



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

July 13, 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

Combined Refugee Week and World Refugee Day celebrations a great success

Refugee Week 2007, celebrating the 'Voices of Young Refugees', was a great success with more than 130 events taking place all over Australia. For the first time, the national celebration of Refugee Week coincided with World Refugee Day, greatly strengthening the overall impact. The variety of events held was most impressive – community celebrations, cultural events, information seminars, art exhibitions, a film festival and much more. Official launches were held in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Townsville, the Refugee Council being directly involved in the NSW and Victorian launches. In Sydney, the Australian Theatre for Young People kindly donated their space for the NSW launch which highlighted the contributions of young refugees including filmmaker and 2005 Young Australian of the Year, Khao Do. Melbourne's refugee communities, together with supporters, celebrated a day of culture and music at the Emerge Festival to launch Refugee Week in Victoria.

The Refugee Council would like to thank the many agencies and community groups that helped to make Refugee Week such a success. In particular we would like to acknowledge the support of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Multicultural Arts Victoria, AMES Victoria, UNHCR, NSW Community Relations Commission, ACL, the Australian National Maritime Museum and Toby's Estate Coffee and Tea.

Refugee Week will continue to be celebrated each year in the week (Sunday to Saturday) which includes UN World Refugee Day, June 20. Refugee Week 2008 will be held from June 15 to 21.

City of Lismore becomes Australia's 63rd Refugee Welcome Zone

To mark Refugee Week and World Refugee Day, the city of Lismore in northern NSW hosted a range of community events including a special ceremony attended by over 200 people to declare Lismore a Refugee Welcome Zone – Australia's 63rd local council to do so. Congratulations to everyone involved.

Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement

The Refugee Council of Australia joined 115 delegates from 22 countries at UNHCR's Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement in Geneva from June 28 to 30. The gathering brought UNHCR officials together with government and non-government representatives of countries which resettle refugees. Australia's refugee resettlement program (13,000 places each year) remains the world's second largest (USA's annual target is 60,000). Topics for discussion included responses to protracted refugee situations, current global resettlement needs, trends in resettlement and debates within some resettlement countries about the "integration potential" of refugees. A report on the consultation will be forwarded shortly to Refugee Council members.

Senate committee inquires into citizenship test legislation

The Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee is holding an inquiry into the Federal Government's citizenship test legislation. The committee will report back on July 31. Unless the legislation is amended, the new citizenship test is due to take effect on September 17.

The Refugee Council is appearing before the committee on July 17. Our submission can be viewed by clicking [here](#). Other details of the inquiry and submissions can be viewed at:

http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/citizenship_testing/index.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

Global refugee numbers increase for the first time in five years

UNHCR's *Global Trends 2006* report released on June 19 shows that refugee numbers have increased by 14 per cent in the last year to almost 10 million. Attributed to the continued conflict in Iraq, refugee numbers are at their highest since 2002. By the end of 2006, the war in Iraq had forced some 1.5 million Iraqis to seek refuge in other countries, predominantly Syria and Jordan. The main groups of refugees under UNHCR's mandate continue to be: Afghans (2.1 million), Iraqis (1.5 million), Sudanese (686,000), Somalis (460,000), Congolese (400,000) and Burundians (400,000).

The report is available at www.unhcr.org

Refugee Council membership increases 60 per cent

During 2006-07, membership of the Refugee Council of Australia grew by 60 per cent to 224 members – 89 organisational and 135 individual. As an independent national umbrella body with no core funding, a strong membership and donor base is vital to our work. Annual membership fees are just \$55 for individuals (concession rate is \$27.50) and organisational membership is on a sliding scale from \$55 to \$440, depending on annual organisational expenditure. For details on Refugee Council membership, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/general/mship-form.pdf>

Farewell to our National Policy Director, Carolina Gottardo – and welcome to Anna Samson

The Refugee Council would like to thank Carolina Gottardo for her outstanding work in the role of National Policy Director over the past 12 months. Carolina brought invaluable experience in human rights law and asylum policy to the work of the Council and has worked tirelessly to strengthen the Council's relationships with communities and settlement agencies at a national level. Her positive approach and dedication to her work will be greatly missed. We wish Carolina and her husband Chris all the best as they relocate to the UK in preparation for the birth of their first child.

We would also like to extend a warm welcome to Anna Samson who is our new National Policy Director. Most recently, as a Research Associate, Anna has been working with Dr Mary Crock on a range of migration, refugee law and policy projects including issues affecting unaccompanied minors in Australia. Anna has also held positions as a Campaign Officer and Acting National Coordinator of A Just Australia and brings extensive experience in grassroots activism in the fields of public education, women's rights and social justice.

UNHCR Canberra office moving

The Regional Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Canberra will be moving to new premises as of 16 July 2007. The new address is 3 Lyons Place, Lyons ACT 2606, phone is (02) 6260-3411 and fax (02) 6260-3477. Emails will remain the same.

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday, 18 July – Brisbane

ICT Factor Conference

This one-day information and communications technology (ICT) conference offers innovative and cost-effective solutions to your organisation. Held in conjunction with QCOSS, there are special registration rates for community organisations.

Venue: Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre

Details: contact Craig Ford (07) 3405 5140 or craig.ford@iib.qld.gov.au

Monday, 30 July & Tuesday, 31 July - Hobart

2007 FECCA Congress

The theme of the 2007 FECCA Congress is Empowerment and Inclusion: Australian Cultural and Social Diversity within a Global Context. Keynote speakers include Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews, and Shadow Immigration Minister Tony Burke.

Venue: Wrest Point Resort Hobart, 410 Sandy Bay Road, Sandy Bay, Hobart

Details: (02) 6282 5755 or <http://www.fecca.org.au/Congress/Home.cfm>

Thursday, 2 August – Melbourne

Public Lecture: "The Charter of Human Rights and the European Experience".

The Castan Centre for Human Rights Law

Venue: 5.45 pm, Monash University Law Chambers, 472 Bourke Street, Melbourne. RSVP required.

Details: <http://www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre/events/2007/singh-ward-lecture.html>

Monday, 6 & Tuesday, 7 August – Canberra

National Civil Society Dialogue

Venue: 1.00pm, Members' Dining Room, Old Parliament House, Canberra

Details: contact avickerman@actu.asn.au

Wednesday, 8 August – Melbourne

Forum: "Freedom from Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" with Prof Claudio Grossman, Vice-Chair of the UN Committee Against Torture

Details: 6.00 - 7.45pm. Registration required at www.hrlrc.org.au

Venue: DLA Phillips Fox, Level 21, 140 William St. Melbourne

Monday, 13 August – Melbourne

Talk: "Responsibility to Protect" with Gareth Evans AO QC and Justice Chris Maxwell

Venue: 5.45 - 7.45pm, Allens Arthur Robinson, Level 34, 530 Collins Street, Melbourne

Details: Registration required by 6 August. Contact Human Rights Law Resource Centre at hrlrc@vicbar.com.au Cost: \$20/\$10 conc.

Friday, 17 & Sunday, 19 August – Sydney

Special Event: My Dress, My Image, My Choice

A 'women only' event, showcasing a fashion parade, superb cuisine and an opportunity to meet Australian Muslim women. This event has booked out for the past five years. Free event

Details: 17 August, 11.00am – 2.30pm, Randwick Town Hall, 30 Frances Street, Randwick

19 August, 5.00pm – 8.30pm, Castle Grand, Cnr Pennant & Castle Streets, Castle Hill

Bookings essential call: Sharon 0422 346 263

Monday, 3 September & Tuesday, 4 September – Sydney

Conference: Muslim Students in Australian Universities

The Conference will discuss national strategies which universities may use in making provision for Muslim students, discuss issues associated with gender, discrimination and respect for difference and engage the Australian Muslim community in partnership and dialogue about educational aspirations and local involvement.

Venue: Crowne Plaza Hotel, 30 Philip Street, Parramatta

Details: 0422 085 222 or <http://www.uws.edu.au/about/adminorg/corpserv/edc/events>

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Film: Lucky Miles

Directed by Michael James Rowland, *Lucky Miles* opens nationally on July 19. "Seriously playful, this bittersweet Australian comedy kick-starts when an Indonesian fishing boat unloads a group of Iraqi and Cambodian men on to a remote beach in Western Australia. Three men are missed in the round-up. Bound together by a single water bottle, these unlikely travel companions begin an epic but confused journey across the harsh landscape looking for a way out." Details: <http://www.luckymiles.com.au/>

Documentary: We Will Be Remembered For This

Directed by Jessie Taylor, *We Will Be Remembered For This* documents the journey in 2006, of a group of young people to the Baxter Detention Centre. The stories of the people they met behind the razor wire surprised, moved and challenged them. *We Will Be Remembered For This* premiered on June 20, World Refugee Day. Details: <http://wewillberemembered.wordpress.com/>

Book: My Life As A Traitor

Following her arrest and brutal imprisonment for taking part in student demonstrations, Zarah Ghahramani realized there was no future for her in her native Iran and she fled to Australia, where she now lives. By Zarah Ghahramani and Robert Hillman, *My Life As A Traitor* follows Zarah's incredible journey and provides valuable insights into contemporary Iranian society, radical Islamist politics and the growing voice of dissent in Iran. Published by Scribe Publications.

Report: Commonwealth Ombudsman's Inquiry Into Immigration Detention

On July 2, the Commonwealth Ombudsman released final reports relating to the immigration detention of 247 people from 1993 to 2007. Ombudsman, Professor John McMillan, said the reports "highlight deficiencies in DIAC's administration which led to the detention of 226 people, including Australian citizens, permanent residents and lawful visa holders. The reports recommend a range of administrative, systems and policy changes which are aimed at addressing the issues of concern. The reports are available on www.ombudsman.gov.au

Book: Where the Sea Takes Us

Written by 29 year-old Vietnamese academic Kim Huynh, *Where the Sea Takes Us* is an account of his family's struggle to find a normal life for themselves and their journey as refugees, finally finding protection in Australia. Published by Harper Collins.

Report: African Resettlement in Australia Conference 2007

Launched on 12 July, this report details the key findings and recommendations of the African Resettlement in Australia Conference 2007 which was held in Melbourne in April this year. Contact: Grace Croce at Darebin City Council on (03) 8470 8613 or grace.croce@darebin.vic.gov.au

Resource: Language of Childbirth

Designed for women of a non-English speaking background, this book provides accessible information about ante-natal and post-natal procedures and aims to improve women's English language skills through a topic which is relevant and meaningful to them. By Fran Weston. For further details, see <http://www.ames.edu.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)

We were not told about lawyers, say Nauru detainees

An advocate for the 83 Sri Lankan asylum seekers detained on Nauru has claimed that more than 50 of the detainees were interviewed by immigration officials without the advice or presence of a lawyer. The detainees were not aware of their right to see a lawyer and officials did not inform them of this right, it is claimed. The interviews for those with legal representation are currently being completed. Those without legal assistance fear that their applications will be disadvantaged. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, July 5)

Letters for 247 wrongfully held in detention centres

Following the release of a final report by the Commonwealth Ombudsman examining 247 cases of wrongful detention, the Department of Immigration will write letters to each of the former detainees. There may be cases for compensation after Ombudsman Professor John McMillan's report demonstrated that frequent mistakes by departmental officials led to the wrongful detention of 226 (and 21 from a previous report) Australian citizens, permanent residents and lawful visa holders between 1993 and 2007. The Ombudsman will continue to monitor individual cases and system issues. (*The Age*, July 4)

Pre-Olympic fears for failed asylum seekers returned to China

Concerns have been raised by refugee advocates that Chinese asylum seekers deported from Australia will be persecuted and detained in the lead up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Chinese asylum seekers currently constitute a majority (80%) of asylum seekers in Australian immigration detention centres and

are Falun Gong practitioners, underground Christians, pro-democracy activists or political dissidents. (*The Epoch Times*, July 3)

Influx from Asia and war zones changes population mix

Recently released Census data shows that Australia's population is becoming increasingly diverse and is home to growing numbers of refugees fleeing conflict areas. There are now some 20,000 Sudanese, compared to a few thousand a decade ago and 73% of those have arrived since 2001. Over the past five years there has been a 45 per cent (7,000) rise in the number of people from Afghanistan and a 34 per cent (11,000) rise from Iraq. (*The Australian*, June 28)

Swimmers seek asylum

Seven international swimmers who remained in Australia following the FINA World Championships have lodged applications for protection visas. Two Congolese men, four Burundians and one competitor from Sierra Leone are believed to be living in Melbourne and Sydney while their applications are considered. (*The Age*, June 27)

Government to assess Nauru detainees visa applications

Immigration officials and interpreters will travel to Nauru from July 12 to 20 to interview the seven Burmese asylum seekers detained on Nauru. From the Muslim Rohingya ethnic minority, the men have been detained on Nauru since August 2006. (*AAP Newswire*, June 27)

Refugee children overlooked, says College of Physicians

A recent Royal Australasian College of Physicians study has accused the Federal Government's policies of failing refugee children. The study involving 70 refugee children in Melbourne, found that 25 per cent had not seen a doctor since their arrival. (*Dandenong Leader*, June 25)

10,000 call for closure of detention centre

A petition calling for the closure of the Christmas Island detention facility will be tabled in parliament in the week beginning 18 June. 10,000 signatures were gathered by A Just Australia, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre and the National Council of Churches. Construction of the new centre has cost Australian taxpayers \$400 million to date. (*AAP Newswire*, June 14) Greens Senator Kerry Nettle told a public rally that the new facility included non-contact visiting rooms similar to those in the maximum security section of Victoria's Barwon Prison and areas for children, contrary to the Government's expressed intention that children would only be detained as a last resort. (*Canberra Times*, June 18)

Sri Lankan asylum seeker deported after medical treatment

Following months of medical treatment in a Perth hospital, a Sri Lankan asylum seeker has been deported to Nauru. Despite having a range of serious medical problems, including a piece of shrapnel embedded in his brain, the man was prevented from applying for a protection visa in Australia. He joins 82 other Sri Lankan asylum seekers who have been detained on Nauru since February. (*West Australian*, June 16)

Canberra told to return Indonesian asylum seekers

The Indonesian Government has directed Australian authorities to return five asylum seekers from West Timor. This follows revelations that the five intend to lodge a judicial appeal against their imminent deportation from Christmas Island where they have been detained for the last 18 months. Indonesian authorities also revealed that one of the asylum seekers was wanted for questioning in relation to a police investigation. Concerns have been raised by immigration law expert Dr Mary Crock about the detrimental impact such allegations may have in relation to asylum claims. (*The Australian*, 14 June)

Detainees' mental health poor: report

Acting Commonwealth Ombudsman, Vivienne Thom, released a report highlighting the psychological impact of long-term detention. The report examines 62 long-term detention cases, 47 of which were found to be refugees. Recommendations of the report urge the Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews to make alternative detention arrangements for several cases. The Refugee Council of Australia together with the Greens and Democrats say the report clearly demonstrates that refugees with legitimate claims are being held in intolerable conditions for extended periods. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, June 14)

Australia urged to take in Chinese Muslims

United States officials have asked a number of countries, including Australia to grant asylum to a group of Chinese Muslim men from the Uighur ethnic minority. The men, captured by US forces during the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan have since been cleared of any terrorist involvement and released from Guantanamo Bay. Australia's Chinese Muslim community is urging the Howard Government to resettle the group amidst fears the men will be executed by Chinese authorities if they are returned. (*The Age, June 13*)

We're at home now – Sudanese refugees have won over town

Following Tamworth Council's controversial decision in January to refuse the settlement of Sudanese refugees, the town has experienced a surge in support for the newly arrived refugees. 1600 locals have pledged their support for the refugees and there are now over 70 Sudanese refugees living in Tamworth with assistance from Uniting Care and STARTTS. (*Sunday Telegraph, June 10*)

PM softens his stance on HIV positive migrants

In a retreat from previous comments, Prime Minister John Howard has said that HIV positive migrants and refugees will not be banned from Australia, but may be required to report their HIV status to State health authorities. (*West Australian, 1 June*) The Prime Minister's position has also received strong criticism from the European AIDS Treatment Group and the Australian AIDS Fund. (*The Australian, 1 June*)