



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

28 MARCH 2007

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

NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

Taking Australian concerns to the international stage

For the past 20 years, the Refugee Council of Australia has been an active participant in the main annual gatherings of the UNHCR in Geneva. In 2007, RCOA representatives will attend UNHCR's Executive Committee, its annual NGO consultations and the annual tripartite consultations on refugee resettlement.

Our goal this year is to be more effective than ever in reflecting the concerns of the Australian community sector in our advocacy at these events. To this end, we have begun planning with some of the agencies which have taken an active role in UNHCR gatherings in previous years, to discuss options for what issues could be raised and how this could best be done. We are keen to hear from groups and individuals who would like to discuss issues they believed should be raised by the Australian NGO movement through UNHCR – and keen to talk to people about the value of international advocacy.

The advocacy work of Australian NGOs is highly regarded in Geneva because a number of groups have taken the UNHCR consultation process seriously, using it to raise issues of global concern. The Centre for Refugee Research of the University of NSW achieved a major advocacy victory at the 2006 UNHCR Executive Committee gathering last October, getting the protection of women and girls at risk pushed to the top of the agenda. This has resulted in US\$35 million in projects over the coming two years to address the protection needs of women and girls in protracted refugee situations.

Twenty-two Australian NGO representatives attended the 2006 Executive Committee gathering and the NGO consultations which preceded it. They used the opportunity to raise many issues of concern, drawing attention to the human realities of Australian policy on asylum seekers, pushing for more effective global action to address the needs of people in protracted refugee situations and advocating for greater international commitment to refugee resettlement. For the first time, four key Australian NGOs produced a joint report of the proceedings – RCOA, the Centre for Refugee Research, National Council of Churches and Austcare. This report is on the Centre for Refugee Research website, with a link on the front page of RCOA's website – www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Comments about issues RCOA should be raising through UNHCR forums this year should be directed to Paul Power or Carolina Gottardo on (02) 9211-9333 or policy@refugeecouncil.org.au

RCOA submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security

In February, the Refugee Council prepared a submission to the review of the Australian Government's powers to proscribe organisations as terrorist organisations. The submission was presented to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security and responded mainly to the impact of the proscription powers on refugees and asylum seekers. We formulated some recommendations including additional research to establish the extent to which refugees and asylum seekers have already been affected by the proscription powers.

Next week, RCOA's president John Gibson will appear before the committee conducting the Inquiry into the Terrorist Organisation Listing Provisions of the Criminal Code Act 1995. He will be highlighting the growing trend of security checks taking a longer than usual amount of time because of an individuals suspected links to organisations such as the PKK and LTTE.

The submission can be viewed on the Refugee Council website: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au>

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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

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 28 MARCH – Melbourne

Flight Rights and Refuge, Foundation House, 6 Gardiner St, Brunswick, 5.30pm to 6.30pm
Part of the monthly seminar series of La Trobe University's Refugee Health Research Centre, the topic is "Refugee Processing and Mental Health: How far does the duty of care extend?" Key speaker is Tania Penovic, lecturer, School of Law, Monash University. Details: rhr@latrobe.edu.au or (03) 9479 5874

Wednesday, 28 MARCH – Canberra

Dinner and evening with Jack Smit of Project SafeCom, Vivaldi's, Australian National University, 6.30pm
Project SafeCom's founder and co-ordinator Jack Smit is hosting an evening on sharing ideas, suggestions and thoughts for asylum seekers, human rights and issues for concern for social justice. Details: Marion Le's office (02) 6258 1419 or Jane Keogh (02) 6249 8613.

Thursday, 29 MARCH – Melbourne

'My Dress Image Choice', Kingston City Hall, Moorabbin
"My Dress Image Choice" is an open space for women only to promote relationships and further understanding between Muslim and Non-Muslim women. The event, hosted by the Migrant Information Centre of Eastern Melbourne, South Central Regent Migrant Resource Centre and the City of Kingston includes an opportunity for dialogue, a fashion parade and lunch. Bookings essential.
Details: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/fashion%20parade%20Kingston.ppt>

Friday, 30 MARCH - Melbourne

Conference on Compensation, Torts and Immigration Detention from 9am to 3.30pm in the Monash University Law Chambers, 472 Bourke Street, Melbourne. Program and registration details: <http://www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre/events/2007/comp-torts-immigration-detention-conf.html>.

30 MARCH – 15 APRIL – Canberra

Exhibition by artist Kate Durham, North Building, Civic Square, Canberra
Presented by Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre in cooperation with Manning Clark House, the exhibition features paintings depicting the plight of the 353 asylum seekers who drowned when 'SIEV X' sank in the Indian Ocean in 2001. Other paintings tell stories of asylum seekers in detention in Nauru, Christmas Island, Port Hedland, Woomera, Baxter and Villawood. Kate Durham opens the exhibition at 6pm on Friday 30 March. All welcome. Details: Dick Aitkin (02) 6251 6599 or jaitken@iimetro.com.au

Saturday, MARCH 31 – Adelaide

Middle Eastern Cultural Festival
The Middle Eastern Communities Council of SA is hosting a multicultural festival at the Adelaide Festival Centre Terrace, King William St, Adelaide. For more information, click [here](#).

Saturday, MARCH 31 - Coffs Harbour (NSW)

Sanctuary Benefit Dinner with Kerry O'Brien
Fundraising event to support the Sanctuary Refugee Foundation, with guest speaker Kerry O'Brien, presenter of ABC-TV's 7.30 Report. For more information, click [here](#).

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 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

Monday, 2 APRIL - Perth

Workshop on "Enabling Culturally Diverse Groups To Be More Effective", ASeTTS.
A workshop for service providers who work with culturally diverse individual and groups, to increase effectiveness in identifying and discussing cultural similarities and differences in positive ways.

Facilitator is Christine Hogan, Adjunct Associate Professor, Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University. Details: ASeTTS (08) 9227 2700.

Tuesday, 3 April – Sydney

Seminar on Human Trafficking and Slavery in Australia ‘What Community Organisations Need To Know’ Non-government and government presenters will address basic concepts of trafficking and slavery, how to identify and refer victims, victim support, the role of government agencies and the work of the Anti-Slavery Project and its partners. 9am–12pm, Jubilee Room, Parramatta Town Hall, 182 Church Street Mall. RSVP by 30 March (02) 9635 8022 or women@speakout.org.au

Wednesday, APRIL 4 - Melbourne

Seminar - The War in Darfur and Prospects for Peace

Researcher Dr Alex de Waal will give a one-hour presentation on the war in Darfur, the failed peace talks and the need for a new concept of peace support. 5.30pm arrival/drinks for a 6pm start. Melbourne Law School, 185 Pelham St, Carlton. Supported by Oxfam Australia and University of Melbourne. RSVP by 2 April to (03) 9289-9313. For more information, click [here](#).

11-13 APRIL – Melbourne

African Resettlement in Australia 2007 Conference, University of Melbourne

The African Think Tank Inc will coordinate the inaugural **African Resettlement in Australia** Conference, at the University of Melbourne from 11 to 13 April. The conference, "Walking together at same speed: A forum to dialogue... a cultural journey", will explore topics such as 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/>

17-23 JUNE – Refugee Week

In 2007, Refugee Week will be celebrated from Sunday 17 June to Saturday 23 June, to coincide with World Refugee Day (Wednesday 20 June). The national theme for Refugee Week is "The Voices of Young Refugees". If you have an event that you would like to publicise, please email the details to info@refugeecouncil.org.au.

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

State of the World's Children 2007 report released

UNICEF's flagship annual publication, State of the World's Children 2007, focuses on the dramatically positive effect that elimination of gender discrimination and empowerment of women has on the well-being of children. The report shows that gender equality produces a "double dividend": it benefits women, their children and leads to the healthy development of families, communities and nations. The report also shows that girls and women are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, subject to physical and sexual violence and, in most places, still earn less than men for equal work.

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)

Australia and Malaysia sign agreement to target people smuggling

Australia and Malaysia have signed an immigration memorandum to crack down on people-smuggling networks. The partnership will lead to new information exchanges on matters such as immigration document fraud. (*Australian Financial Review*, 23 March)

Ombudsman recommends permanent visa for ill former detainee

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has recommended a permanent visa for a mentally ill man whose identity the Immigration Department could not confirm after seven years in detention. The 32-year-old man claims to be from Indian Kashmir was released from detention in 2005, suffering major depression and psychosis. Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews rejected the Ombudsman's recommendation, saying the man's Removal Pending Bridging Visa enabled him to live in the community and have full access to a range of services. (*The Age*, 23 March)

Empty Port Hedland detention centre to meet housing shortage

After three years of community pressure, the Federal Government will lease Port Hedland Immigration Detention Centre to help meet the town's dire shortage of affordable housing. The detention centre was mothballed in 2004. (*North West Telegraph, 21 March*)

Nauruan Government sets deadline for removal of Sri Lankan asylum seekers

The Nauruan Government has demanded that the latest influx of Sri Lankan asylum seekers be processed within six months. In the past, asylum seekers have spent more than 3½ years on Nauru and more recently Burmese asylum seekers have spent more than six months without being processed. The Australian Government is seeking a third country to take the 83 asylum seekers to dissuade further groups from travelling to Australia by boat. (*The Age, 20 March*)

Sri Lankan asylum seekers sent to Nauru

Eighty-two Sri Lankan asylum seekers have been sent from Christmas Island to Nauru to have their asylum claims processed, after the Australian Government abandoned plans to return them to Indonesia. "The transfer of these illegal arrivals will send a strong message to those considering any attempt to enter Australia illegally," Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews said. One asylum seeker, transferred to Perth for medical treatment, will have his asylum claim dealt with separately. (*The Australian, 16 March*)

Liberal MP attacks proposed citizenship test

Federal Liberal backbencher Petro Georgiou has attacked his government's proposed citizenship test, saying it would bring "a fundamental political and social regression that will erect unreasonable and unnecessary barriers to citizenship". Mr Georgiou said hundreds of thousands of native-born and immigrant Australians would not be able to pass the test. (*ABC, 15 March*)

Labor refugee lobby pushes case of people displaced by climate change

The "Labor for Refugees" group is pushing for the introduction of legislation to address the growing need to protect people displaced by climate change in the Pacific. Currently, Australia has no analysis on the impact of climate on people's movements in the Pacific, the group says. Possible changes to the ALP's refugee policy will be debated at the party's national conference in April. (*The Age, 14 March*)

Asylum seekers in detention to face compulsory finger-scanning

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship is introducing finger-scanning technology to join facial images already gathered from migrants, to ensure anyone refused entry to Australia can be picked up should they re-enter under a different identity. Asylum seekers in detention will have no right to refuse to be scanned. (*Australian Financial Review, 12 March*)

NSW MP proposes moratorium on Muslim immigration

NSW Christian Democratic Party MP, Rev Fred Nile, has called for a 10-year moratorium on Muslim immigration to study of the effects of more than 300,000 migrants who are already in Australia. Campaigning to retain his seat in the NSW Upper House, Mr Nile also proposed that Australia welcome thousands of persecuted Christians at risk in the Middle East. (*The Australian, 12 March*)

Dorrigo welcomes second Sudanese family

The NSW North Coast town of Dorrigo has welcomed its second Sudanese refugee family. Proposed by the Sanctuary Refugee Foundation in Coffs Harbour, the three new arrivals were welcomed by a local refugee support group which arranged housing, furniture, food and groceries with the backing and financial support of the local community. (*Don Dorrigo Gazette, 7 March*)