that from February to June this year, the Department of Immigration has processed 71% of asylum applications within the specified 90-day time limit. Prior to the Federal Election last year, Labor said they would improve decision times to ensure 90% of applications were processed within 90 days. Immigration Detention Advisory Group chairperson John Hodges has also said that, despite the Christmas Island detention centre being imposing and overdone, it was the right decision to keep it open. Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes has said there should not be a detention centre on Christmas Island at all. (*The Canberra Times*, 5 September)

New migration laws introduced

The Government has introduced the Migration Amendment (Notification Review) Bill 2008 into Parliament aiming to 'clarify' the way the Immigration Department, the Migration Review Tribunal (MRT) and the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) communicate decisions on visa applications and cancellations. The government says the bill is needed to reduce applicants using technical errors in the notification process "to delay the resolution of their cases". (*The Age*, 4 September)

Absconding an 'acceptable risk'

Immigration Detention Advisory Group chairman John Hodges has said that under the Government's changed policies regarding immigration detention that some asylum seeker may inevitably abscond into the community and that they would pose no threat to the community. If a large number of people do not come forward to make themselves available for removal from Australia when their cases are rejected, the Government may need to rethink the policy, he said. (*The Age*, 4 September)

Candidates play white Australia card

Three candidates from the Australia First Party have sent out almost 1000 letters to Sutherland Shire residents claiming that the Shire is "slated for a new Third World refugee settlement" and that Sutherland Shire should be a place for white Australians. The Mayor of Sutherland Shire, Cr David Redmond, has said that residents had moved on from the Cronulla riots and would not be attracted to xenophobic statements. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 September) [In the September 13 election, Australia First polled less than 2% of the vote in the one Sutherland Shire ward it contested.]

People smuggler given five-year sentence

An Indonesian national charged with people smuggling offences in late 1999 has told the Northern Territory Supreme Court that he attempted to smuggle some 350 mostly Iraqi professionals to Australia because he felt sorry for their suffering under Saddam Hussein. The man has been given a five-year jail sentence. (*Northern Territory News*, 1 September)

Refugee says he'll be killed if deported

An application for protection by a former bodyguard of the Lebanese President has been rejected by Australian authorities. Mr Naji Mazloum whose wife and children live in Lebanon, says he fears he will be killed if he is returned. (*The Age*, 31 August)

Refugees face rent anguish

Community workers in Sydney claim that vulnerable refugee families are being exploited by real estate agents and landlords. Housing agencies have reported their clients are experiencing unreasonable rent rises, face eviction and are often asked to sign exploitative rental agreements. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August)

Government defends family reunion and refugee program

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has defended Australia's refugee and family reunion programs, following a study by Access Economics that shows that refugees and family reunion entrants impose a cost on the Australian community. Senator Evans said that refugees make a significant contribution in the long-term and that Australia was not just an economy, it was a society. (*The Age*, 22 August)

Refugee advocates critical of new Christmas Island detention centre

Following a tour of the \$400 million upgraded detention centre on Christmas Island, refugee advocates have written to Immigration Minister Chris Evans saying the centre is a stark environment in which to detain people and that the damaging impacts of detention have been well-documented. Refugee Council of Australia CEO Paul Power has said that the facility does not reflect the positive changes that have been made to Australian immigration policy in recent years. (*ABC News Online*, 16 August)

Philip Ruddock regrets delays in releasing children from detention

In an interview about his legacy, former Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock has said that his regrets were not so much the question of the policies but the question of the speed and implementation. He told *The Australian* that lack of funding for alternative detention arrangements meant children were not able to be released "sooner and earlier". (*The Australian*, 13 August)

Youth Day pilgrims seek asylum

Sydney's Asylum Seeker Centre has said that 20 people have sought asylum following World Youth Day. The Centre is assisting the asylum seekers with accommodation and other support services while their claims are assessed. It is expected that more applications for protection will be received when the three-month visas issued to pilgrims come to an end. (*ABC News Online*, 12 August)

West Papuan refugees don't want to return home, despite Minister's claims

A spokesperson for a group of West Papuan refugees has denied Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda's claims that they want to return. "Foreign Minister Wirayuda is very deliberately misleading the international community by claiming any improvement in conditions inside our homeland, West Papua," the spokesperson said. (*Radio NZ International*, 11 August)

Papuan refugees 'want to return home'

Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirayuda has claimed that a number of the 43 West Papuan refugees who were granted refugee status in Australia want to now return home. Mr Wirayuda says that Indonesian authorities would assist in the repatriation and that the situation in West Papua had improved. Mr Wirayuda would not say how many refugees wanted to return or how they had communicated with Indonesian officials. He said that he hoped "there will be no more groups seeking asylum in Australia and other countries." (*The Age*, 11 August)

Bradman sidelined in citizen rethink

The chair of the committee conducting a review of the citizenship test, Richard Woolcott has said the test needs to be simplified and take into consideration the special needs and challenges facing refugees and humanitarian entrants. The committee received 170 submissions and has undertaken consultations around the country. The committee report *Moving Forward: Improving Pathways to Citizenship* contains 34 recommendations and will be released soon. (*The Age*, 11 August)

Boat people battle goes offshore

In leading a delegation to Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore, Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has said that regional cooperation is the key to preventing unauthorised arrivals and enhancing the capacity of other countries in the region to detect illegal movements. Coordinator of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, David Manne, has said that while the government's recent reforms are a step in the right direction, there were still concerns about the continued use of the Christmas Island detention centre and the excision of islands from Australia's migration zone. (*The West Australian*, 9 August)