



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

29 July 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

New RCOA study sheds light on experiences of refugees in countries of first asylum

In Refugee Week, RCOA released a new research report, *The Search for Protection: Resettled refugees reflect on seeking asylum in Asia and the Middle East*, documenting the experiences, in camps and urban settings, of refugees in countries of first asylum. Written by Lia Kent and Dr Jamileh Abu Duhou and supported by Caritas Australia, the report brings together first-hand accounts from interviews and focus group discussions of Chin, Karen and Iraqi refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia. It explores individuals' experiences in relation to protection, highlighting the impacts of discrimination, exploitation and corruption. The report also documents respondents' suggestions for addressing these protection-related issues, including their recommendations for NGOs. The report is at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/reports.html

Refugee Week 2009 boosts awareness of refugee contributions and concerns

Refugee Week 2009 was a great success, with more than 130 local events across Australia and major launches in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane. This year's theme, "Freedom from Fear", was explored at many of the week's events, which included community celebrations, seminars, artistic events and performances, open days, sporting events, film festivals and launches of new books and reports. The media took a significant interest in the week, with coverage given to some of the many events, the week's theme and the experiences and contributions of individual refugees. The week was so successful because of the efforts of the thousands of people and the hundreds of organisations involved in organising events and promoting awareness in communities across Australia. RCOA would also like to thank its main sponsors for Refugee Week – Victorian Multicultural Commission, AMES Victoria, NSW Community Relations Commission, City of Sydney, AMES NSW, ACL and Leichhardt Council – and the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia and the Multicultural Development Association in Brisbane for their pivotal roles in coordinating activities in their states.

RCOA president John Gibson spoke at the Melbourne and Sydney launches of Refugee Week, formally launching "The Search for Protection" report (see above) and calling for a return to bipartisan political cooperation in national refugee policy. The Sydney event also featured a young Rohingya woman from Burma, Yasmeen Fatimah, who spoke about her 16 years on the move as a refugee. John and Yasmeen's speeches are available at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/speeches.html

Four Inquiries explore aspects of refugee and settlement policy

This Friday (July 31) is the official deadline for submissions to four significant inquiries into aspects of Australia's refugee, immigration and settlement policy.

- The Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) is inviting submissions on its discussion paper on the **Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)**, the program which provides on-arrival settlement support for newly arrived refugees and humanitarian migrants. In addition, DIAC has been conducting community consultations on IHSS, as it prepares for the 2010 IHSS tender round. Information on the discussion paper and the submission process can be found at <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/contracts-tenders-submissions/ihss-procurement.htm>

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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

- The Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs is seeking submissions for its inquiry into the Government's new **Migration Amendment (Immigration Detention Reform) Bill 2009**. The drafting of this Bill follows the "New Directions in Detention" policy outlined a year ago by Immigration Minister Chris Evans. The Bill aims to articulate and strengthen some immigration detention principles, clarify and expand community access provisions, expand some detention powers and amend the Minister's non-compellable residence determination power. Information on the inquiry is at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/migration_2009/index.htm
- The Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs is also conducting an inquiry into the **Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Test Review and Other Measures) Bill 2009**. This Bill would amend the current citizenship test legislation to: allow some people who have suffered torture or trauma outside Australia to be eligible for citizenship without sitting the citizenship test; and to make some changes to the administration of the test and the conferring of citizenship. These changes are based on some of the recommendations of the Citizenship Test Review Committee, which gave its report to the Government last year. For more details on this inquiry, see http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/citizenship/index.htm
- The Australian Human Rights Commission is inviting submissions for its **research on African Australians' experiences of social inclusion and human rights**. The project is looking particularly at experiences related to employment and training, education, health, housing and justice. Details on the project and the submission process can be found at <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/africanaus/>

New work rights arrangements for asylum seekers now in place

After years of lobbying by many organisations and community members, modifications to asylum seekers' eligibility for work rights and their access to Medicare came into effect on July 1. The stated intent of the changes is to allow those who comply with the Migration Act to support themselves while awaiting a substantive outcome. Under the new arrangements, many of those who were previously prevented from working because they had sought protection after having been in Australia for more than 45 days in the previous 12 months, are now either eligible to work or to apply for permission to work. Some asylum seekers will still need to demonstrate a compelling need to work and good cause for delayed lodgement (lack of access to migration advice is cited as an example of an explanation that is unlikely to be deemed acceptable). It seems that those who are litigating, and who have previously been affected by the 45-day rule, will remain ineligible for work rights. For more information on the new arrangements, see <http://www.immi.gov.au/refugee/permission/>

Australian NGO representatives take refugee concerns to global UNHCR meetings

From June 29 to July 2, the UNHCR's two main annual meetings involving NGOs were held in Geneva – the NGO Consultations and the Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement (ATCR). In addition, a series of semi-formal and informal meetings were held between NGOs and with UNHCR. 25 NGO representatives from Australia attended the two meetings, five going to ATCR and 20 going to the NGO Consultations. They included four RCOA representatives (president John Gibson, CEO Paul Power and board members Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin and Paris Aristotle), four refugee community representatives (Liliane Lukoki and Fatima Elzibar of the African Women's Advocacy Unit, Dr Kamal Hussein of the Burmese Rohingya Community in Australia and Dr Sheikh-Eldin) and nine interns from University of NSW's Centre for Refugee Research (who were involved in documenting all aspects of the NGO Consultations and the UNHCR Standing Committee meeting held the previous week). The Australian NGO group worked extraordinarily well together, based on months of planning coordinated by RCOA and the Centre for Refugee Research. They worked on raising issues through both meetings, planning common questions, developing a series of short papers on issues of concern and working together to plan meetings with UNHCR representatives. The advocacy of the refugee community representatives was very effective, with each of them involved in numerous meetings with UNHCR representatives and states present for the UNHCR Standing Committee, as well as taking different presentation roles in the NGO Consultations and ATCR. Information from the meetings is being developed and will progressively be posted on the RCOA website at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/unhcr.html>

RCOA appeals for greater support for victims of Sri Lanka crisis

The severity of the crisis in Sri Lanka has prompted RCOA to write to the Australian Ministers for Immigration and Foreign Affairs, asking for the Australian Government to increase its support to victims of the crisis. In a letter to Ministers Chris Evans and Stephen Smith, RCOA president John Gibson asked for the Government to:

- Expedite the processing of family reunion visa applications by members of the Australian Tamil and other Sri Lankan community members with heightened family concerns;
- Allocate additional settlement places for Tamil and other Sri Lankans of humanitarian concern under the 2009-10 intake (through the In-country Special Humanitarian visa sub-class 201);
- Refrain from removing Sri Lankan asylum seekers until conditions have improved within Sri Lanka;
- Allocate additional financial assistance to UNHCR to support its activities within Sri Lanka; and
- Join other countries in seeking to encourage the Sri Lankan Government to: allow UNHCR and other international agencies unrestricted access to all IDP camps; release, or expedite trials for, all detained civilians against whom charges have not been laid; and release the findings of its inquiry into serious human rights abuses and prosecute individuals who have authorised, carried out or been complicit in extra-judicial executions, disappearances and other human rights violations.

RCOA's statement on this issue is at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/media.html>

Poorer countries continue to host largest number of refugees

The recently released "2008 Global Trends" document from UNHCR highlights the fact that most refugees seek refuge in countries very close to their own and that most refugees are being hosted by countries much poorer than Australia. The largest numbers of refugees in 2008 were in Pakistan (1.78 million), Syria (1.1 million), Iran (980,000), Jordan (500,000), Chad (330,000) and Tanzania (322,000), with Germany (583,000) and the UK (292,000) the only OECD countries in the top ten host countries. Australia is ranked 51st, with 20,919 refugees (0.2% of the global total). At the end of 2008, Australia had just 0.3% of the world's 827,323 asylum seekers. Of the 535,950 asylum seekers recognised as refugees around the world during 2008, just 1,845 (0.3%) were in Australia. However, Australia's involvement in refugee resettlement is much more significant, with 11,006 (12.4%) of the 88,800 refugees resettled in this country during 2008 (second overall and first in per capita terms). When refugee recognition and resettlement figures for 2008 are combined, Australia was 12th numerically (12,851 out of 624,750 worldwide) and 17th in per capita terms. For details, see our media release: http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2009/090619_Australia_&_refugee_protection.pdf UNHCR's 2008 Global Trends document is at <http://www.unhcr.org/4a375c426.html>

Detention debt legislation passed by House of Representatives

Legislation to abolish the practice of charging asylum seekers and others for their time in immigration detention has been passed by the House of Representatives, after four Liberal MPs (Petro Georgiou, Russell Broadbent, Judi Moylan and Danna Vale) broke ranks with the Coalition and spoke in favour of the legislation. The Bill is expected to be passed by the Senate in August with the support of Labor, Greens and independent Senators. The most recent statement on the Bill from Immigration Minister Chris Evans is at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09059.htm>

Three more councils become Refugee Welcome Zones

In June and July, three more local councils declared themselves Refugee Welcome Zones – Gosford City (NSW), Burwood (NSW) and Townsville City (Qld), bringing the total number of Refugee Welcome Zones in Australia to 72.

COMING EVENTS

Thursday 30 July – Sydney

Refugee Contributions to Australia – ALP National Conference Fringe Event

Immigration Minister Chris Evans, barrister Julian Burnside and 1996 Australian of the Year Dr John Yu will be guest speakers at a Labor for Refugees forum, held in conjunction with the ALP National Conference.

Details: 12.45pm at The Atrium, NSW Trades Hall, 337 Sussex St, Haymarket. Tickets \$25/\$20.

More information: http://www.alp.org.au/download/now/labor_for_refugees2.pdf

Friday 31 July – Adelaide

Islamic Spectrum in Australia Youth Forum – building cultural bridges through understanding

A full-day youth forum of fun and interactive learning about Islamic art, food and music. Special performance by Islamic hip hop group The Brothahood (Melbourne)

Details: Contact Nexus by email nexus@nexus.asn.au or (08) 8212 4276 or go to www.nexus.asn.au/islam

Friday 31 July – Sydney**Best Way Forward? Refugees, Security and the Asia-Pacific**

Organised as part of the ALP National Conference Fringe Events calendar, this forum will feature presentations by UNHCR Regional Representative, Richard Towle, Amnesty International Australia's Refugee Coordinator, Dr Graham Thom, RCOA CEO, Paul Power, and A Just Australia's Acting National Director, Zhi Yan.

Details: 7.15pm. Australian National Maritime Museum, Murray Street. Darling Harbour. Information and RSVP to Graham Thom (02) 8396 7643.

Wednesday 12 August – Sydney**Open forum: Is Australia Giving Refugees a Fair Go?**

University of Western Sydney's Open Forum Series with guest speakers: Denis O'Brien, Principal Member of Migration Review Tribunal and Refugee Review Tribunal, and Jacqueline Everitt, human rights lawyer, author and journalist. *Details: Arrive at 5.30pm for a 6pm start, building EZ, Female Orphan School, Parramatta campus, RSVP to Debbie Mey d.mey@uws.edu.au or (02) 9678 7374*

Wednesday 12 August to Friday 14 August - 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 strategy.

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

Monday 17 August to Monday 31 August – throughout Victoria**Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) community consultations**

The consultations provide an open forum for the public to share views on the Victorian Government's activities and policies in multicultural affairs. There will also be information on community grants.

Details: To find out more about the consultations go to the VMC's website www.multicultural.vic.gov.au or call (03) 9651 0678 or (03) 9651 0651.

Friday 21 August – Melbourne**Symposium: Overqualified and Undervalued – employment barriers for CALD people**

Victoria University's Institute for Community, Ethnicity and Policy Alternatives (ICEPA) is organising this symposium that will explore issues related to representation and participation of culturally and linguistically diverse people (immigrants and refugees) in the public and private sectors, including factors promoting and prohibiting their career and employment advancement

Details: 9am – 1pm; level 9, room C915, City Flinders Campus, Victoria University, 300 Flinders St; RSVP to Sue Butterworth by 14 August (03) 9919 5478 or Sue.Butterworth@vu.edu.au For more information contact Dr Beata Leuner at ICEPA at VU (03) 9919 5482

September 1 to 4 – Perth**The Mental Health Services Conference of Australia and New Zealand, incorporating the 1st Australasian Refugee Health Conference and the WA Transcultural Mental Health Conference**

Details: More information can be found at www.themhs.org

September 7 to 8 – Melbourne**Victorian ESL Conference: Transforming ESL Pedagogy, educating for success in learning**

Venue: The Sebel Albert Park, Melbourne.

Information: <http://www.vatme.vic.edu.au/ESLconference09/Indexconference.htm>

November 19 to 20 – Melbourne**International Conference on Migration, Citizenship and Intercultural relations**

Details: Guest speakers include Professor Bryan Turner (NUS, formerly of Cambridge), Professor Riaz Hassan (Flinders), Professor Stephen Castles (Oxford) and Professor Michael Humphrey (Sydney). For more info go to www.deakin.edu.au/arts-ed/icg/events/conf-2009.php

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Foundation House Oration: 'Making International Refugee Law Meaningful Again'

One of the most thought-provoking events held during Refugee Week was the Foundation House Oration, given by Professor James Hathaway, Dean of Melbourne University's Law School. In his oration, Professor Hathaway focused on the importance of international refugee law and the idea of "meaningful protection" as a "human rights remedy, not an immigration path." He challenged dearly held notions of both governments and refugee advocates. A vidcast of the oration can be downloaded from <http://www.foundationhouse.org.au/AnnouncementRetrieve.aspx?ID=24433>

Professor Hathaway's oration was summarised in an opinion piece in "The Age" on World Refugee Day: <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/we-can-all-help-lift-the-refugee-burden-20090619-crba.html>

'Refugee and Humanitarian Issues: Australia's Response'

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship has produced an excellent overview of Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program, outlining clearly the onshore protection and refugee resettlement components of the program and explaining Australia's current role in refugee protection and in settlement support. This booklet can be downloaded from the DIAC website through the following link: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/refugee/ref-hum-issues/ref-hum-issues-june09.htm>

'Case Management as an Alternative to Immigration Detention: The Australian Experience'

The International Detention Coalition has produced a paper which outlines the development of alternatives to immigration detention in Australia since 2005. The paper is being used as an advocacy tool with other governments considering detention alternatives. The report can be downloaded via the following link: <http://idc.rfbf.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/casemanagementinaustralia.pdf>

'Understanding client experience: Refugees accessing and utilising the health system in Australia'

Published by the Victorian Department of Human Services (Southern Metropolitan Region) in May 2009, this report is a literature review in the area of refugees' experience accessing and utilising the health systems in Australia, to inform the planning of health services and to better cater for the needs of refugees in Victoria's Southern Metropolitan Region. The report is available at <http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/AnnouncementRetrieve.aspx?ID=23673>

New multilingual living skills website for youth

A new multilingual living skills website for young people and their workers providing info in six community languages (Arabic, Amharic, Dinka, Swahili, Karen and English). The website will teach young people about housing, managing mobile phone bills, getting legal advice and staying happy and healthy. <http://www.livesmart.net.au>

'Us and Them: Muslim Christian harmony in Australia'

Professor Abe W Ata, well known for his work on comparative religions and ethnicity and now based at Australian Catholic University, offers truths about interfaith relations as they are believed and expressed by Muslim and non-Muslim Australians. Cross-cultural research material is drawn from a variety of research projects over the years, including results from a national survey on attitudes towards Islam and Muslims among Australian secondary students. Published by Australian Academic Press and available from: <http://www.australianacademicpress.com.au/Publications/Books/4-921513190.html>

'Refugees and Australia's Response: Politics, Morality and the Way Forward'

Written by Fr David Holdcroft SJ, director of Jesuit Refugee Service Australia from 2004 to 2008, this recent publication from Australian Catholic Social Justice Council explores the development of the concept of refugee status, provides theological insights into refugee questions and plots the development of Australian refugee policy. This 36-page booklet is \$6.60 (plus postage). To order, see: http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_papers.html

'One Step at a Time': new comic book for cultural orientation of young refugees

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson, has launched a new comic book for young refugees taking part in the pre-departure Australian Cultural Orientation Program. 'One Step at a Time' tells the story of three young refugee families from Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia and their adjustment to life in Australia. For background information, see <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/media-releases/2009/lf09035.htm>

OPPORTUNITIES

Refugee Mentoring Program - Sydney

Sydney Community College has developed a program to assist unemployed refugees and humanitarian entrants find work. Trained mentors are from a wide range of cultural and professional backgrounds. Refugees must be over 18 years of age, permanent residents, actively seeking work and have English language skills. For more information, contact Ruby Madan on (02) 8752 7533 or email ruby.madan@scc.nsw.edu.au or go to <http://getskilled.sydneycommunitycollege.com.au/>

Call for art projects – Displaced Children

Paper and art submissions are sought for an international architecture competition that has youth homelessness as its theme. Organisations who work with refugee youth may have refugee youth who are interested in sharing their stories, feelings or general insight on the effects of displacement on children, and their ideas of 'home'. All submissions are due by August 21, 2009. Contact Alison Hagan at the Socio Design Foundation (Colorado, USA) sociodesignfoundation@gmail.com or find more info at www.sociodesignfoundation.org

UNAA Media Peace Awards

Nominations for the national awards program are now open to all media organizations. Entries close on Friday 12 September 2009. Winners will be announced at the Awards Presentation Dinner to be held in Melbourne on 23 October. For more info contact UNAA Victoria (03) 9670 7878 or go to www.unaavictoria.org.au

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)

Newly arrived refugees in Queensland will no longer receive free immunisation

The Queensland Government has handed over funding of free catch-up vaccinations for newly arrived refugees to the Commonwealth. The vaccinations cover diseases such as polio, diphtheria, measles, mumps, rubella and hepatitis B. The funding is estimated to be over \$400,000 per year and both the Queensland and Commonwealth governments are believed to be in dispute over who should pay. (*Courier Mail, 23 July*)

Injured asylum seekers living in Perth community

Asylum seekers injured in a boat explosion off Ashmore Reef have been discharged from hospital and are living in the community in Perth. Rather than being transferred back to Christmas Island, the asylum seekers will remain in Perth to receive outpatient treatment for their burns. It is still unknown whether the asylum seekers will be allowed to remain in Australia. (*Channel 9 Perth, 22 July*)

Boat explosion inquest unlikely to sit before next year

The inquest into what happened behind the burning and sinking of an asylum seekers boat off Ashmore Reef in April this year might not be heard until next February. A police source said more than 200 witnesses had been interviewed but investigations had been hampered because some key witnesses were badly injured and could not speak English. (*Northern Territory News, 20 July*)

Compassion trumped by expediency in asylum-seeker response – opinion piece from Mike Steketee

The Government seems to be in a state of anxiety that the issue will regain its political potency. Two weeks ago, on his way to Europe, Kevin Rudd dropped into Malaysia with Foreign Minister Stephen Smith in tow, a rare double act in Australian diplomacy... In the meantime, hopefully any deal between Australia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka will take into account not just the political wellbeing of the Rudd Government but also the welfare of asylum seekers. (*The Australian, 18 July*)

Uighur leader will take her case to Canberra

The unofficial leader of the Uighurs, Rebiya Kadeer, will use a visit to Australia in August to push the government to take a stand on China's violent repression of demonstrations in her homeland and to take the remaining Uighur detainees from Guantanamo Bay. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 18 July*)

Boat blast victims still not identified

Northern Territory police have yet to formally identify the five people who died after an explosion on an asylum seeker boat near Ashmore Reef in April. Police have released names of the people believed to be dead but they still have not formally identified them. *(ABC News, 18 July)*

Victoria Police searching for first African recruit

The western suburbs of Melbourne are the prime target for a Victoria Police recruitment drive for the first African recruit. "Victoria Police has been building its relationship with African communities and we think encouraging them to consider a future with us will benefit them and the wider community. The first African police officer would be a role model for the community," Senior Sergeant Craig Spicer said. *(Moonee Valley Community News, 15 July)*

Norfolk Island pulled into line by Canberra

The semi-autonomous territory of Norfolk Island has been pulled into line by the Federal Government for allegedly seeking to take detainees from Guantanamo Bay without consulting Canberra. Senior government sources told the Herald that Norfolk Island's Government made representations to the United States consulate in Sydney last month. *(Sydney Morning Herald, 15 July)*

People smugglers offering 'money-back guarantees' to clients

People smugglers are apparently offering "money-back" guarantees to clients in Afghanistan and Pakistan and reducing their profit margins in an attempt to generate more business. Security expert and academic Khalid Koser said the people-smuggling industry in Kabul and Peshawar was dominated by 10 to 20 smugglers. "They were people who were travel agents who had legitimate businesses and at the end of the day they closed the door and brought you in and did some work under the table." *(The Australian, 15 July)*

Citizenship test could be dropped for refugees diagnosed with psychological disorders

Refugees diagnosed with psychological disorders resulting from torture or other traumas may soon be exempt from having to sit the Australian citizenship test. Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement, Laurie Ferguson, said the legislation was still subject to approval. *(Blacktown Sun, 14 July)*

Afghan asylum seekers promised 'a big ship'

An Afghan asylum seeker has told The Australian how people smugglers promised him he would travel to Australia on 'a big ship' using his passport. Hussain Ali, 24, on board the ill-fated vessel which foundered in eastern Indonesia last week. Investigators in Indonesia believe most of the approximately 85 Afghan asylum seekers on the boat have made their way back to Jakarta. *(The Australian, 14 July)*

Ian Rintoul says lost lives are Australia's fault

Refugee advocate Ian Rintoul has denied being in contact with people-smuggling syndicates. Last week The Australian revealed Mr Rintoul had been in regular mobile phone contact with a passenger on the sinking vessel, who told him the engine had failed. "The situation was desperate. I spoke to an Afghan man on board, Ali, who said 'we need help, we need help', and I could hear water lapping against the boat. When I called Immigration, I was out on to someone in media. The federal police issued a press release containing the co-ordinates of the boat but did nothing else," Mr Rintoul said. He stressed that, "I have no contact with people-smugglers, nor do I have any advanced knowledge about refugee boats heading for Australia." *(The Australian, 13 July)*

Navy intercepts Sri Lankan asylum seekers

There are many women and children among the 70 Sri Lankan asylum seekers now on Christmas Island after being picked up near the island on Saturday. Meanwhile Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith has confirmed that all passengers on another boat, which sank on its way from Indonesia to Australia last week, are safe. He said Australian police had spoken to two passengers who confirmed that all passengers had been rescued. Someone on the boat sent a text message to friends and family in Pakistan saying it was sinking. The message was redirected to refugee advocate Ian Rintoul in Australia who alerted Australian and Indonesian authorities. *(The Age, 13 July)*

Fresh impetus to improve refugee-police relations nationally

There is national interest in a Tasmanian study which aims to improve relations between police and refugees. The University of Tasmania study involved interviewing hundreds of refugees about their encounters with police. It found cultural misunderstandings and gaps in legal knowledge are to blame for inflamed encounters between the two groups. (*ABC Network News, 13 July*)

Minister was told of surge

The Government knew last October about a possible surge in asylum boats heading for Australia. Apparently it has taken seven months to fund new measures to deal with the problem. Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans was briefed by his department of an expected "surge in authorised boat arrivals" on 27 October 2008. (*Herald Sun, 13 July*)

PM says global plan needed on asylum seekers

World leaders co-operating to solve the global economic crisis should similarly address the issue of increasing numbers of asylum seekers, PM Kevin Rudd said. Rudd told a function at a diplomatic club in Rome on 8 July there was a need for countries to share the burden of resettling refugees by developing a coordinated global plan. "We, the advanced economies of the world, need to all burden share. There are a number of resettlement countries and those places allocated this year are probably needing reform and I think wider global burden sharing on the part of certain states would be appreciated," Mr Rudd said. (*AAP, 9 July*)

Indonesian authorities find missing Afghan asylum boat

Indonesian maritime authorities have found a boat – carrying possible asylum seekers – that was feared to have been lost at sea. The boat believed to be carrying about 70 asylum seekers from Afghanistan, went missing in the Sape Strait off Komodo Island. (*Australia Network News, 9 July*)

A test for a more humane strategy – Paul Kelly opinion piece

Kevin Rudd and Stephen Smith now seek to validate the deepest conventional wisdom about unauthorised boat arrivals, that the essence of the solution lies in regional agreements with our South-East Asian neighbours. With more than 800 boat people arrivals in the latest phase and intelligence that an upsurge in the thousands is coming, the Rudd Government faces an exacting test of the balance it has drawn. Its policy is best labelled as strong border protection leavened with humanity. (*The Australian, 8 July*)

Owner of Christmas Island casino given notice on lease

The owner of Christmas Island's mothballed casino has been given 100 days to comply with the terms of his 99-year lease or face the possibility of the Australian Government booting him out. There has been speculation that the casino, which has been unused for the past 11 years, will be renovated by the Australian Government to house the extra number of DIAC officials and asylum seekers on the island. (*The Australian, 8 July*)

Asylum bid goes regional as PM calls for help to stem increase in numbers

Australia wants to lead a push to assist South-East Asian countries toughen their people-smuggling laws. PM Kevin Rudd and Foreign Minister Stephen Smith held talks with the Malaysian Prime Minister on 6 July in an effort to improve co-operation on people smuggling. Meanwhile, Attorney-General Robert McClelland told the Australian his department was actively advising countries in the region on how to toughen their laws which were hindering the ability of police to crack down on people-smugglers. (*The Australian, 7 July*)

People smuggling top of PM's agenda on overseas trip

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd flew to Malaysia today to discuss people smuggling with his Malaysian counterpart Najib Razak. Rudd is en route to Europe where he will attend the G8 meeting of major economies in Italy. Both Rudd and Foreign Minister Stephen Smith will discuss joint efforts to combat people smuggling in meetings in Malaysia. (*ABC News online, 6 July*)

Law too severe for Indonesian people-smugglers

Australia's strong stance on people-smugglers has the potential to strain relations between Indonesia and Australia, Jakarta's ambassador to Australia said. Primo Alui Joelianto said some of the

Indonesians convicted of people-smuggling offences were duped and had no clue what they were doing. The ambassador said the growing number of Indonesians in jail or charged was not yet a political issue in Indonesia and would not discourage Indonesian co-operation in cracking down on people smuggling. But he warned that might shift if the numbers continued to grow. *(The Australian, 4 July)*

Casino won't house asylum seekers on Christmas Island – Evans

The Federal Government has rejected reports it has struck a deal to use a casino on Christmas Island to house asylum seekers. Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans told ABC Lateline on 3 July that talks had been held with the casino but no deal had been made. *(ABC News online, 4 July)*

Townsville becomes Refugee Welcome Zone

RCOA's National Policy Director Tamara Domicelj was in Townsville this week to thank Mayor Les Tyrell for declaring the city a refugee welcome zone. Tamara's strong passion for working with refugees and her own rich cultural heritage was acknowledged in the article. *(Townsville Bulletin, 4 July)*

Refugee rights 'vulnerable to politics'

A former asylum seeker who was rescued by the Norwegian ship Tampa in 2001 and is now an Australian citizen, says the human rights of refugees remain vulnerable to politics. Mustafa Najib, 30, who became an Australian citizen last year, fled Afghanistan in 2001 after he and his family had suffered two decades of persecution. Mr Najib told the gathering at the Canberra public hearings of the National Human Rights Consultation on Wednesday that in seven years until 2008 he was unable to visit his family overseas because this would put him at risk of his temporary protection visa being revoked. *(Sydney Morning Herald online, 2 July)*

'I was moved to help', says alleged smuggler

An alleged people smuggling kingpin in prison in Indonesia tried to help asylum seekers reach Australia because he felt sorry for them. All Cobra, 30, has been interviewed by the Herald Sun newspaper. Cobra was seized in May this year in a joint operation between Indonesian and Australian police. He claims he was only involved in two people smuggling operations. *(Herald Sun, 2 July)*

WA court jails Indonesian people smugglers

A group of six Indonesian people smugglers has been sentenced to at least three years in jail. The men crewed two boats from Indonesia to Australia in December 2008. Immigration Minister Chris Evans has backed the jail time. *(ABC News Online, 2 July)*

Asylum via false papers on increase

There has been a spike in the number of people lodging asylum claims on the basis of forged or missing documents. DIAC figures show a 30 per cent increase in people presenting at Australian ports with fake or missing documents. *(The Australian, 2 July)*

Malaysia not 'soft' on asylum seekers

Malaysia is as serious as Australia in wanting to protect its borders, the country's high commissioner Salman Ahmad said. While 'push factors' have increased the number of asylum-seekers in the region, co-operation between Malaysia, Indonesia and Australia was needed to tackle the problem. *(The Australian, 2 July)*

Christmas Island casino needs to be handed back to community, says island chief

The Federal Government needs to return the mothballed Christmas Island casino to the community to operate as a tourist resort, the island's Shire President and workers' union boss Gordon Thomson said. The Age revealed on 1 July that the Federal Government was in negotiations to use the casino resort to house an influx of immigration officials. But Mr Thomson has accused the casino's owner, Sydney entrepreneur David Kwon, of holding the lease for more than a decade while the luxury resort fell into disrepair. "We would not expect the Government to spend taxpayers' money to make this property habitable, particularly when we aware there are wind-up proceedings in place." *(The Age, 2 July)*

Missionaries teaching Christmas Island detainees

Evangelical missionary volunteers have been contracted to teach activities such as English classes to Christmas Island detainees. Three volunteers from Youth With A Mission are on the island, having been

brought in by G4S Australia, the company that until June 30 was contracted by DIAC to run the detention centre. This week the company Serco signed a \$370 million contract with the Government to run the centre. No concerns were registered with G4S or the Department over services provided by Youth With A Mission who have claimed they will not proselytise or advocate Christian values. The issue is among a number to be investigated by the Human Rights Commission during its next inspection. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 2 July*)

Care, not panic, about refugees: Sydney Morning Herald editorial

With an increasing number of asylum-seekers heading for Australia and the possible appointment of Tony Abbott as Opposition immigration spokesman, “let’s hope this does not descend into more dog-whistle politics. The Howard Government’s post-Tampa approach was costly, ineffective and inhumane. The Christmas Island centre for processing may be filling up, but is a long way from being overwhelmed. The asylum seekers who come into our jurisdiction have a right, under treaty, to have their cases assessed properly and to be treated humanely.” (*Sydney Morning Herald, 1 July*)

Detention centres will stay privately run

A private company has been handed a \$370 million contract to run seven immigration detention centres, despite the Federal Government promising in 2007 to end the practice. The Australian division of the multinational Serco Group begins the takeover of the centres from former contract holder G4S from 1 July. Acting national director of A Just Australia, Xhi Yan, said Serco’s track record – which includes running some of Australia’s prisons and providing catering and cleaning services for Australian Defence forces was “concerning”. (*Canberra Times, 1 July*)

Woolcott in discussions with Indonesia

Canberra’s new ambassador for people-smuggling, Peter Woolcott, will fly to Jakarta on 5 July to discuss ways of combatting a spike in asylum-seekers. (*The Australian, 1 July*)

Abbott ‘set to be promoted to Opposition Immigration spokesman’

In an attempt to restore Malcolm Turnbull’s fortunes following the OzCar affair, there was strong speculation Tony Abbott would pick up the Immigration portfolio in a front-bench reshuffle. Senior Liberals rallied around Turnbull yesterday (June 29) in the wake of three devastating opinion polls putting Turnbull’s personal standing at a new low. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 30 June*)

Tougher screening for Tamils over fears of an influx of ex-Tigers fleeing Sri Lanka

The latest boatload of asylum seekers – believed to be Tamils – will be subjected to extra rigorous security screening amid fears that ex-Tamil fighters will try to slip in as refugees. The Australian newspaper reported that the recent defeat of the Tamil Tigers in their stronghold in north-eastern Sri Lanka has led to concerns Tamil fighters might flee the island due to fears of government retribution. (*The Australian, 30 June*)

Big influx of refugees predicted

A surge in asylum seekers heading for Australia from Indonesia has been predicted by Indonesian authorities. As many as 10,000 asylum seekers are waiting in Malaysia to make the journey to Australia via Indonesia. Around 1500 asylum seekers have already arrived in Indonesia this year and registered for refugee status, with almost all having come by boat from Malaysia. The same number again are believed to have arrived but not registered. Malaysia is used as a staging point for asylum seekers because they can easily obtain tourist visas. (*The Age, 30 June*)

95 children on Christmas Island

Crikey.com has confirmed there are 95 minors (under 18 years of age) currently in community detention on Christmas Island. DIAC told Crikey that most of the minors are Afghan and are in community detention which consists of community-based housing with access to school, sporting facilities and regular excursions. According to a DIAC spokesperson, the processing of minors’ cases is up to around April arrivals. The length of time it takes to process a protection visa depends on each case but, once a visa is granted, the minor is placed in foster care and then the child has the option of lodging an application to sponsor their family. (*Crikey.com, 29 June*)

Boosting foreign aid can stem refugee numbers

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute says the key to reducing the numbers of people seeking asylum in Australia is to improve living conditions in poorer countries. A new report has been released recommending that Australia expand its aid program in the Asia-Pacific region and do more to try to slow population growth in countries like East Timor and Papua New Guinea. *(ABC PM program, 29 June)*

Refugee children are having a ball

A free after-school sports program for refugee families is instilling confidence and self-esteem in students who have often faced extremely traumatic experiences before coming to Australia. Soccer, basketball and dancing are the most popular sports which keep the children healthy and helps them socialise. The program is run by the Australian Sports Commission and is offered in 1000 schools in Victoria. The program at St Albans Primary School offered to 30 students is unique in that it links with local clubs so students can continue playing outside school. *(The Age, 29 June)*

Navy intercepts 194 people on asylum boat

A boat carrying 194 asylum seekers was intercepted by the navy off the West Australian coast. The boat was first seen by a surveillance aircraft on Friday June 26 and was intercepted near Christmas Island early on June 28. The asylum seekers will be taken to Christmas Island for medical and security checks. *(ABC News online, 28 June)*

Community liaison officer for Christmas Island

The Australian Government will fund a community liaison officer to reassure Christmas Islanders about the large numbers of asylum seekers now on the island. Locals have voiced concerns to Christmas Island shire president Gordon Thomson about food shortages and other conveniences in relation to the increase in island population. Mr Thomson said it was highly unlikely food shortages and price hikes would occur. *(The Australian, 27 June)*

WA welfare groups feuding

Two peak welfare organisations, WA Council of Social Service (WACOSS) and Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA) are at loggerheads over a \$93,150 government grant to provide services to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in WA. ECCWA head Ramdas Sankaran said providing services to CALD communities by a mainstream organisation was unconscionable and belied WACOSS's status as a peak body. WACOSS has countered by saying the funding is earmarked for WA's African communities via "two established multicultural services". *(Perth Voice, 27 June)*

Liberal MP defies Turnbull over detainees

Four moderate Liberal MPs have broken ranks with their leader and endorsed Labor's plan to abolish detention fees for asylum seekers. "Do we make drug dealers, serial pedophiles, sadistic murderers or multiple rapists pay the costs of their incarceration?", MP Petro Georgiou said. Mr Georgiou told Parliament no advanced society should charge innocent people for the cost of their incarceration. He said charging asylum seekers was part of the process of dehumanising people seeking refugee status. *(The Australian, 24 June)*

49 asylum seekers detained near Ashmore Reef

A boat carrying 49 asylum seekers and four crew has been intercepted near Ashmore Reef. The 53 people were taken to Christmas Island detention centre for identity checks. *(ABC Radio, 24 June)*

Refugees being exploited, says Melbourne legal centre

A report by Footscray Community Legal Centre says many African refugees are falling into debt and being ripped off by companies that inadvertently or deliberately exploit their limited legal knowledge. The centre's African Legal Service found many refugees in the area could not reach basic legal information because of poor English skills and information unavailable in their native languages. *(Brimbank Leader, 23 June)*

Bhutanese refugees get a taste for Aussie culture in Albury

To celebrate refugee Week, around 100 Bhutanese refugees, Albury-Wodonga's newest residents, were invited to an Aussie Rules game between the Tigers and Wodonga Raiders. Bhutanese refugees began settling in the the region late last year, with new families still arriving. *(Weekly Times Now, 17 June)*

Time to end fearful treatment of refugees: editorial in The Age

Australians have been asked to take pride in themselves as compassionate and humanitarian as 10 years of fearful and unwelcoming immigration policies under the Howard Government, are reformed under Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. The Rudd Government has significantly reformed, although not abolished, mandatory detention and there has been a small increase in Australia's humanitarian intake to 13,750. Now only the US has a larger humanitarian program. The Government has also abolished temporary protection visas and ended the 45-day work rule for asylum seekers. (*The Age*, 17 June)

Australia remains committed to protecting refugees

Immigration Minister Chris Evans said Australia's humanitarian program would continue to focus on the resettlement of people forced into refugee camps. Speaking at the opening of a photography exhibition featuring images taken by young Sudanese refugees, Senator Evans said: "In the past 10 years, about 20,000 Sudan-born people have made Australia their new home. So many have defied the odds and made a success of their lives in Australia in the business, health, academic, arts sectors, to name a few." (*DIAC media release*, 16 June)

Assistance to refugees on Thai-Burma border

Australia will provide \$1 million to improve the conditions of refugees living in camps on the Thai-Burma border, the Foreign Affairs and Trade Department has announced. Assistance will be provided through the Thai Burma Border Consortium which provides food and shelter to the displaced people living in camps. (*Minister for Foreign Affairs media release*, 16 June)

Photo exhibition shows new life through young refugees' eyes

Far to Here, a photo exhibition showing Australia through young refugee eyes, opened in Parliament House Canberra to mark Refugee Week. The exhibition shows images of young Darfur refugees "doing what I think are quintessential Australian things: going to the shops, playing soccer, just everyday things", Kenyan-born photojournalist and exhibition organiser Kabir Dhanji said. "I find that more often than not, whilst you get a lot of harrowing images and ideas being put out about Africa, the communities themselves prefer not to have those things talked about." (*ABC News Online*, 16 June)

Smugglers face court

Three Indonesian men accused of helping smuggle asylum seekers into Australia have been arrested by the Federal Police. According to the AFP, the men were crewing a boat carrying 31 passengers that was intercepted north of Bathurst and Melville Islands on May 11. (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 June)

'Forgotten man' finds home

A Kuwaiti-born Palestinian man who was the last remaining asylum seeker on Manus Island has finally been granted Australian citizenship. Aladdin Sisalem, 30, was held for 18 months on Manus Island, 10 of them on his own. (*The Age*, 12 June)

PM urged to press Sri Lanka on access to refugees

Prominent Australians have written to the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd asking him to put pressure on the Sri Lankan Government to give aid workers and journalists unrestricted access to refugee camps. Human rights groups have expressed concern about the camps, where 280,000 Tamils are being forcibly interned until the Government has found any suspected former members of the Tamil Tigers. (*The Age*, 11 June)

Refugee campaigner receives Order of Australia

A Russian refugee who arrived in Australia almost 60 years ago has been honoured with a Queen's Birthday Medal of the Order of Australia for her volunteer work with the Russian community. Lydia Charlamow has volunteered tirelessly for Russian cultural groups and schools. (*Star News*, 9 June)

Australian nationals still detained in Sri Lankan refugee camp

Three Australian nationals caught in Sri Lanka's overcrowded refugee camps could face a year in detention after the Government in Colombo ruled out any special treatment or early release. The three are believed to be dual Sri Lankan/Australian nationals. (*The Australian*, 6 June)