



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

15 FEBRUARY 2007

Welcome to the first email bulletin for 2007 from the Refugee Council of Australia. We will be issuing regular bulletins throughout the year, to draw attention to some of the latest news from the national refugee sector and to upcoming events. We welcome feedback, ideas or information worth sharing. Please contact us at info@refugeecouncil.org.au.

Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia

NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

Recent public statements from the Refugee Council

In the past two months, the Refugee Council has issued four public statements in defence of the refugee resettlement program:

- A response to Pauline Hanson's public attack on new arrivals from Africa (December 7).
- An appeal to Tamworth Regional Council to reverse its original decision not to participate in a refugee resettlement partnership (December 15).
- A statement welcoming Tamworth Council's change of heart (January 17).
- A response to press speculation that the Australian Government may decrease the intake of refugees from Africa (February 5).

These and other Refugee Council statements can be viewed at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au>

Responses to Australian Government discussion papers

In November, the Refugee Council prepared submissions in response to two Australian Government discussion papers:

- "Australian Citizenship: Much More than a Ceremony", which canvassed changes to national citizenship legislation.
- "Measures to Improve Settlement Outcomes for Humanitarian Entrants", which canvassed possible changes to the Special Humanitarian Program.

The Refugee Council brought together the concerns of the national refugee sector on both matters, putting forward positive alternatives. Both submissions can be viewed on the Refugee Council website: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au>

Refugee and Humanitarian Intake 2007-08

Each year, the Refugee Council compiles a detailed submission of the views of the community sector on refugee resettlement issues, as part of the Australian Government's consultation process for the following fiscal year's Refugee and Humanitarian Intake.

The Refugee Council has just completed a national consultation process, conducting more than 30 forums and involving more than 170 organisations from every state and territory. This process canvassed views on all aspects of the refugee resettlement process, from the initial application process to settlement issues experienced several years after arrival. The 70-page submission includes 96 recommendations covering the regional composition of the intake, visa processing, issues for people seeking asylum, orientation for resettling refugees and such settlement issues as housing, health, language learning and employment.

The submission will be available for public release shortly.

Refugee Week 2007 – June 17 to 24

To encourage a more effective national celebration of Refugee Week the Refugee Council of Australia is recommending that organisations celebrate Refugee Week 2007 from Sunday 17 June

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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

to Saturday 23 June. This will enable the national celebration of Refugee Week to coincide with the celebration of World Refugee Day (Wednesday 20 June). The national theme for Refugee Week will be "The Voices of Young Refugees". This theme is a local adaptation of UNHCR's international focus for World Refugee Day on the unheard voices of refugee children.

The Council is keen to distribute information about local Refugee Week events nationally through our website and e-bulletins. If you have an event that you would like to publicise, please email us the details to info@refugeecouncil.org.au.

COMING EVENTS

24 FEBRUARY - Melbourne

A fundraising film evening in support of the Naga Ethnic Group from Burma, Ashburton Baptist Church. The Naga of Burma are the only ethnic group in Burma not recognised as refugees by any governments or NGOs. The NagaRa Trust aims to offer scholarship support and hostel accommodation for those Naga refugees who are currently working as servants in Kohima. Join us for a screening of the documentary "**Forbidden Burma: Return of the Chief**" by award-winning French film maker, Patrick Bernard. Saturday 24 February, 7pm, \$20, Ashburton Baptist Church. For further information please contact Visier Sanyu on 0425 852 781.

26 FEBRUARY - Melbourne

Public lecture: "The Insidious Erosion of the Prohibition of Torture", Monash University Law Chambers. Sir Nigel Rodley, Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, will present a public lecture on Monday 26 February at the Monash University Law Chambers from 6.15pm to 7.30pm on the topic "**The Insidious Erosion of the Prohibition of Torture**". RSVP to castan.centre@law.monash.edu.au or (03) 9905 3327. Details: <http://www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre/events/rodley-lecture.pdf>.

27 FEBRUARY - Melbourne

Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria, Human Rights Conference, Melbourne Arts Centre. Speakers: Sir Nigel Rodley, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture from 1993 to 2001, Dr Sima Samar, the first woman in the post-Taliban Afghanistan government and the UN's special envoy to Darfur, and Major Michael Mori, US military lawyer and defence counsel for Guantanamo Bay detainee David Hicks. For information, contact Ian Row, Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria, on (03) 9281 7138. Details: <http://www.eoc.vic.gov.au/conference/>

8 MARCH - Melbourne

Public lecture: "Human Rights Challenges in Trying Grave Crimes", Monash University Law Chambers. The Castan Centre for Human Rights Law invites you to a public lecture to be presented by Howard Morrison QC, an international criminal law expert, on Thursday 8 March at Monash University Law Chambers between 6 and 7 pm, light refreshments will be provided following the lecture. Mr Morrison will speak on the topic "**Human Rights Challenges in Trying Grave Crimes**". RSVP required to castan.centre@law.monash.edu.au or phone (03) 9905 3327. Details <http://www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre/events/morrison-flier.pdf>.

21 MARCH

Harmony Day (Australia) and International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Beginning of Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination (March 21-27)

31 MARCH & 1 APRIL - Canberra

"A Weekend of Ideas: A Fair Go for Refugees", Manning Clark House, Forrest. An opportunity to explore and debate the issues of Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, with more than 40 of Australia's most prominent thinkers on asylum issues. Speakers include Dr Eva Sallis, Julian Burnside QC, Prof Frank Brennan SJ, Peter Hughes, Prof William Maley, Ronald Merkel QC, Marion Le, Prof Aamer Sultan, Dr Mary Crock, David Marr, Phil Glendenning and Arnold Zable. Entry \$20 per day. Enquiries (02) 6295-9433. Details: http://www.manningclark.org.au/events/diary_events.html#woi07

11-13 APRIL - Melbourne

African Resettlement in Australia 2007 Conference, University of Melbourne

The African Think Tank Inc is coordinating the inaugural **African Resettlement in Australia** Conference, to be held at the University of Melbourne from 11 to 13 April 2007. The Conference theme, "Walking together at same speed: A forum to dialogue... a cultural journey", reflects the belief that both African refugees and Australian society need to come together in the spirit of learning and mutual understanding. A series of keynote addresses, case studies and presentations will reflect the theme and topic areas: settlement needs, community building, acclimatisation, gender roles, health and wellbeing, employment, youth, education, African family values and cultural awareness.

Details: <http://www.union.unimelb.edu.au/conferences/att/>

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

HREOC submission raises concerns about new Migration Amendment Bill

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has recommended against the passing of the Migration Amendment (Review Provisions) Bill 2006. In its submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, HREOC says the Bill would create an unfair process which is likely to breach applicants' right to a fair hearing. The Bill aims to create a mechanism of review that is 'fair, just, economical, informal and quick', by giving the Refugee Review Tribunal the option of putting information to applicants orally, instead of in writing. However, HREOC says the changes are more likely to result in inconsistency, confusion and unfairness in the review process, increasing the risk of refoulement.

See http://www.humanrights.gov.au/legal/submissions/migration_amendment_bill_06.htm

HREOC report on Mainland Immigration Detention Facilities

The Human Rights Commissioner, Graeme Innes, has released HREOC's 'Summary of Observations following the Inspection of Mainland Immigration Detention Facilities'. The report covers immigration detention centre visits conducted in October and November 2006. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship and the private detention service providers (GSL, IHMS and PSS) were invited to respond to an advance copy of the report. A copy of the report can be viewed at:

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/asylum_seekers/inspection_of_mainland_idf.html

New schools kit to combat racism

HREOC has launched a new kit to help combat racism and promote a culture of respect and equality among high school students. The kit can be viewed at:

<http://www.humanrights.gov.au/education/voices/index.html>

Information sheets on humanitarian youth arrivals to Victoria

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) in Melbourne has developed a new information sheet that provides a general statistical overview of the primary source countries and settlement trends for refugee young people currently residing in Victoria.

Download from: <http://www.cmyi.net.au/ResourcesfortheSector#InfoSheets>

REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

A busy person's digest of some of the recent Australian media coverage of refugee issues:

(Inclusion in this summary does not imply that RCOA agrees with the article's content or vouches for its accuracy)

Nauru detention centre costs \$2 million per month

The Federal Government is spending \$24 million dollars per year to operate the immigration detention centre on Nauru and \$3 million to maintain the empty detention centre on Manus Island in PNG. The Nauru facility is currently home to eight detainees. (*ABC, 14 February*)

Bill for Christmas Island detention centre now \$396 million

The cost of the Christmas Island Detention Centre has blown out by more than 40 per cent to \$396 million since its first estimate. The cost now represents almost \$1 million for every detainee it will hold when it becomes fully operational this year. (*The Sydney Morning Herald, 14 February*)

Community detention to stop

Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews has promised to end the practice of placing aggressive asylum seekers or those with serious mental health conditions under guard in motels or apartments. He said that detainees who had problems with violence must not be given any special privileges and would be returned to detention centres. (*Border Mail, Albury, 14 February*)

Australia to take 200 Hmong refugees

Australia plans to give refuge to 200 of about 8,000 Lao ethnic Hmong refugees currently living in Thailand. The Hmong fought alongside America in the Vietnam War. Human rights groups accuse Laos of waging a 30-year campaign of vengeance against Hmong guerrillas still hiding out in the forests. Laos denies the accusations. (*ABC, 14 February*)

Department facing \$60m blow-out

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship is facing a \$60 million blow-out this year following extensive changes brought in after the Cornelia Rau and Vivian Alvarez Solon scandals. The multi-million dollar blow out includes increases in units handling the politically sensitive temporary skilled migration program, as well as computer system costs and training packages. In addition, it includes part of the multimillion-dollar settlement awarded to Ms Alvarez Solon. (*The Age, 13 February*)

Australia to reduce intake of Sudanese refugees

The Sunday Herald Sun reports that Australia is set to drastically reduce its Sudanese refugee program. "With growing community concern about the behaviours of the refugees, Federal Cabinet will soon consider a proposal from Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews to reduce the intake from the Horn of Africa nations," the newspaper reported. The refugee intake would shift focus to settling refugees from the Asia Pacific region. (*The Sunday Herald Sun, 4 February*)

Australia urged to increase intake of refugees from Iraq

UNHCR has urged Australia to look 'favourably' on the large numbers of Iraqis seeking protection in Asia. In 2005-06, 24,000 Iraqis applied for humanitarian visas with just over 2000 applications successful. UNHCR estimates 1.6 million Iraqis are now internally displaced and a similar number have fled the country. (*The Age, 3 February*)

New trimaran to patrol Australian waters

Triton, a 98-metre trimaran, has begun patrolling Australia's northern waters in search of illegal fisherman, illegal immigrants and drug smugglers. The boat's capacity to operate as a temporary high seas detention centre has earned it the label "Floating Prison", a label rejected by Federal Customs Minister Chris Ellison. "What it will do is hold for a very short period of time those people suspected of illegally fishing," he said. (*Burnie Advocate, 3 February*)

Plans for new detention centre scrapped

The Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews has scrapped plans to build a new 800-bed immigration detention centre in Sydney. Instead the Government will redevelop the existing centre at Villawood. A 2005 investigation found that the centre's stormwater and sewer drainage, medical, recreational and educational facilities were either inadequate or at capacity. (*The Australian, 1 February*)

Nauru detainee freed after five years

After five years in offshore detention on Nauru, Iraqi refugee Mohammad Faisal has been given residency. This followed ASIO's decision to review its earlier ruling that Mr Faisal posed a security threat. The other long-term detainee on Nauru, Mohammad Sagar, will shortly leave the island for resettlement in a Scandinavian country. (*The Age, 1 February*)

Minister orders investigation after refugee's rape conviction

The Immigration Minister has ordered an investigation into the circumstances of the entry into Australia of a Sudanese refugee who committed a series of serious rapes in Melbourne within five weeks of arriving in the country. Hakeem Hakeem, 21, was sentenced to 24 years jail for the rape of two teenage girls and a 63 year old woman and additional charges of intentionally causing serious injury, aggravated burglary, false imprisonment and armed robbery. (*The Australian, 1 February*)