



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

May 15, 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

\$209 million for settlement services announced in Federal Budget

The Australian Government has announced \$209 million in additional funding over the next four years for measures to improve support for newly-arrived refugees. These measures are part of a \$359 million package of additional funding for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) announced in the 2007-08 Federal Budget.

The Refugee Council's summary of refugee-related spending in the 2007-08 Federal Budget can be viewed at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html>

Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews' budget announcements are at www.minister.immi.gov.au

Labor supports abolition of TPVs and changes to offshore processing

On April 27, the Australian Labor Party reviewed its refugee policy at its National Conference in Sydney, marking a number of changes. The four main decisions to come out of the conference were:

1. Support for an end to the system of Temporary Protection Visas, with the ALP now supporting a policy of granting permanent protection to anyone determined to be a refugee. See the speech of Shadow Immigration Minister, Tony Burke, to the ALP conference:
<http://www.tonyburke.com.au/file.php?file=/news/ZEUGOAWBA/index.html>
2. A commitment to reviewing the 45 day rule which results in asylum seekers on Bridging Visas being left without the right to work. The ALP is seeking to develop a policy framework which gives the right to work to asylum seekers except in cases where the protection claim is frivolous or vexatious.
3. The defeat of an amendment which sought to end the ALP's support for the excision of Christmas Island, Ashmore Reef and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands from the migration zone. The conference reaffirmed the party's support for the excision of these islands. Under Labor's policy, asylum seekers who arrive by boat on these islands would have their claims processed on Christmas Island rather than offshore.
4. Support for a discussion paper which proposes that Australia establish an international coalition to lobby for change in UN conventions to recognise the protection needs of people displaced by climate change. <http://www.anthonyalbanese.com.au/file.php?file=/news/940/index.html>

New directions in offshore processing policy cause concern

The Australian Government's policy of offshore processing has taken an unexpected turn in recent weeks with the announcement of a possible swap of asylum seekers with the United States. Speculation about such a swap four years ago had been dismissed by the then Immigration Minister. The Refugee Council has maintained its view that Australia should respect the letter and spirit of the 1951 Refugee Convention, offering the people who make a protection claim of Australia the opportunity to have that claim heard on Australian soil, with full access to options for administrative and judicial review. Those found to have a need for protection should be offered immediate and permanent protection. We applaud international cooperation between governments where the protection of people at risk is the overriding objective and where decisions are based on humanitarian need. This new Australia-US cooperation agreement does not meet these criteria.

Much has been written about this issue in recent weeks. You may be interested to read:

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

- The Refugee Council's media release:
http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2007/070418_Asylum%20swap%20with%20US.pdf
- An article by researcher and author David Corlett:
<http://www.theage.com.au/text/articles/2007/04/19/1176697001723.html>
- The views of Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews:
http://blogs.theaustralian.news.com.au/yoursay/index.php/theaustralian/comments/third_country_policy_is_sound/desc/
- A response from Shadow Immigration Minister Tony Burke:
<http://www.tonyburke.com.au/file.php?file=/news/EEFAEYSODD/index.html>

African community leaders hold ground-breaking conference on settlement issues

More than 300 people from across Australia gathered at the University of Melbourne from April 11 to 13 for the African Resettlement in Australia Conference. Organised by African Think Tank Inc, the conference was the largest of its kind organised by leaders of Australia's African communities. A broad range of settlement issues and community responses were discussed, including employment, education, health, youth issues, cultural identity, capacity building and citizenship. Presentations can be viewed at http://www.union.unimelb.edu.au/conferences/att/att_pdfs.html

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 16 May – Sydney

Forum on a Human Rights Act for Australia

Presented by Amnesty International and the NSW Human Rights and Security Network, the forum, "Harmony Lost: Why Multicultural Australia needs a Human Rights Act in the Era of Anti-Terror", aims to explore the effects of recent governmental responses to security threats and its impact on the degree of racial discrimination in Australia. Speakers include Robin Banks, Dr Danielle Celemarjer, Professor George Williams and Suraya Turk.

Venue: Amnesty International, Level 1, 79 Myrtle Street, Chippendale. Time: 6.30pm to 8pm.

Details: (02) 8396 7670 or nswaia@amnesty.org.au.

Saturday, 19 May – Sydney

African Women Dinner Dance

A fun filled evening with great food and entertainment, this annual event brings together African women from all corners of NSW – and is a good chance for organisations working with refugees to advertise, by setting up a table with resources or fliers. Sponsorship inquiries welcome, too.

Venue: Auburn RSL Club. Cost: \$30 per head

Details: Rosemary Kariuki on 0411 263 230 or kari1ros@police.nsw.gov.au or Beatrice Sesay on 0403 263 230 or sesaybeatrice@hotmail.com.

Thursday, 24 May – Sydney

Release of "A Charter of Rights for Australia"

George Williams discusses his new book, A Charter of Rights for Australia, with SMH columnist and Justinian editor Richard Ackland and Susan Ryan AO, Hawke Government minister, architect of the Sex Discrimination Act and head of New Matilda Human Rights Act Campaign. Former Premier of WA and now Director of the Graduate School of Government at University of Sydney, Geoff Gallop, will moderate.

Venue: Gleebooks, 49 Glebe Point Road, Glebe. Time: 6.30pm for 7pm. Cost: \$10 / \$7 conc.

Bookings: (02) 9660 2333 or <http://www.gleebooks.com.au/default.asp?p=events/welcome4.htm>.

Wednesday, 30 May – Melbourne

Seminar: 'Rights in Resettlement: Refugees Perspectives on Expectations and Realities'

The Refugee Health Research Centre of Latrobe University and Foundation House present this seminar by Dr Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe.

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner Street, Brunswick. Time: 5.30pm to 6.30pm.

Details: (03) 9479 5874 or <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html>.

Refugee Week – June 17-23 – “The Voices of Young Refugees”

For updates on Refugee Week, keep an eye on the Refugee Week page of the Refugee Council website – <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/refugeeweek.html>. This page will be regularly updated. To have Refugee Week events included on the website and in information sent to the media, please email details to info@refugeecouncil.org.au

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Caring for Older Refugees in NSW: A Discussion Paper

NSW Refugee Health Service has published this 60-page discussion paper which profiles older refugees in NSW, gives an overview of the issues they face and explores implications for policy and service delivery. http://www.swsahs.nsw.gov.au/areaser/refugeehs/resources_research.asp

Returning Failed Asylum Seekers From Australia

This discussion paper by David Corlett draws together information and recommendations from a three-year research project on Australia's return policy and practice by a La Trobe University team led by Professor Robert Manne. Issues explored include offshore interception, offshore processing, detention, the situation of community-based asylum seekers, temporary protection and monitoring returnees. <http://www.sisr.net/apo/asylum-corlett.pdf>

When Do I Stop Being a Refugee: The Journey Towards Citizenship and Community Inclusivity

A report of the resettlement conference held in Adelaide in October 2006 by the Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia and the SA Refugee Week Committee, including presentations given by 32 speakers and panellists. Copies of the report available from the Migrant Resource Centre on (08) 8217 9500 or admin@mrcsa.com.au

Working Collaboratively Towards Full Participation: Federation of African Communities Council

A report of the Federation of African Communities Council (FACC) National Conference held in Sydney in November 2005, the first conference by Australia's national peak body for African organisations. Launched on May 3 by Federal Attorney-General Philip Ruddock, the conference report draws together papers on issues of education, employment, law and order, harmony, citizenship and health. For further details, see <http://www.facc.org.au>

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)

Work exemption for new refugees cut to six weeks

Refugees and humanitarian entrants will have to start looking for work six weeks after arriving in Australia or face the temporary loss of welfare benefits. Workplace Participation Minister Sharman Stone said refugees and humanitarian entrants still learning English would be exempt if they were completing 20 hours of English tuition a week. Dr Stone said the move was designed to tackle welfare dependency. The policy has ALP support. (*The Australian*, 14 May)

Audit Office highlights record keeping deficiencies in Immigration Department

An Australian National Audit Office report into preparations for re-tendering the Immigration Department's detention and health services contract has highlighted record keeping deficiencies and inconsistent management report. The report acknowledges an improvement in the Department's overall performance but points to the absence of an approved budget for the re-tendering project, predicting its total cost would exceed the forecast of \$5.9 million. Global Solutions Limited's current four-year contract to run seven detention facilities runs out in August and is estimated to exceed \$400 million. (*The Age*, 9 May)

Australia to end five-year wait for 120 stranded asylum seekers

Australia will accept 120 of around 240 Afghan and Iraqi asylum seekers left stranded in Indonesia for more than five years after being turned back while trying to enter Australia. Most of the remaining

asylum seekers are likely to be resettled in other countries, including Canada and New Zealand. This news was confirmed by Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews while in Indonesia for talks on border protection and immigration. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 2007)

More funds for IOM and UNHCR in Indonesia in new 'people smuggling' strategy

The Australian Government will boost funding to improve conditions for asylum seekers in Indonesia, as part of its strategy to fight people smuggling. Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews said \$7 million would go to the International Organisation for Migration to "improve the level of care and support for illegal arrivals in detention in Indonesia" while \$450,000 would go to UNHCR to employ more staff to conduct refugee status determinations. Australia and Indonesia will also establish a joint immigration task force to increase the detection, investigation and prosecution of people smugglers. (*The Age*, 4 May 2007)

Deporting two Chinese cost \$45,000 in airfares, Government says

The removal of two Chinese nationals from Australia cost about \$45,000 in airfares to provide an onboard exclusion zone around the involuntary deportees, the Immigration Minister's office has revealed. The Immigration Department was required to buy five rows of seats to meet airline demands for an exclusion zone, an arrangement which was "not uncommon". Justifying the cost of the proposed refugee swap with the United States, a spokeswoman for the minister said the cost of swapping 200 refugees was likely to be lower than deporting 200 people involuntarily. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, April 19)

Section of Migration Act ruled invalid by High Court

The High Court has declared invalid a section of the Migration Act which severely inhibited its ability to hear appeals from asylum seekers. The court said the section of the Act was invalid because it sought to deny the competence of the court to exercise its original jurisdiction under Section 75 of the Constitution, which enables the court to issue writs and injunctions against Commonwealth officials. Former Immigration Minister Amanda Vanstone had sought to argue that, as a Bangladeshi student's application was one day late, the High Court could not hear it. (*Canberra Times*, April 19)

Former Woomera detention centre to be returned to Defence Department

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship is completing works to return the former Woomera immigration detention centre to the Department of Defence. The formal handover will occur by late May. Used by Defence for a variety of military purposes from the early 1970s, the camp became an immigration detention centre in 1999. Originally intended to hold 400 people, by April 2000 almost 1500 people were detained at the site. The detention centre closed in 2003. (*Monitor Roxby Downs*, April 19)

Newly arrived refugees need more help to learn English, Opposition says

Refugees are failing to learn English because the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) does not take into account that many are illiterate and have never been in a classroom before, the Federal Opposition says. Immigration spokesman Tony Burke said up to 90 per cent of new arrivals were completing AMEP without achieving "functional" English. He said the program needed to be redesigned to emphasise vocational English and moving new arrivals into work. (*The Age*, April 19)

PM and Victorian Health Minister call for restrictions on new arrivals with HIV

Prime Minister John Howard believes people with HIV should be prevented from entering Australia, except where humanitarian considerations "could temper that in certain cases". Mr Howard was responding to Victorian Health Minister Bronwyn Pike, who called for stronger health checks for immigrants after the number of HIV-positive people arriving in Victoria jumped from 16 in 2004 to 70 in 2006. Of the new arrivals to Victoria with HIV, 50 were from interstate, 10 were believed to be Australian-born people diagnosed overseas and five were thought to be New Zealanders, according to the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, April 14)

Refugees priced out of Footscray housing market

Refugee services in Footscray, in Melbourne's west, are advising new arrivals to settle elsewhere, as rental prices increase and the number of apartments grows. John Mirabile of New Hope Foundation said large African families were being forced to move further west, to Wyndham and Hoppers Creek, to find homes which were large enough and more affordable. However, these areas had fewer services

and were away from the communities which could help them to settle in Australia. (*Sunshine-Ardeer-Braybrook Star, April 10*)

Sudanese community leaders support concerns about lack of support for refugees

Sudanese community leaders in Dandenong, in Melbourne's south-east, have backed claims by Dandenong's mayor that Sudanese refugees are getting inadequate support. Gatwech Kulang of Nasir Community Development Agency said the community would not face as many problems if government support were greater. Samuel Kuot of Sudanese Community Association of Australia said Sudanese refugees needed greater help with education and employment, but noted that the government was doing its best. Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews said the government nationally was putting \$50 million into the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy and \$32 million into other practical projects for refugees. "Like the refugee communities that have preceded them, I have every confidence that the Sudanese will integrate successfully and become fully participating members of the Australian community," Mr Andrews said. (*Dandenong Leader, April 9*)