



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

18 March 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

If you no longer wish to receive this bulletin, please email unsubscribe@refugeecouncil.org.au

NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

Refugee Week 2009 theme: 'Freedom from Fear'

Refugee Week 2009 will be held from Sunday 14 June to Saturday 20 June to coincide with World Refugee Day (20 June). This year's national Refugee Week theme is 'Freedom from Fear', a theme which encourages Australians to think about the reasons refugees flee their homelands and the importance of providing safety and the lasting security to people who have lost everything. Organisations around Australia are encouraged to mark Refugee Week by holding suitable events which celebrate the contributions of refugees and which promote awareness of issues of refugee protection. Over the next three months, we will be building up a national calendar of events on our website and distributing information on activities to media outlets across the country. We rely on local organisers to send us details to help build this calendar, so please forward information ASAP to info@refugeecouncil.org.au. This address is also the place to order copies of the Refugee Week poster, which will be available soon. To keep up to date with plans for Refugee Week as it draws closer, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/refugeeweek.html>.

Constructive dialogue allows for open discussion of key issues

In the two months since the completion of our 2009 submission to the Australian Government on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program (<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/consultations.html>), RCOA has been very busy taking up issues canvassed in the submission. We have participated in a series of meetings with the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services and the senior leadership of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). In addition, RCOA participated last week with representatives of six other NGOs in a series of meetings with Parliamentarians, as part of an annual lobbying exercise in Canberra aimed at briefing Labor, Liberal, Greens and Independent MPs and Senators on refugee policy alternatives being promoted by the community sector.

Among the many issues on which there has been useful dialogue are:

- Reviewing priorities for the Special Humanitarian Program;
- Breaking the numerical link between the offshore and onshore refugee programs;
- Exploring aid and development partnerships with Australia's refugee diasporas;
- Increasing core funding for UNHCR (see item below);
- Multi-year planning for Australia's refugee resettlement program;
- Reviewing funding timelines for the Settlement Grants Program;
- Issues for consideration in the next tender round for the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy;
- Improving the link between the Australian Cultural Orientation Program and post-arrival orientation strategies for refugee and humanitarian entrants;
- Exploring new options for refugee settlement in regional areas;
- The role of volunteers in refugee resettlement;
- Housing concerns for refugees and humanitarian entrants;

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

- Improving support for refugees through the new employment services network;
- Allowing asylum seekers the right to work;
- Introducing a system of complementary protection;
- Improving the Protection Visa application process;
- Removing the system of charging people for their time in immigration detention (see below);
- Improving support for asylum seekers living in the community.

For a few of these issues, a satisfactory resolution seems possible or likely during 2009. In other cases, progress will be more gradual, with an expected reduction in DIAC's budget for 2009-10 being a significant limiting factor. However, in each case, it appears that key Government decision makers understand community concerns and are actively examining solutions. Over the past two years, there has been an appreciable leap forward in the quality of the Australian Government's engagement with the community sector on matters of refugee policy. Even long-time advocates cannot remember a time when the dialogue was more constructive.

Detention debt regime to be abolished

The Australian Government has introduced a Bill today (18 March) to abolish the unjust and ineffective detention debt regime imposed on immigration detainees. Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, introduced the Migration Amendment (Abolishing Detention Debt) Bill 2009 which will waive all existing debts for current and former detainees, however there will be no refunds of debts already paid. People convicted of people smuggling or illegal foreign fishing will still be liable for their costs of detention and removal. The abolition of detention debts was recommended in December by the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration, with the support of MPs and Senators from the Labor and Liberal parties and the Greens. Senator Evans' statement on this legislation can be seen at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09031.htm>

UN High Commissioner for Refugees praises Australian settlement services

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, paid his first visit to Australia on 22-25 February. His visit included 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 in Melbourne and Sydney. Mr Guterres was impressed by what he saw, praising Australia's settlement services and the national approach to refugee resettlement as probably the best in the world. However, he criticised Australia's decision to continue offshore processing and detention on Christmas Island. Mr Guterres predicted that the number of global refugees would rise dramatically in 2009 as a result of economic instability accelerating triggers such as war and political unrest, and warned against a corresponding increase in xenophobia and the blaming of migrants. RCOA participated in two meetings with Mr Guterres and NGO groups, and also jointly hosted a community reception for Mr Guterres with Foundation House in Melbourne.

Australian government pledges increased funding for UNHCR and for displaced people

RCOA welcomes Senator Chris Evans' announcement on 23 February to increase Australia's core funding to UNHCR by of \$4.4 million to \$14.3 million in 2009-10. This substantial increase restores Australia's core funding of UNHCR to the level (in dollar terms but not in real terms) of 2001-02. In the 2002-03 Budget, the then Government cut UNHCR's core funding by nearly 50% (from \$14.3 million to \$7.3 million), following UNHCR criticism of changes to Australian policy in 2001. Since then, RCOA has been advocating for a restoration of UNHCR's core funding, to enable the organisation to support what it saw as the most pressing global refugee needs. For Senator Evans' announcement, see <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09020.htm>

Input sought for research on sport's role in assisting refugee settlement

Agencies which support the settlement of refugees have increasingly recognised sport as a useful tool for assisting refugees to settle more effectively. However, there are many factors which limit refugees' participation in organised sport, such as language barriers, financial constraints and a lack of culturally appropriate sport programs. RCOA is undertaking a research project, with the financial support of the NSW Government, to determine the most effective strategies for overcoming these obstacles and increasing refugees' participation in sport. We are currently seeking information about sport programs which target refugees. If you have any information to offer, please contact Zhi Yan on (02) 9211 9333 or info@refugeecouncil.org.au.

Input sought for research on sustainable employment pathways for refugees

RCOA is currently undertaking research into sustainable employment pathways for refugees. We will be holding consultations across Australia with employment service providers, employers and refugee groups to explore what works in supporting refugees into work. We want to talk to businesses that have been successful in tapping into the skills and experiences of workers from refugee backgrounds, as well as employment services that have experience supporting refugee job-seekers into work. For more information, see www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current.

COMING EVENTS

Thursday 19 March 2009 - Sydney

Soldiers of Peace - Sydney Peace Foundation Benefit Screening

A star-studded Australian documentary which won Best Feature Film and Best Documentary Director for Feature Film at the Monaco International Film Festival, *Soldiers of Peace* takes the viewer on an inspiring journey across five continents and 14 countries to show the extraordinary peace efforts of ordinary individuals across the globe. Speakers on the night are: director Tim Wise; Professor Jake Lynch, Director Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies; and Professor Stuart Rees Director of Sydney Peace Foundation.

Details: 7pm, Footbridge Theatre (Sydney University), Parramatta Road. Tickets \$15. Book online at Moshtix <http://www.moshtix.com.au/event.aspx?id=25289>

Information: <http://www.soldiersofpeacemovie.com/>

Thursday 19 March 2009 – Mt Gambier

Screening: Lucky Miles, Reels@Wehl Film Society

"Lucky Miles" opened the previous Adelaide Film Festival and was the winner of the Audience Award at the Sydney Film Festival. In this bitter-sweet comedy set in 1990, an Indonesian fishing boat abandons a dozen Iraqi and Cambodian refugees on a remote WA beach, promising them that a bus over the sandhills will soon come and take them to Perth. When the fishing boat sinks on its way home, the two people smugglers also end up in the empty outback. Most of the men are quickly caught, except for two of the asylum seekers and one of the fishermen. The three, Arun (Kenneth Moraleda), Youssif (Rodney Afif) and the fisherman Ramelan (Srisacd Sacdpraseuth), with nothing in common but their misfortune and determination, escape arrest and begin an epic journey through the deserted landscape. Laconically pursued by an army reservist unit, they bicker amongst themselves as they try to find a big town - like Broome or Perth - without the slightest idea of the distances involved.

Details: 6pm for 6:30pm.

Information: <http://reelsatwehl.blogspot.com/2009/03/next-screening-lucky-miles-thursday.html>

Saturday 21 March 2009 – National

Harmony Day

Harmony Day celebrates the cohesive and inclusive nature of our nation and promotes the benefits of cultural diversity. It is organised by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. For Harmony Day events and activities Australia-wide, see www.harmony.gov.au.

Sunday 22 March 2009 - Melbourne

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Global Gourmet Fair

This event is part of the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival but also provides an opportunity to support Victoria's asylum seeker population and to celebrate our cultural diversity. It is one of the largest and most important fundraisers for the Centre and all proceeds will go towards the ASRC's human rights programs. There will be global food, fresh produce, craft stalls and activities for the whole family, with exciting feature world music performances from Mick Thomas with Shackleton, The Joelenes, Dan Sultan and Sol Nation plus much more.

Details: 12 Batman Street, West Melbourne, 10.30am - 4pm.

Information: Kristine Robertson - kristine.r@asrc.org.au

Monday 23 March 2009 - Sydney

Human Rights Submission Writing Workshop

The Public Interest Advocacy Centre is running a free two-hour workshop to assist you to contribute to the national human rights consultation process through written submissions.

Details: 5-7 pm, Level 9, 299 Elizabeth Street, Sydney.

Registration essential: kaki@piac.asn.au or (02) 8898 6500.

Tuesday 24 March 2009 - Sydney

Workshop for refugee/ asylum seeker organisations on the National Human Rights Consultation

The Australian Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International invite you to a practical workshop to help you participate effectively in the national consultation. The workshop is targeted at community sector organisations working on refugee and asylum seeker issues in NSW. The workshop will cover 1. What is the National Human Rights Consultation?; 2. Why is the National Consultation important for protecting the rights of refugees and asylum seekers?; 3. What options are there for better protection of human rights in Australia?; and 4. Tools and tips for writing submissions to the National Consultation.

Details: 10.30 am – 12.30 pm, Amnesty International, Level 1, 79 Myrtle Street, Chippendale NSW

RSVP: by 20 March to letstalkaboutrights@humanrights.gov.au or to Catherine Maywald on (02) 9284 9699.

Thursday 26 March 2009 - Melbourne

“Dialogue: Only Path to Peace” - Address by ex-Iranian President Seyed Mohammad Khatami

La Trobe University’s Centre for Dialogue invites everyone to hear Mr Khatami, ex-President of Iran from 1997-2005 and Leader of the Reform Movement in Iran, at his only public engagement in Melbourne.

Details: 7.15 pm, West Lecture Theatre, La Trobe University, Bundoora. Melways 573 C6 (Car Park 1).

Admission \$5 donation. RSVP: Centre for Dialogue, (03) 9479 1893 or dialogue@latrobe.edu.au. See www.latrobe.edu.au/dialogue

Saturday 28 March 2009 - Sydney

Housing and Homelessness - Challenges to Immigrant and Refugee Women

The Immigrant Women's Speakout Association is co-sponsoring a national workshop on "Housing and Homelessness: Challenges for Immigrant and Refugee Women". This free event for women of any age is being organised by the Network of Immigrant and Refugee Women. Lunch and child care provided. To confirm your participation fill out a form (download from <http://www.ncoss.org.au/mail/090227-NIRWA-participation-form.doc>) and fax to (02) 6230 5156 or email natoffice@ywca.org.au.

Details: 9am to 3:30pm, Y Conference Centre, Hotel Hyde Park, 5-11 Wentworth Avenue, Sydney

Information: (02) 6230 5150, <http://www.ncoss.org.au/mail/090227-YWCA-NIRWA-Poster-2-09.pdf>

Saturday 28 March 2009 – Adelaide

‘WorldFest’ – A Celebration of South Australia’s New Communities

Organised by African Communities Council of SA, Middle Eastern Communities Council of SA and Migrant Resource Centre of SA, WorldFest is a vibrant and exciting celebration of the cultural diversity that characterises SA’s new and emerging communities. Communities from Africa, the Middle East and Asia will promote and share their cultural traditions through food, song and music, art and craft.

Details: Adelaide Festival Centre, 10 am – 6 pm. Free

Information: Keith Preston (08) 8217 9522 or keith@mrcsa.com.au.

Monday 30 March 2009 - Sydney

The Importance of Play and Playfulness in Working with Traumatized Children and Adolescents

This free clinical master class will discuss the importance of understanding the emotional significance of the origins of play, and how this understanding is useful in the emotional assessment and therapeutic interactions with traumatised children and adolescents. There will be a discussion as to why being able to play and being in a state of playfulness is necessary in maintaining a personal sense of self. There will be a presentation of what a clinician needs to look for in determining whether a child's play is beneficial or harmful to their mental health. Examples of how play can be used in therapy will be given. Led by Peter Blake, clinical psychologist, child and adolescent psychotherapist.

Details: 6-8pm, STARTTS, 152-168 The Horsley Drive, Carramar. Please register on (02) 9794-1900.

March – April 2009 - Sydney

City of Sydney Living in Harmony Festival 2009

The City of Sydney will celebrate Harmony Day with the Living in Harmony Festival 2009, featuring over 12 events throughout March and April, providing Australians with an opportunity to think about our community's success as a multicultural society; re-commit to continuing respect, good will and understanding between Australians of all backgrounds; and say 'no' to racism. All events are free and bookings are essential. *Information:* www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/whatson.

Saturday 4 April 2009 – Brisbane

Iraqi Festival Day

The Romero Centre and Iraqi community members present the inaugural Iraqi Festival Day. Come to experience food, art, culture, music, dance and hospitality.

Details: Marymac Hall, 616 Ipswich Rd, Annerley. 10am–4 pm. Information: (07) 3846 3250.

Sunday 5 April 2009 - Sydney

Bridge for Asylum Seeker Foundation Benefit Concert - Singing the Spirit Home

Celebrating the songs of Eric Bogle, featuring Eric Bogle & Colcannon, Chris While & Julie Matthews (UK), Martyn Wyndham-Read (UK), John Williamson, Graeme Connors and Judy Small (all these world-class performers are donating their time). Standard tickets \$40 but, if you can, please buy a \$140, \$240 or \$540 ticket. Receipts provided for fully tax deductible donation for all but \$40 tickets.

Details: 2pm, York Theatre, Seymour Centre.

Bookings: www.seymourcentre.com.au or (02) 9351 7940.

Information: Kate Maclurcan (02) 9810 5826 or www.asylumseekersfoundation.com

Until 13 April 2009 - Melbourne

A Worthwhile Enterprise: The migrant hostel in Springvale

This exhibition records the history of the hostel and the impact it made on the surrounding community of Springvale, as well as on Victoria's broader multicultural landscape. Stories include those of migrants and refugees who were temporarily housed at the hostel, the workers who provided support and programs, and the community which embraced each wave of newcomers.

Information: Melbourne Immigration Museum at museumvictoria.com.au/immigration_museum.

Tuesday 12 - Wednesday 13 May 2009 - Sydney

2-day Seminar and Workshop on Service Provision related to Muslim clients

The al-Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences & Human Development will run a short course designed to suit all Service Provider, Government and private sector organisations dealing with Muslims as clients.

Lakemba, \$120 for 2 days. *Information:* <http://alghazzali.org/events/spmc1>

Tuesday 14 – Thursday 16 April 2009 – Adelaide

MRCSA Refugee Youth Leadership Camp

A residential leadership camp organised by the Migrant Resource Centre of SA at the Nunyara Conference Centre in Belair. 60 young refugees will participate in workshops and activities focusing on their development as leaders and mentors, employment pathways, sporting and recreation needs, cultural expression through the arts, and other areas. Places are still available but filling up quickly. Service agencies, youth organisations and community groups are welcome to nominate young refugees (15-21 years) for the camp which is a free event.

Information: Cynthia Caird or Bosco Opi on (08) 8217 9510 or admin@mrca.com.au

Sunday 19 April 2009 - Sydney

Acoustica – Balmain's Free Outdoor Concert

All day at Birchgrove Park. Fantastic lineup finishing with Jim Conway's Big Wheel. A day of great music, food and kids activities. *Information:* www.asylumseekersfoundation.com.

Saturday 2 May 2009 – Port Pirie

MRCSA Arts, Silk Road performances at Afghan Cameleers and Descendants Festival

Open to the public. *Details: Regional Art Gallery, Mary Elle Street, Port Pirie. 11.00am*

Information: Keith Preston (08) 8217 9522 or keith@mrca.com.au.

Tuesday 12 May 2009 - Sydney

Healing Trauma: The Central Role of Integration in Working with the Mind, Brain and Human Relationships

STARTTS presents a one-day seminar with Dr Daniel J. Siegel, author of "The Developing Mind" and "The Mindful Brain".

Details: Mercure Hotel, Sydney. Information: www.startts.org.au

Contact: Marla Camacho (02) 9794 1900 or marla.camacho@sswahs.nsw.gov.au.

Thursday 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 they think in either poetry or a short story.

Information: (08) 8223 7662 or (08) 8217 9522.

18 - 30 May 2009 - Adelaide

MRC Arts, Launch of the UnderXposed Photographic Exhibition

This exhibition will feature the art work of young artists living in South Australia from new and emerging communities. Poetic and thought provoking, from both a personal and global perspective, UnderXposed is a testament to strength, patience, endurance and the human desire to survive and re-imagine the future. Working with professional artists, young people particularly from African and Middle Eastern backgrounds share stories, experiences, thoughts, ideas and culture through photography and video.

Details: Adelaide Town Hall Foyer Gallery, King William Street, Adelaide. 9am-5pm.

Information: Keith Preston (08) 8217 9522 or keith@mrcsa.com.au

Friday 29 May 2009

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.

Information: www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/charter_of_rights/index.html

Until Sunday 7 June 2009 - Melbourne

Centre for Multicultural Youth 20th Anniversary Exhibition

Celebrate the Centre for Multicultural Youth as it supports the needs of migrant and refugee young people. The exhibition will include: *Voices of Young Australia* (stories of strong, inspiring young people) and *Multicultural Youth-Led Futures* (a poster series of leadership initiatives by migrant and refugee young people). Melbourne Immigration Museum, museumvictoria.com.au/immigration_museum.

Saturday 4 - Sunday 5 July 2009 - Adelaide

Human Development in the Context of Movement Within and Across National Boundaries

This workshop will examine the developmental implications of migration within the Asia-Pacific region including: Forced migration, Voluntary migration, Temporary migration, Within-border migration and Consequences of these movements.

<http://guest.cvent.com/EVENTS/Info/Custom.aspx?cid=17&i=76820f08-2fc0-4c7a-8204-22ea702e90e2>

Friday 17 July 2009 - Melbourne

2009 Human Rights Conference

Venue: State Library of Victoria. Keynote speaker: Federal Attorney-General Robert McClelland.

Information: www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre

Tuesday 21 - 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 1. Explore innovative and effective models of settlement service provision; 2. Assess the impact of pre-arrival experience on settlement; and 3. 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).

Information: <http://www.ames.net.au/settlementconference>

Wednesday 12 – Friday 14 August 2009 - Townsville

International Unity in Diversity Conference

The Conference will explore the potential benefits of diversity that bring rich outcomes and possibilities; develop a unified cohesive approach to address the current and emerging global crisis; and consider how cultural diversity must be seen as a key platform of the government's social inclusion agenda. Expressions of interest forms are due on 31 March and abstracts for papers by 30 April.

Information: www.unityindiversityconference.com

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Report on African Communities Speak Out: Making Our Voices Heard

The African Communities Speak Out Report was officially launched at the AGM of the Migrant Resource Centre of SA on 11 February. This is the report of the forum held on 27 November 2008, which brought together the leaders and members of South Australia's diverse African communities to identify and discuss their shared issues, concerns and aspirations across a broad range of areas. These included education, employment and training, housing, health, family relationships, identity and integration, law and the police, leadership and governance, migration and family reunion, participation and social inclusion, and the rights and protection of children, youth and women. For a copy of the report, contact Martin Maya at the ACCSA on (08) 8217 9520 or martin@accsa.com.au or Matti Spellacy at MRCSA (08) 8217 9510 or admin@mrcsa.com.au

Reducing Stigma in Multicultural Communities: Stepping Out of the Shadows

This resource by Multicultural Mental Health Australia (MMHA) is a new training package that has been developed for CALD community workers to educate their communities about mental health to help reduce stigma towards mental illness. This package contains additional resources including a DVD and bilingual mental health fact sheets. To be involved in the national roll-out of this training, please call MMHA on (02) 9840 3333.

Multilingual mental health CDs

MMHA will also be launching its series of audio mental health fact sheets that were recorded and produced in partnership with SBS Radio. The audio fact sheets are available on CD and in digital format in over 20 languages. These are an extension of the "What Is..." series of multilingual mental health fact sheets that were produced by MMHA last year with funding from the Department of Health and Ageing. You can order the *What Is...* audio series directly from MMHA on (02) 9840 3333. The fact sheets can be downloaded from the MMHA website – www.mmha.org.au

'Diabetes: What you need to know'

Diabetes Australia-NSW has produced a book titled: 'Diabetes: What you need to know'. This has been made culturally appropriate and translated into Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Greek and Italian. At \$10 each (plus postage), these can be ordered on 1300 136 588 or email: orders@diabetesnsw.com.au

Review of ASEAN nations' positions on Responsibility to Protect

The Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect has released a report that examines the position that Member States of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have adopted on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) since its endorsement at the 2005 World Summit. It looks at their policy priorities in areas related to implementing the principle through the UN. The report identifies steps that might encourage the region's governments to become more positively engaged with the R2P principle. See <http://www.r2pasiapacific.org/>

REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

A busy person's digest of some recent 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)

National probe into discrimination against Africans

A national inquiry will examine the racism and exclusion faced by Africans, amid fears that media stereotypes, such as the portrayal of African youths as violent gang members, are fuelling discrimination. The project, to be headed by the Australian Human Rights Commission, will provide the first national picture into the health, education, housing and employment barriers experienced by Africans, many of whom came to Australia as traumatised refugees. (*The Age*, 17 March)

Australian navy detains 54 boat people

A boat carrying 52 suspected asylum seekers and two crew members has been intercepted off the Coburg Peninsula northeast of Darwin. It is the ninth vessel to be detected by Australian authorities since last September. The passengers are believed to be from Afghanistan. It is not yet known whether any children were on board. (*The Australian*, 16 March; *The Daily Advertiser*, 17 March)

Australia gives asylum to two Iraqi soldiers

Two Iraqi soldiers who helped rescue a kidnapped Australian, Douglas Wood, in 2005 have been granted asylum in Australia because their lives were at risk at home, officials said Monday. David Manne, a lawyer for the two men, said they had been in danger because they testified against Wood's kidnappers. Another rescuer, Mohammed al-Samarae, resettled in the United States after being refused a visa to come to Australia six times, according to Wood. (*The Associated Press*, 16 March)

Cuts to Australia's skilled migrant intake

Australia's intake of skilled migrants will be cut by 18,500 over the next three months (14% of the annual intake) in a move to protect local jobs. The government has responded to the deepening economic crisis and rising unemployment by removing building and manufacturing trades from the list of workers Australia is seeking from overseas. Bricklayers, plumbers, welders, carpenters and metal fitters have been taken off the critical skills list, which is now confined mainly to the health and medical, engineering and IT professions. The cut reduces the skilled migrant intake for the 2008-09 financial year from 133,500 to 115,000. (*The Age*, 16 March)

United Nations to query Australia on possible human rights breaches

Parts of Australia's immigration policies have been identified as potential human rights violations by the United Nations Human Rights Committee, which is preparing to hold a review into Australia's human rights record in New York over the next fortnight. Australian Government officials will appear before the committee on 23-24 March to be quizzed about compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, potentially embarrassing Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who will be in the US for his first meeting with President Barack Obama. Among the UN panel's concerns is Christmas Island detention centre, which has recently been reactivated. (*The Age* and *The West Australian*, 13 March)

Chinese interrogation in detention leads to compensation payout

The Immigration Department was found to have breached the human rights of a group of Chinese asylum seekers and has begun paying compensation. The Department allowed visiting Chinese security officials to interrogate the asylum seekers in Villawood detention centre in 2005. (*The Age*, 11 March)

Champion for refugees added to Women's Honour Roll

Pamela Curr, campaign co-ordinator at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Melbourne, has been honoured for her outstanding contribution to the community by being added to this year's Victorian Women's Honour Roll. Ms Curr has spent the past decade fighting for human rights, firstly co-ordinating the Fair Wear campaign for clothing industry outworkers and more recently at the asylum seeker centre. "I'm fighting for legislation to stop people getting locked up in detention centres and I want to see an end to Christmas Island being used as a detention centre," she said. (*Moreland Leader*, 9 March)

Boost refugee intake to 15,000, says FECCA

The head of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia has called for Australia's refugee intake to be increased by at least 1500 people a year to accommodate more families forced to flee trouble spots in the Middle East, Africa and Afghanistan. (*West Australian*, 7 March)

Australians urged to consider plight of refugee women

Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said International Women's Day (March 8) provided an opportunity for all Australians to recognise the plight of vulnerable refugee women and children and Australia's efforts to help them. "The life of a single female or a female head of household in a refugee camp is very hard and they often face violence, abuse and torture," Senator Evans said. (*Immigration Minister's media release*, 6 March)

People smuggler jailed three years

Indonesian Abdul Hamid, 35, was convicted in Perth District Court of illegally bringing non-citizens into Australia and sentenced to six years in jail, with a non-parole period of three years. Hamid was the captain of a boat intercepted by Australian Border Protection Command near Australia's northwest shore on 29 September 2008. The boat was carrying 12 people believed to be from the Middle East. None of them were charged with any offences. (*Straits Times*, 5 March)

Australia boosts aid for Rohingya refugees

Australia will give another \$2.5 million to help the Rohingya people of Bangladesh and Burma. Foreign Minister Stephen Smith says it takes the amount of government assistance for the Rohingyas in the last fortnight to nearly \$5 million. (*ABC Online*, 4 March)

Evans set to meet Indonesian counterpart

Immigration Minister Chris Evans will meet his Indonesian counterpart in Jakarta on Tuesday to discuss ongoing cooperation between the two countries on migration, border security and refugees. Senator Evans will meet Indonesian Law and Human Rights Minister Andi Mattalatta for talks. The pair are likely to discuss a working holiday visa scheme, people smuggling and the plight of Burma's Rohingya people. (*The Age*, 3 March)

People trafficking guidelines for NGOs launched

The Minister for Home Affairs, Bob Debus, has launched the Guidelines for NGOs working with trafficked people, with the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Catherine Branson QC and the Director of the NGO Anti-Slavery Project, Jennifer Burn. The new guidelines spell out issues such as informed consent, privacy and culturally appropriate treatment of victims. (*Australian Human Rights Commission Media Release*, 3 March)

Regional approach to Rohingya boat people

Southeast Asian leaders have agreed to use the regional mechanism, known as the "Bali process", to try to solve the problem of the minority Muslim Rohingyas fleeing Myanmar. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) made the decision at its annual meeting in Thailand at the weekend. UNHCR says there are some 28,000 recognised Rohingya refugees in two UNHCR camps in Bangladesh and 200,000 unregistered Rohingya outside the camps. (*IRIN*, 2 March)

Budget cuts threaten services for pregnant refugees

The Pregnancy Support Service for Refugee and Migrant Women was set up last year by Community Midwifery WA to help refugee women who had little English, were living in a foreign country and were suffering from the traumas of their war-torn homes. The service received over half of its shoe-string budget of \$33,000 from the government but has no reassurance that it will be funded beyond 10 March. Service co-ordinator Anne Coutts is already preparing mothers and mothers-to-be to expect the doors to close in three weeks. (*WA Today*, 27 February)

Refugees let down by Shepparton clinic closure

Goulburn Valley politicians said refugee families who have been settled in the area were being let down by the closure of a specialist health clinic in Shepparton and the clinic's refugee health program. Shepparton paediatrician Peter Eastaugh has raised concerns that since its closure the refugee children who have been relocated and settled in the city were not being treated for serious health

problems. State Member for Northern Victoria Wendy Lovell criticised the Victorian Government for not continuing funding. (*Shepparton News*, 27 February)

Burma's refugees cut from ASEAN agenda

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) secretary-general has defended a decision to exclude discussions on the plight of Burmese Rohingya refugees from the agenda of this week's leaders' summit in Thailand, saying not to underestimate what can be achieved in informal discussions. (*ABC News Online*, 26 February)

New program to tackle racism

Community organisations have welcomed a stepped-up government program to tackle racial, cultural and religious intolerance. The Diverse Australia Program (DAP) will seek to address problems at a local level by providing funding support to organisations that deal directly with issues of intolerance and prejudice, with small one-off grants available in addition to year-round financial assistance. (*IPS News*, 26 February)

Sanctuary closer for Iraqi soldiers

The two surviving Iraqi soldiers from the group of nine who gave evidence against the terrorists who kidnapped Australian businessman Douglas Wood in 2005 are a step closer to sanctuary. Officials met the soldiers' former commander Moliamed Al-Samarai in Melbourne yesterday. Earlier, Mr Wood said the remaining men had tried to apply for asylum but had been turned down by Australian authorities. However the Department of Immigration still says it has not found any applications from the two soldiers for resettlement in Australia. (*The Age*, 25 February)

Multicultural Advisory Council to discuss diversity and tolerance

Australia's new Multicultural Advisory Council met for the first time in Canberra today to discuss ways the Government can tackle cultural, racial and religious intolerance. The council will focus on practical approaches to promoting social cohesion; overcoming intolerance and racism in Australia; communicating the social and economic benefits of Australia's cultural diversity; and the inclusion of migrants in society. (*Immigration Minister's media release*, 24 February)

400 Iraqis accept ADF offer to live in Australia

The Immigration Department says just over 400 Iraqis employed by the Australian Defence Force have accepted the Government's offer to move to Australia. Last year the Government created a special class of visa for Iraqi citizens who had been employed as translators and drivers by the Australian forces in Iraq. (*ABC News Online*, 24 February)

World Youth Day pilgrims in RRT backlog

Last year the Immigration Department revealed almost 200 pilgrims who travelled to Australia for the Catholic Church's World Youth Day event applied for asylum. The Refugee Review Tribunal has seen its backlog of appeals grow by one fifth this year, mainly due to the 90 cases related to World Youth Day pilgrims. (*Daily Telegraph*, 25 February)

Government considers complementary protection legislation

Immigration Minister Chris Evans is considering changing the law to accommodate asylum seekers with complementary protection needs – those who have protection needs under international conventions other than the 1951 Refugee Convention. It is understood Australian laws would offer those owed complementary protection the same rights as those deemed refugees. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February)

Do not target foreigners in hard times, UN High Commissioner for Refugees says

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Antonio Guterres, said economic instability accelerated triggers such as war and political unrest that forced people to flee their homelands, and forecast refugee numbers to increase "dramatically" in 2009. He also warned against xenophobia and a "fortress mentality" by receiving countries. Mr Guterres condemned Australia's detention policies that continued offshore processing and incarceration at Christmas Island, but praised resettlement programs as among the world's best. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 February)

Increased humanitarian aid for UNHCR

Senator Chris Evans announced a \$4.4 million increase in funding to the United Nation's refugee agency, bringing Australia's core funding to UNHCR to \$14.3 million, which is equal (in dollar value, not real value) to Australia's 2001 funding levels. (*Immigration Minister's media release*, 23 February)

Funding to support displaced people

The Government has allocated \$12.8 million for overseas assistance projects to support displaced people fleeing wars, persecution or political strife in their homelands. The Displaced Persons Program for 2009 will focus on displaced Afghans, Iraqis, Burmese and Sri Lankans. (*Immigration Minister's media release*, 23 February)

Italy's "Mediterranean Solution"

Italy's new system for processing asylum-seekers offshore - with its echoes of Australia's Pacific Solution - is generating unrest on the tiny island of Lampedusa. By trying to "extra-territorialise" as much responsibility as possible, Italy is leading the European Union's push for a new refugee regime. (*Canberra Times*, 21 February)

Initiative by New Zealand refugees to create national links

A new initiative taken by former refugees living in New Zealand has resulted in the setting up of a national network of organisations representing former refugees. The initial purpose of the National Refugee Network is to share information. (*Scoop*, 20 February)

Desperate refugees set fire to Italian detention centre

A revolt and fire set by desperate refugees held on the rocky Italian island of Lampedusa has been quelled by tear gas, leaving the centre severely damaged and sending 24 immigrants and police to hospital with burns and injuries. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees called for an immediate evacuation of those held at the centre but Italian authorities are trying to expedite the expulsion and deportation of the 800 or so immigrants while it assesses the damage (*The Age*, 20 February)

Fire vandals hit Hobart Migrant Resource Centre

In the latest of a string of vandal attacks in recent months, arsonists lit a fire which damaged the lower floor of the Migrant Resource Centre in Molle St, Hobart. The centre has helped migrants and refugees settle in Tasmania since 1979. (*Hobart Mercury*, 19 February)

Greater transparency for refugee and migration tribunals

The Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) will publish its country of origin research to provide greater transparency in its decision making. The RRT and the Migration Review Tribunal will also double the number of decisions published online so that 40% of all decisions made by the tribunals will be publicly available. (*Immigration Minister's media release*, 17 February)

Afghan reprisal feared in Perth killing

A refugee who fled persecution by the Taliban has been murdered in Perth, fuelling speculation that forces within Australia's Afghan community who support President Hamid Karzai have launched a fear campaign against their political enemies. Ahmad Shah Abed may have been targeted because of his connections to Afghan politics and a campaign by his family to oust backers of Mr Karzai in Afghanistan's troubled Oruzgan province. (*The Australian*, 17 February)

Telstra attacks Australia's human rights record

Telstra has launched an extraordinary attack on Australia's human rights record, citing the Howard government practice of keeping children in detention as a reason why a charter of rights is needed. In a submission to the national human rights consultation panel, the country's largest telecommunications company wholeheartedly endorses a charter, arguing it would "provide greater clarity about the protection of human rights in Australia". (*The Australian*, 16 February)

Thai PM admits boat people set adrift

Thailand's Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva has admitted that boatloads of Rohingya asylum seekers have been towed out to sea and allowed to "drift" by Thai authorities. The admission reverses weeks of denials of mistreatment. Mr Abhisit said his investigation had yet to uncover who was responsible but that he regretted "any losses". The fate of the Rohingyas will be discussed at an ASEAN meeting later this month and at the "Bali Process" tentatively scheduled for March. (*The Age*, 14 February)

Women Involved In human trafficking

A study by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime shows that a third of the 155 countries surveyed are reporting more female traffickers than male traffickers. There are fears that the number of persons trafficked will rise as the economic crisis deepens the pool of potential victims. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 February)

'Bali process' to decide Burma asylum-seekers' fate

Indonesia and Thailand have agreed to cooperate via regional forums towards deciding the fate of almost 400 Rohingya asylum seekers detained in Aceh. The "Bali Process", which was initiated by Australia and Indonesia, refers to a regional framework for cooperating on people-smuggling and requires the involvement of the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration. (*ABC News Online*, 12 February)

Diploma program for Burmese refugees on the Thai-Burma border

Twenty-one Burmese students from Thai-Burma border refugee camps are following a liberal studies diploma program organised by the Australian Catholic University in the mountain areas of northern Thailand. (*CN Catholic News Services*, 11 February)

Call to probe local war criminals

A Lowy Institute report says that significant numbers of war criminals are likely to have taken refuge in Australia, and that criminals from modern conflicts are a far more serious problem in Australia than those from the World War II era. (*The Age*, 11 February)

People-smuggling case

A 20-year-old Indonesian man, Ade Hairdar, has been remanded in custody, accused of trying to smuggle 17 people into Australia on 17 January on board a vessel near Ashmore Island, 840 kilometres west of Darwin. (*Australian Financial Review*, 10 February)

New body to regulate migration agents

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, today announced the establishment of a new body to regulate migration agents. The new Office of Migration Agents Registration Authority (MARA) will undertake the regulatory functions which have been operated under statutory self-regulation by the Migration Institute of Australia (MIA) since 1998. (*Immigration Minister's media release*, 9 February)

Asylum-seeker language test under scrutiny

A report from the University of New England urges caution on the use of language analysis in determining if an asylum seeker is telling the truth about where they are from and says that most reports on asylum seekers using language analysis are flawed. (*ABC News*, 9 February)

US calls on Burma to end Rohingya persecution

The US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher has told a press conference in Bangladesh that the plight of the stateless Rohingya is 'a matter of concern'. (*Radio Australia*, 9 February)

Alleged people smugglers in custody

Six men accused of people smuggling were remanded in custody yesterday. Three were intercepted on 2 December and the other three were intercepted on 6 December in the waters between Indonesia and the territory of Ashmore Reef and Cartier Islands. (*The West Australian*, 7 February)

Urgent need to open employment doors for humanitarian migrant women

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria called for a special focus on job creation for humanitarian women migrants following the release of a new discussion paper documenting a number of barriers faced by many in accessing employment. "This paper confirms what many associated with migrant communities have been saying for a long time: that women who have arrived in Victoria under the humanitarian entrant program are experiencing disproportionate difficulty in accessing employment opportunities." (*EECV media release*, 6 February)