



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

6 February, 2009

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

Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia

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NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

RCOA releases submission on 2009-10 Refugee and Humanitarian Program

Each year, the Refugee Council invites people from across Australia to participate in its national consultations on the future of Australia's refugee and humanitarian program. These consultations inform RCOA's annual submission to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship on issues the Australian Government should consider in planning the coming year's refugee program. This latest submission draws together the views of more than 500 people, representing more than 200 organisations, who took part in 35 consultations across Australia during October and November 2008.

The submission explores a number of themes, including:

- * Australia's resettlement program in the context of global refugee needs and past national intakes;
- * Considerations for future planning of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program;
- * Family reunion and the Special Humanitarian Program;
- * Funding and planning of settlement services;
- * Housing;
- * Education and English language training;
- * Employment and income support;
- * Health;
- * Cultural orientation
- * Rural and regional settlement;
- * Asylum policy issues.

The submission also includes a summary of conditions in some of the major source countries for refugees, as well as resettlement needs for people from those countries.

The submission was presented to Senator Chris Evans at the annual peak bodies meeting with the Minister on January 23. It will form the basis of RCOA's advocacy with the Government during 2009.

See http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/submissions/2009-10_intakesub.pdf

RCOA gives evidence at Parliamentary Inquiry into Immigration Detention

On February 4, RCOA's CEO, Paul Power, and National Policy Director, Chris Nash, gave evidence at the Federal Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry into immigration detention. The Committee has already published its first report covering criteria for release from detention. In the first half of this year, the committee will publish two further reports, covering alternatives to detention, conditions in detention and oversight of detention arrangements. RCOA emphasised that, if the Minister's values statement limiting detention to a last resort is to become reality, there needs to be effective and well-resourced alternative community measures in place. Evidence was provided about alternatives to detention used in Australia and overseas which are not only more cost-effective than detention, but are also very successful in ensuring compliance with the asylum process. In order to ensure adequate oversight and to guard against arbitrary detention, all detainees should have an automatic and independent right of review against the decision to detain, with enforceable remedies. A transcript of the RCOA testimony will soon be on the inquiry website, along with transcripts of previous hearings and the initial report - <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/detention/hearings.htm>

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

NGOs publish report on situation of Palestinian refugees on Syria-Iraq border

Having fled killings, kidnappings, torture and death threats, about 3,000 Palestinian refugees from Iraq are currently stranded in three camps along the border between Syria and Iraq. Denied asylum and refugee rights, they are extremely vulnerable in poorly situated camps. RCOA was one of 13 NGOs that participated in a one-week assessment in November of the situation for Palestinian refugees from Iraq and endorsed a summary statement. RCOA was represented by Dr Graham Thom of Amnesty International Australia. The statement is at:

http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/NGO_stmt_Palestinians_081120.pdf

UN High Commissioner for Refugees to visit Australia

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, will visit Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney from February 23 to 25. Mr Guterres' visit will include meetings with Parliamentarians, Australian Government officials, non-government organisations and refugee community representatives, as well as site visits to services involved in assisting recently arrived refugees.

Have your say about how human rights should be protected in Australia

On 9 December 2008, the federal government announced that it would conduct a National Human Rights Consultation. This is an opportunity for you to share your views on human rights in Australia, including the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.

There are three key questions in the Consultation:

- Which human rights and responsibilities should be protected and promoted?
- Are human rights sufficiently protected and promoted?
- How could Australia better protect and promote human rights?

Information and materials about a charter of rights and how to participate in the national consultation are available at www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au

COMING EVENTS

Sunday 8 February - Melbourne

Parliament of the World's Religions - "Melbourne: Making a Difference" preparatory event

The Parliament of the World's Religions (PWR) is a global inter-religious event that will be held in Melbourne in December 2009. The theme of the 2009 Parliament is Make a World of Difference: Hearing each other, Healing the earth. All are welcome to attend the preparatory event at the Melbourne Town Hall, 4 - 8:30 pm. See www.parliamentofreligions.org for more information.

11 - 21 February - Melbourne

Darfur Australia Network art exhibition

The Darfur Australia Network (DAN), an advocacy and community group for Darfuri refugees is holding an art exhibition called Far to Here. Photojournalist Kabir Dhanji documents the lives of Darfuri people who fled the conflict in Sudan, while Darfuri youth capture their day-to-day experiences in Australia on their own cameras. Details: Fortyfivedownstairs Gallery, 45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 3000.

Contact: Tess Whittakers at contact@darfuraustralia.org or on 03 8060 5659.

Saturday 14 February - Sydney

World Says No to War Photo Exhibition and Fundraising Auction

When The World Said No To War is a photographic exhibition of the 2003 demonstrations held worldwide, against the US-led invasion of Iraq. The images are a reminder that the vast majority of people, including those in the US and Australia, opposed the war.

Exhibition details: 8 - 23 February at Pine Street Gallery, 64 Pine St Chippendale NSW 2008.

Fundraising Auction details: 4-8 p.m., Pine Street Gallery. 4:30 pm - Speeches and performances. 5 pm - Auction starts. Jake Lynch, Director of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, will speak. Performances by musicians and artists. All proceeds to the Australian Red Cross, the International Labor Conference in Iraq, and the Sydney Stop the War Coalition. See www.worldsaidno.orgb or www.pinestreet.com.au or contact Karen on karenadler@unwired.com.au.

Friday 20 February – Wollongong

Red Cross Missing Persons day

Are you missing relatives as a result of conflict or disaster? Red Cross may be able to help locate them. They will be conducting appointments for the Illawarra. Time: Between 10am and 4pm (pre-booked appointments will be seen first). To book an appointment or for more information, call 02 9229 4233 or email nswtracing@redcross.org.au

Venue: Red Cross, 6 Foley St, Gwynneville, NSW

Monday 23 February to Thursday 26 February - Sydney

Refugee Studies Summer School at the Centre for Refugee Research

The summer training program includes a two day course on community consultation approaches and two one day courses focusing on key resettlement issues. Participants may choose to attend the full four day training program or alternatively select individual days to attend. See <http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au>

Thursday 26 February - Melbourne

'Traditional Practices Affecting Young Immigrant and Refugee Women's Health and Wellbeing'

This seminar, organised by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, will cover topics including early marriage; forced marriage; female genital mutilation; unplanned pregnancy and traditional practices related to pregnancy and childbearing.

Details: 9am – 2pm, 134 Cambridge St, Collingwood VIC.

For more information or to register, see www.mcwh.com.au

Friday 6 March and Saturday 7 March 2009 - Perth

Conference: Refugee and Immigrant Women Setting the Social Inclusion Agenda

This conference, organised by ECCWA and FECCA, aims to address the maximizing of the potential of refugee and immigrant women within the overarching policy of the Government's Social Inclusion agenda. For details on the program and speakers, see www.multicultural.online.wa.gov.au

14 May 2009 - South Australia

Closing date for entries to the Jambo Creative Writing Competition for Africans living in SA

The Migrant Resource Centre of SA, the SA Writers Centre and the Multicultural Writers of Australia invite migrants from an African background who live in South Australia to share their stories, get creative and tell the world what you think in either poetry or a short story. For more information, contact (08) 8223 7662 or (08) 8217 9522.

Friday 29 May 2009 – national

Deadline for submissions to the National Human Rights Consultation

This is an opportunity for you to share your views on human rights in Australia, including the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.

See www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au

Friday 17 July 2009 – Melbourne

2009 Human Rights Conference

Details: To be held at the State Library of Victoria. The keynote speaker will be Commonwealth Attorney-General Robert McClelland. Further information will be posted on the Castan Centre website www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre .

Tuesday 21 July to Thursday 23 July 2009 – Melbourne

Beyond the Refugee Journey: A Humanitarian Settlement Conference

The conference will focus on settlement models and refugee achievements and will present an opportunity to:

- Explore innovative and effective models of settlement service provision
- Assess the impact of pre-arrival experience on settlement
- Celebrate the lives of refugees who have made Australia their home

Details: BMW Edge, Federation Square (21 July) and Melbourne Cricket Ground (22–23 July). For more information, see <http://www.ames.net.au/settlementconference> .

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Australian Human Rights Commission releases 2008 Immigration Detention Report

The 2008 Immigration detention report covers inspections of the immigration detention facilities around Australia, including Christmas Island, between June and September 2008. The report contains a comprehensive set of recommendations about Australia's immigration detention system. A summary factsheet is available at www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/immigration/sum_factsheet.html. The full report is at www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/immigration/idc2008.html

Updated information on immigration detention, asylum seekers and refugees

The Australian Human Rights Commission has also recently updated its web pages on immigration detention, asylum seekers and refugees. The updated web pages can be viewed at http://www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/immigration/index.html

Report on engaging refugee and migrant young people around mental health

The Centre for Multicultural Youth released a report arising from a Statewide Multicultural Youth Issues Network meeting in October 2008, called "Engaging refugee and migrant young people around mental health: Exploring strategies that work". The report can be found on www.cmy.net.au.

UNHCR releases The Global Appeal and The Global Report

Two sister publications, The Global Report and The Global Appeal, offer a comprehensive view of the agency's operations and annual requirements. Although designed primarily for governments and UNHCR's partners, they are also a useful guide for general readers to UNHCR's worldwide operations. Click here to read the reports. <http://www.unhcr.org/publ/3b7b87e14.html>

The Hegg Hoffer Fund for Displaced Women Graduates

The Hegg Hoffer Fund for Displaced Women Graduates deals with applications for assistance from graduate women (in special cases tertiary women students) who have been displaced as a result of war, political upheaval or other serious emergencies, and makes short term small grants for refresher courses for re-entry into the candidates' professional fields, and courses for integration into new countries. In case of serious natural disasters, national federations and associations may apply for short-term grants on behalf of university women (women students), who suffered hardship due to the disaster, and who wish to continue their work or studies. More details are available on their website at <http://www.ifuw.org/hegg-hoffer/index.shtml>.

Call for papers: Protection Gaps in the Asia Pacific Region

The 12th International Association for Forced Migration Conference (Cyprus, 28 June to 2 July) will include a series of panel discussions on 'Protection Gaps in the Asia Pacific Region' in recognition of the recent founding of the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network and to provide a space for the discussion of refugee rights protection in the Asia Pacific region. The conveners of this series of panels are Eileen Pittaway of the Centre for Refugee Research, University of New South Wales, and Alice M. Nah of the Asian Research Institute and the Sociology Department, National University of Singapore. Interested participants should submit a 300-word abstract of their proposed paper and brief biographical details to Eileen Pittaway and Alice M. Nah at e.pittaway@unsw.edu.au and alicenah@gmail.com by 12 February 2008. Selected papers will be solicited for publication. More information on IASFM and IASFM12 can be found on www.iasfm.org and www.iasfmconference.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)

40 arrested en route to Australia

Indonesian police arrested 40 Afghan and Pakistani citizens as they tried to pass through Bau-Bau waters in Southeast Sulawesi on their way to Australia. (*The Jakarta Post*, 5 February)

Australia raises boat people concerns

Australia's ambassador in Geneva has reiterated the Australian government's concerns to the Thai Foreign Minister, about the reports of the loss of life at sea of significant numbers of Rohingyas and claims of their mistreatment by Thai forces. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 February)

Burmese asylum seekers recount sea horrors

Muslim Rohingya asylum seekers said 20 of the 218 on their vessel died from starvation after being towed out to sea by the Thai military. The boat was intercepted in the Strait of Malacca, 68 nautical miles from the east coast of Aceh, Indonesia's northernmost province on the tip of the island of Sumatra. (*The Age*, 4 February)

Burmese boat people found drifting off Indonesia

The Indonesian navy says a wooden boat with around 200 Burmese people aboard has been found floating off the east coast of Sumatra. (*Australia Network News*, 4 February)

Report highlights plight of Burma's Chin

The US-based rights group Human Rights Watch is urging India to allow UNHCR access to about 100,000 Chin who have fled persecution and poverty in Burma. In a new report, Human Rights Watch calls for pressure to be applied to the Indian Government to allow UN officials access to the border regions near Burma on a permanent basis and not force asylum seekers to make the long trek to New Delhi. (*Radio Australia*, 2 February)

Evans warned that children's detention breach obligations

Concern is mounting for the welfare of 20 children in immigration detention at Christmas Island without their parents, with human rights groups warning Australia is breaching international obligations. "You have a situation where the minister is both the guardian and the jailer," Professor Mary Crock, a specialist in immigration law, said. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 January)

Refugee advocates urge Government to do more

Refugee advocates are calling on the Australian Government to do more to make sure asylum seekers are given better treatment by Indonesian authorities, after another asylum seeker drowns trying to reach Australia. (*PM ABC Radio*, 29 January)

Refugee advocates honoured

Among the Australians who received an Australia Day honour in 2009 were people who had been recognised for their services to asylum seekers, refugees, and multicultural communities. These included refugee/human rights advocates Julian Burnside QC (AO), Marion Le (OAM), Reverend Donald Edgar (OAM), Erskine Rodan (OAM) and Helen Grainger (OAM). A number of others were recognised for their contributions to their communities, including Phung Dang Nguyen and Dr Phuoc Vo (Vietnamese community), Myroslaw Boluch (Ukrainian community), Sarkis Yedelian (Armenian community) and Laszlo Ory (Hungarian community). (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 January)

International distress call to help boat people around the world after week of horror

The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) reports on a horrific week for asylum-seeking boat arrivals. At least 500 asylum seekers from Burma and Bangladesh were pushed out to sea on boats and abandoned, without engines, with little or no food or water and sometimes with their hands tied. 310 migrants were feared dead after three boats sank between Africa and Yemen, with only 110 rescued or otherwise making it to shore. In numerous countries, post-arrival detention practices are increasingly characterised by extreme overcrowding. The centre on the Italian island of Lampedusa, built for 850, was holding 1,800 when, on January 24, some 700 of the immigrant detainees broke out of the centre, complaining of conditions and shouting "Help us!" (*ICMC Press Release*, 26 January)

Visas for eight Afghans who faced death or persecution

Another eight Afghan boat people will be resettled in Australia after immigration officials found they faced persecution or death if they returned home. The men have been in detention on Christmas Island since late November after they were rescued from their sinking boat near Ashmore Reef. (*The West Australian*, 23 January)

Refugee group urges detention centre relaxation

The International Detention Coalition (IDC) is urging the Government to consider supervised release and bail requirements as alternatives to immigration detention. The IDC appeared before Federal Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Migration to discuss its proposals. (ABC News, 22 January)

Fishermen tell of 25-day ocean ordeal in Icebox

Two Burmese fishermen have described how they survived for 25 days adrift on a plastic icebox by drinking rainwater and eating nothing but fish regurgitated by two seabirds. (*The West Australian*, 21 January)

Thailand accused of dumping refugees at sea without water

Thailand is facing international condemnation after towing about 1000 refugees, many of whom were Burmese Rohingya, into international waters and abandoned them with barely a day's supply of rice and water. Five hundred men are now missing feared drowned. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January)
Thailand's Prime Minister has refused to grant UN experts access to 126 boat people from Burma, following allegations that the Thai army had left them to die on the open seas. (ABC News Online, 21 January)

Sri Lankan boatpeople volunteer to be sent home

Two Sinhalese Sri Lankan men who arrived by boat on the Western Australian coast last year have been repatriated, on December 22 and January 12. DIAC reported that they had returned voluntarily and had not raised protection claims. (*The Australian*, 20 January)

Labor breaks detention promise

Prison operator G4S (formerly GSL) will have its contract to run Australia's immigration detention centres extended until at least July 31 despite Labor's pre-election promise that the public sector would manage the centres. Detention centres will also remain in private hands for several years after the Government confirmed it would proceed with the retendering process started by the Howard government. But Immigration Minister Chris Evans said the retendering was well advanced when the Rudd Government came into office and the lack of alternative public-service providers would have required the current contract to be extended for at least two years anyway. (*The Age*, 20 January)

20 boat people arrive off WA coast

The Royal Australian Navy yesterday intercepted a boat of 20 people, thought to be travelling from Indonesia, 39km from Ashmore Island. There were no children on board and that at least two of 20 people detained were thought to be crew. The arrivals will be taken to Christmas Island to be processed. (*The Age*, 19 January)

Refugees to arrive in SA within days

The Immigration Department says South Australia's proven track record for resettling refugees was among the reasons for making it home to a new group granted permanent residency yesterday. The group's protection claims were processed on Christmas Island. (ABC News Online, January 17)

Asylum seekers on Christmas Island granted protection

Twenty-five Afghan and three Iranian refugees were granted visas after a thorough assessment of their claims determined they were entitled to Australia's protection under the Refugees Convention. The refugees were passengers from boats that were intercepted by Border Protection Command in Australian waters on September 29, October 6 and November 24. The group comprises 26 males and two females and includes 10 children. (*Immigration Minister's Press Release*, 16 January)

Immigrants drown after fleeing detention

Four illegal Afghan immigrants have drowned at sea and five others are missing after escaping from a detention facility in eastern Indonesia and trying to reach Australia, officials say. Nine survivors were returned to custody. (*The Age*, January 15)

Refugee advocates slam Labor's 'inaction'

Refugee advocates and the Greens have condemned the Federal Government's "inaction" on immigration detention. The criticism follows the publication of an Australian Human Rights Commission

report, which found refugees continued to live in "miserable" conditions, despite Labor saying it would take a more humane approach to immigration detention. Senator Sarah Hanson-Young backed calls for Christmas Island detention centre to be shut down and said Senator Evans should enact legislation to support changes to detention. (*The Canberra Times*, 14 January)

Report demands more change on immigration detention

The Australian Human Rights Commission says asylum seekers are still being treated like political footballs and enduring "miserable" conditions at some immigration detention centres. The commission's latest report on immigration detention again calls for the new Christmas Island centre to close and parts of the Villawood centre in Sydney to be demolished. (*ABC AM Radio*, 13 January)

Children are still being held in immigration detention facilities for unacceptable periods, Human Rights Commissioner Graeme Innes says. Although no longer kept behind razor wire in high-security detention centres, they are still detained in low-security facilities where their movement is restricted and monitored. (*The Age*, January 13)

Vitamin lack hits African arrivals

Increased African immigration to Australia has brought a rise in cases of vitamin D deficiency, which can cause serious health problems. Researchers say that migrants from eastern and sub-Saharan African countries such as Sudan were particularly susceptible to vitamin D deficiency because of their darker skin and lowered exposure to direct sunlight in Australia. (*The Age*, 12 January)

East Timor rebel family find asylum in Australia

The wife and children of slain East Timorese rebel leader Alfredo Reinado have been granted permanent residency in Australia after pleading with the Rudd Government to grant them political asylum. (*The West Australian*, 9 January)

Refugee boat found

A wooden boat with nearly 200 people on board has been found drifting off the northern tip of Indonesia's Sumatra Island. The boat, with 174 people from Burma and 19 from Bangladesh on board, was found at sea by fishermen off Sabang Island in Aceh province yesterday. Police have referred the boat passengers' case to UNHCR and local immigration authorities. (*The Canberra Times*, 8 January)

Refugees say boat people just want a chance at fulfilling life

Just a few short years ago, Adam Janali and Hussain Sadiqi were refugees locked in immigration detention centres as part of the former Howard government's tough line on boat people and people smuggling. Now one is a successful artist who works in robotics and the other is a former kung fu champion on the verge of a promising film career. The men felt compelled to speak out after reports about the latest wave of asylum seekers which Mr Janali claims "inflame hatred through creating an image of wealthy queue jumpers". (*The West Australian*, 5 January)

Home at last, far from big cities and refugee camps

A refugee family from a camp on the Thai-Burma border is helping to set the standards on how refugees should be resettled in regional Australia. Their experience in the South Australian town of Mt Gambier is being used by Immigration officials and support groups as a template for introducing refugee families to their new life. (*The Australian*, January 3)

Afghan, Iraqi and Iranian boat people set to win asylum

Twenty-six boat people held on Christmas Island are almost certain to be resettled on the Australian mainland within weeks after Immigration Minister Chris Evans effectively conceded they had strong refugee claims by allowing them to apply for permanent residency. (*The West Australian*, 31 December)

John Howard's detention centre to open

Immigration officials have been forced to open the 800-bed, Howard-era detention centre on Christmas Island to accommodate a growing number of unauthorised boat arrivals intercepted in the past three months. The decision was condemned by refugee advocacy groups, who predicted the facility would have a damaging effect on the psychological health of detainees. The government has promised that no women, children or families will be housed at the facility. (*The Australian*, December 19)

New Multicultural Advisory Council formed

The Government has announced the formation of the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council to advise it on promoting social cohesion and stemming racism. Australia has been without a multicultural policy since its predecessor was allowed to lapse in 2006. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 December)

Worsening country conditions behind asylum seeker boost, Government says

Foreign Minister Stephen Smith says more boats are coming to Australia because conditions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Sri Lanka are worsening. (*ABC News Online*, 17 December)

Affleck and Jagger help Congo refugees

The 23-minute film *Gimme Shelter* is directed by Ben Affleck and features the Stones' hit, taken from their 1969 album *Let it Bleed*. "We made this film in order to focus attention on the humanitarian crisis in the DRC at a time when too much of the world is indifferent or looking the other way," Affleck said. (*Nine News*, 17 December)

Navy intercepts seventh boatload of asylum-seekers

The navy is taking 37 suspected asylum-seekers to Christmas Island after picking up the seventh boat in Australian waters in recent months. (*The Canberra Times*, 17 December)

Sudan refugees leave Iraq for Romania: UNHCR

Ninety-seven Sudanese refugees mainly from Darfur have left a makeshift camp in the Iraqi desert for Romania as part of a resettlement program, UNHCR said. Another 42 Sudanese refugees in Iraq are expected to follow them next month. (*AFP*, 17 December)

Questions raised after detainees flee

Three detainees at Maribyrnong Detention Centre escaped on the weekend, raising questions about immigration security. (*The Age*, 16 December)

From war-torn Kabul and little English, to Thomastown and near perfection

When Shaheen Hasmat and his family arrived in Australia from Afghanistan as refugees five years ago, the year 8 student knew only a few words in English, like yes and no. But yesterday, Shaheen was the dux of Reservoir District Secondary College, with a near-perfect tertiary score, or ENTER, of 99.8 and the promise of a scholarship to study medicine at Monash University. (*The Age*, 16 December)

Voters support asylum policies

Most West Australians appear to agree with the Federal Coalition's decision to dump the controversial Pacific solution on asylum seekers, according to the latest Westpoll. (*The West Australian*, 15 January)

Together again, a war-torn family beats the odds

For the first time in 10 years, Abi Sesay will spend Christmas with all of her family. For more than two years she battled the Immigration Department, which misplaced her file, and has spent thousands of dollars on police and medical clearances and expensive DNA tests to prove her case. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 December)

Fifteen Homeless World Cup players seek asylum

The Department of Immigration has confirmed it has 15 applications for further visas from Homeless World Cup players. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 December)

Australia, Indonesia agree to step up efforts against people smuggling

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd said after talks on the resort island of Bali they would intensify joint efforts to control people smuggling. Indonesia's parliament was finalising the process to ratify the UN convention on trans-border crime, which would boost its ability to cooperate with Australia against trafficking networks. (*AFP*, 11 December)

UNHCR urges Rudd Government to resist calls for tougher measures on asylum-seekers

UN High Commissioner for Refugees regional head Rick Towle said that it was important to keep a sense of perspective about the numbers of boatpeople arriving in Australia, compared with countries

such as Italy, where thousands had landed over the same period. He said that it was no accident that most of the asylum-seekers were coming from Iraq, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan – countries battered by years of bloody warfare and insecurity. (*The Australian*, 9 December)

Turnbull accused of scare tactic on refugees

Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull has been accused of "scaremongering" over a small increase in asylum seekers arriving by boat. Mr Turnbull blames Labor changes to immigration policy, saying the scrapping of temporary protection visas has made Australia a "soft target" for people smugglers. (*The Age*, 9 December)

More suspected boat people found off Broome's coast

A boat carrying more than 44 suspected asylum seekers and three crew was intercepted off the coast near Broome. They are being taken to Christmas Island. (*WA Today*, 7 December)

Memorial for Iraqi refugees

A controversial temporary memorial to 353 asylum-seekers who died on the SIEV-X on their way to Australia in 2001 is likely to become permanent. (*The Canberra Times*, 8 December)

Howard years public service culture must end, Evans says

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Evans, has told a gathering of Commonwealth public servants the political culture that infiltrated departments throughout the Howard administration needs to come to an end. (*ABC News Online*, 8 December)

Report backs refugee detention changes

Researchers say a new report on the mental health of refugees backs the Federal Government's decision to greatly reduce its use of mandatory detention. Co-author Zachary Steel says it shows rates of mental illness, such as depression, increased dramatically the longer the refugees spent in detention. (*ABC News Online*, 5 December)

Merit-based appointments to Migration and Refugee Review Tribunals

Immigration Minister Chris Evans has announced the appointment of five Senior Members to the Migration Review Tribunal (MRT) and the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT). The five successful applicants were unanimously selected through a merit-based process. (*Immigration Minister's Press Release*, 5 December)