



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

October 12, 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

Recent statements from the Minister: African refugee intake

The Refugee Council remains deeply concerned about recent comments made by Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews in relation to refugees from the African region and their capacity to settle successfully in Australia. Criticism by the Minister about a particular entrant group and drawing inferences about their ability to 'integrate' is both unprecedented and completely unsubstantiated by fact. These public comments serve to undermine the success of Australia's refugee program and efforts made by the many thousands of refugees from the African region to settle successfully in Australia. The Refugee Council has joined many organisations, including the African Think Tank, in condemning Minister Andrews' comments. A number of the community responses and other background information about this issue can be found at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html>

We have included a summary of related media coverage of this issue later in the bulletin but, due to the large number of articles, opinion pieces and commentary in the media we have compiled available reports on our website at the above address.

How can people respond?

Many people have asked the Refugee Council how they should respond to the Minister's comments. With the Federal election coming, the most constructive thing for electors to do would be to write – either by mail or email – to the local MP and candidates, expressing support for the African community and for keeping Australia's refugee and humanitarian program focused on humanitarian need.

To find contact details for the MPs and candidates for the parties currently in Parliament, see:

Liberal: <http://www.liberal.org.au/locallib/byseat.php> (includes CLP in NT)

Nationals: <http://www.nationals.org.au/ourteam/default.asp>

Labor: <http://www.alp.org.au/people/index.php>

Democrats: http://www.democrats.org.au/campaigns/election_07_candidates/

Greens: <http://www.greens.org.au/Election>

Family First: <http://www.familyfirst.org.au/contactus.php>

Please note that seats have been redistributed in NSW and Queensland since the 2004 election. To check your local seat, see the search facility on the ABC Elections website:

<http://www.abc.net.au/elections/federal/2007/>

Email campaign makes false claims about refugee benefits

An email which continues to be circulated nationally falsely claims a single refugee receives \$1458 per month more than an aged pensioner. In response to many public enquiries about this, RCOA has set the record straight – see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html#email>

Vale Major General Paul Cullen AC, CBE, DSO, ED (1909 - 2007)

The founder and first President of RCOA, Major General Paul Cullen, sadly passed away at the age of 98 on September 19. One of the last surviving World War II combatant battalion commanders and Australia's most senior and most decorated Jewish ex-servicemen, Major General Cullen served with the Australian Army in Crete, North Africa, Greece and on the Kokoda Track in 1942. Major General Cullen was also widely recognised for his support and commitment to refugees. He worked for the relief of

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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

Jewish refugees pre and post WWII, was involved in the founding of Austcare and held the position of Austcare President from 1970 to 1990. From 1979 to 1981, Major General Cullen was also the President of JewishCare, established by his father Samuel Cohen. In 1981 he was awarded the prestigious UNHCR Nansen Medal which enabled the establishment of the Refugee Council. He was also the recipient of the RSL ANZAC Peace Prize in 1983 for his work on behalf of refugees. Also a keen businessman, he founded Festival Records and established Australia's first supermarket, merchant bank and was a pioneer of agricultural development in the Northern Territory.

The life and contributions of Major General Paul Cullen were remembered at a memorial service at Sydney's Victoria Barracks on September 26. Each year, Austcare awards the Paul Cullen Humanitarian Award to community members and agencies acknowledging substantial contributions to the support of refugees and asylum seekers.

COMING EVENTS

Saturday, 13 October – Melbourne

Special Event: Celebrating the Rich Dignity the Sudanese bring to Australia

Organised by the Fitzroy Learning Network and Lentil as Anything, there will be a range of events and activities for the whole family to celebrate the contribution of the Sudanese community in Australia.

Venue: Lentil as Anything at the Abbotsford Convent, 1 St Heliers St, Abbotsford VIC 3067

Details: from 12pm onwards. Contact: Sara Maher, 0432 223 381 / 03 9417 2897

Thursday, 18 October – Melbourne

Postgraduate Human Rights Discussion Forum: Session 4 Law and Human Rights.

Speakers: Clancy Kelly and Maritza Thompson

Venue: Staff Common Room, Melbourne University, 4th Floor, 234 Queensberry St, Carlton

Details: 4.00pm to 6.00pm

Friday, 19 October – Melbourne

Media Peace Awards – United Nations Association of Australia

Venue: ANZ Pavilion, Victorian Arts Centre

Details: www.unaavictoria.org.au

Friday, 19 October – Melbourne

Forgotten People Installation Official Launch and Benefit Concert

Presented by the Darfur Australia Network, the installation represents those displaced by the ongoing conflict in Darfur and will continue from 17 to 28 October.

Venue: The Atrium, Federation Square, Melbourne

Details: 6.00pm to 8.30pm, tickets from www.greentix.com.au \$50. For further information contact rebecca@darfuraustralia.org or call 0408 302 635

Sunday, 21 October – Sydney

National Day of Prayer for Burma

Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Christians and people of all faiths and spirituality join together for the people of Burma in a national day of prayer.

Venue: Martin Place, CBD Sydney.

Details: 1.00pm. For further details contact Caritas Australia 0417 284 831 www.caritas.org.au

Saturday, 27 to Monday, 29 October – Melbourne

Festival: World Matters – The Audacity of Hope

Featuring the Melbourne Launch of “Rainbow Bird” by 14 year old Czenya Cavouras and chaired by writer Arnold Zable on Sunday 28 from 4pm to 5pm.

Venue: Edendale Community Centre, Gastons Lane, Eltham

Details: Bookings essential contact (03) 9439 8700 / elthambookshop@bigpond.com

Wednesday, 31 October – Melbourne

Seminar: “Good Starts Arts – Results and Reflections”

Presented by the La Trobe University Refugee Health Research Centre, Speaker: Ms Caitlin Nunn, Research Officer RHRC.

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner St, Brunswick
Details: 5.30pm to 6.30pm (registration 5.00pm)
For further information visit: www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html

Wednesday, 7 November – Sydney

Course: Anti-Discrimination – Rights, Advice and Strategies

Coordinated by the Centre for Community Welfare Training, this course will assist participants to recognise when unfair treatment may be against the law and when it is not and give accurate advice to clients, consumers or members of the community about their rights under anti-discrimination law.

Venue: Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, Level 4, 699 George St., Sydney

Details: 9.30am to 4.30pm, registration essential, cost \$150/\$130 (members). For further details visit: www.acwa.asn.au

Friday, 9 to Sunday, 11 November – Perth

National Conference on Racism in a Global Context

This unique 3-day conference will bring together a range of internationally respected speakers, non-government and government agencies, indigenous leaders and community groups to focus on experiences and effects of racism.

Venue and registration details can be found at: ncrgc.murdoch.edu.au/

Sunday, 25 November – Melbourne

Peace Service: Festival of Lights – Remembering the war and violence in Sri Lanka

Venue: St Georges East St. Kilda Uniting Church, 4 Chapel St, East St. Kilda.

Details: 10.30am, RSVP and all inquiries: Rev. Angela Tampiyappa (03) 9731 0604 or Rev John Bottomley (03) 9827 8322

Wednesday, 28 November – Melbourne

Seminar: "Looking Back and Looking Forward – Health and wellbeing of refugee youth after 2 years"

Presented by the La Trobe University Refugee Health Research Centre, Speaker: Prof Sandy Gifford, Director RHRC.

Venue: Foundation House, 6 Gardiner St, Brunswick

Details: 5.30pm to 6.30pm (registration 5.00pm)

For further information visit: www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

New report: "Removing Seriously Ill Asylum Seekers from Australia"

The recently released report is the first comprehensive study examining the issue of the removal of seriously ill asylum seekers and explored Australian government policy and practice relating to the health and welfare concerns of asylum seekers. A collaborative project between LaTrobe University's Refugee Health Research Centre and the Hotham Mission Asylum Seeker Project, the study demonstrates a strong link between the asylum process and the deterioration of mental and physical health of those seeking asylum in Australia.

The report is now available online at: www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/documents/removing.pdf

Call for submissions: Review of Migration Agents

A discussion paper regarding improvements to the migration advice sector was released by Assistant Immigration Minister Teresa Gambaro on 12 September. A copy of the discussion paper is available at:

www.immi.gov.au/gateways/agents/news/mig-advice-prof.htm

Submissions to the review must be received by **26 October 2007**.

VicHealth Report: More than Tolerance – Embracing Diversity for Health

Launched on 17 September, this new report examines the health consequences of discrimination for migrants and refugees. The report provides information which will assist government and non-government agencies to support the development of welcoming and supportive environments for people from a range of cultural backgrounds.

A copy of the report is available online at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/discrimattitudes/

Radio documentary: Christmas Island Detention Centre

Produced by Rachel Bongiorno for SBS Radio's *Alchemy* program, this new documentary contains interviews with Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews, Anna Samson and Christmas Island Shire President Gordon Thompson. Exploring the issues surrounding the construction of the \$400 million facility, the documentary aims to shed light on exactly what is being built and the Government's intentions behind the construction of Australia's first purpose built detention centre. The documentary is available for podcast at:

www20.sbs.com.au/podcasting/media/audio/alchemy_2007-08-20_8902.mp3

New Iraq report: "Millions in Flight: the Iraqi Refugee Crisis" Amnesty International

This new report from Amnesty highlights the unfolding refugee crisis stemming from the ongoing conflict in Iraq. The report calls on the international community to provide greater levels of assistance to millions of refugees in Syria and Jordan in the greatest population movement in the Middle East since the formation of the state of Israel in 1948.

The full report is available online at web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE140412007

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)

Calls for apology from Minister

Following the funeral of Liep Gony and the attack of a young Sudanese man in Melton, leaders from the Sudanese community have criticised the Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews for inflaming racial tensions and have called upon Minister Andrews to make a public apology to the community. (*The Age*, 11 October)

Detainees' delay avoidable: Andrews

Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews has said that seven Burmese asylum seekers on Nauru could have their claims expedited if they went to Malaysia and delays in dealing with their cases are the result of actions taken by lawyers for the men. Lawyer, David Manne of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, has said that returning to Malaysia is not an option for the men because Malaysia is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention and there are no guarantees of safety. (*The Age*, 10 October)

Police seek three over racial attack

A young Sudanese man has been attacked by three men in Melbourne's outer suburb of Melton in what community leaders believe is a response to comments made by the Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews. The attack comes on the eve of the funeral service for murdered Sudanese teenager, Liep Gony, who was beaten to death in Noble Park (*The Age*, 10 October)

Unis unite to slam 'racist' Andrews

More than 165 academics from medical, public health and psychiatry fields have written an open letter to the Immigration Minister stating that there is no evidence to suggest that African refugees are experiencing more problems settling than other groups. (*The Australian*, 9 October)

Andrews sparks anti-African abuse – community

Some of the 300 Sudanese residents in Wagga Wagga have experienced racial abuse in the street and at work following comments made by Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews. (*ABC Online*, 9 October)

Assistant Minister expresses different view, but Hanson approves

While Pauline Hanson, who is standing as an independent candidate for the Senate in Queensland, has applauded Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews' decision to cut the African refugee intake, the Assistant Immigration Minister, Teresa Gambaro has offered a differing view. Ms Gambaro has said that Mr Andrews could have expressed his views differently and that African migrants were keen to integrate and had been successful in adapting to Australian life. "It is something I would have been mindful about. We have to support our humanitarian settlement program. They are no different to migrants of the past. They want a job, a future for their children and their children to be educated," said Ms Gambaro. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October)

African migrants 'welcome addition'

Police in Shepparton, Victoria have said the Sudanese are a welcome addition to the community and the Sudanese families who have settled there over recent years have been very keen to become part of the community. Les Twentyman, a youth worker in the Footscray area, is working with young African refugees encouraging their participation in sport, providing positive social activities (*The Age*, 5 October).

MPs challenge Andrews over Sudanese

National Party MP John Forrest has questioned Kevin Andrews' comments regarding Sudanese, saying they are welcome in the seat of Mallee and has urged the Minister to extend the refugee quota. (*News.com.au*, 5 October)

Africans complain over Minister's 'racism'

The Federation of African Communities Council intend to lodge an official complaint of racial discrimination with the Human Rights Commission (*News.com.au*, 5 October)

Andrews, Howard deny racism

While Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews denied that recent statements made regarding the Sudanese community are racist, the UNHCR said that refugees needed to be accepted on humanitarian grounds, not on their ability to integrate. The UNHCR has also confirmed that they have not promoted any shift away from Australia's refugee intake from Africa and were not aware of any evidence to suggest Sudanese refugees were experiencing greater difficulties than any other group. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October)

Andrews contradicts police on Sudanese crime

Minister Kevin Andrews has contradicted the Victoria Police Chief Commissioner saying he has data which indicates there are higher levels of criminal behaviour in the Sudanese community, but has refused to release the data publicly (*AAP*, 5 October)

Minister's African dossier renews racial tensions

Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews has refused to release the advice he received which contributed to the decision to reduce the African refugee intake, but has publicly released a summary of the advice which includes concerns about 'gangs', conflict between families and arguments between African community groups. African Think Tank Chairman, Dr. Berhan Ahmed has said the claims are unsubstantiated and challenged Mr. Andrews to release any statistics he has to support his statements. Refugee Council CEO, Paul Power said the claims could be made about any group in the community and it presented a very one-sided view of African Australians. (*The Australian*, 5 October)

Sudanese no more prone to crime than others

Victoria Police Chief Commissioner, Christine Nixon has said the proportional representation of Sudanese refugees in police statistics is no greater than other groups in the community. Australian Bureau of Statistics census data highlights the challenges faced by many Sudanese with 40% leaving school before Year 11 and often earning the least of all ethnic communities. (*The Age*, 4 October)

Labor backs refugee cap

Opposition immigration spokesperson, Tony Burke has backed the Government's decision not to take any more African refugees this year and committed to maintaining the existing cap on refugee numbers if elected. Mr Burke said that it was important not to go beyond the current numbers in the refugee intake to ensure that existing settlement services can provide the support that is required. (*The Age*, 4 October)

Uniting Church says refugees need support

The Reverend David Pargeter, Director of the Commission for Mission at the Uniting Church, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania has said that recent comments by the Immigration Minister regarding African refugees demonstrates a lack of understanding about the situation facing refugees. (*The Age*, 4 October)

Australia closes door on Africans

Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews has said that no more African refugees will be resettled in Australia until at least July 2008. Stating that the quota from Africa had already been filled for this year, Mr Andrews also said there were no guarantees that any Africans would be accepted in the next intake. Reducing the proportion of African refugees from 50% to 30% was, in part, a response to difficulties with integration. Mr Andrews has claimed that refugees from Africa "have more problems and challenges associated with them" (*Herald Sun*, 3 October).

New citizenship test takes effect today

As more than 30 people prepare to be the first to sit the Government's controversial new citizenship test, Refugee Council CEO, Paul Power has reiterated concerns that the test will disadvantage those from non-English speaking backgrounds. Refugee and humanitarian entrants have historically been more interested than other groups of migrants in becoming citizens, but the test will disadvantage them the most, creating an additional hurdle for them in participating as citizens (*The Australian*, 1 October).

Australia admits to deporting Papuans

Refugee advocates claim the Federal Government's deportation of five West Papuan asylum seekers has breached our international obligations and endangered the lives of the men who reached Saibai Island in Australia's northern waters in August. After the men were intercepted by immigration authorities, they were transferred to Horn Island and then removed to PNG on September 18. Despite raising protection issues with immigration officials, the men were not allowed to make asylum claims because they had been intercepted in an excised zone. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September)

World not facing up to Iraqi refugee crisis: Amnesty

A report released by Amnesty International claims that the developed world is not facing up to the growing refugee crisis from Iraq. Without meaningful assistance from the international community, the report says the security situation in the region will continue to worsen amidst the largest exodus from the Middle East since the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. (*ABC Online*, 26 September) Over the last five years Australia has taken approximately 2000 Iraqi refugees and Amnesty has called for this figure to be increased. (*The Age*, 25 September)

Climate refugees a 'humanitarian issue'

In response to comments made by AFP Commissioner Mick Keelty that climate change and rising sea levels raises security concerns for Australia, human rights groups have taken the opportunity to highlight the humanitarian issues associated with global warming and the impact on 'environmental refugees' in our region. (*The Australian*, 25 September)

Refugees languish on Nauru

Despite their recognition as genuine refugees, the future remains uncertain for 72 Sri Lankans who have spent the last 6 months on Nauru. While Department of Immigration officials have stated they are working towards resettlement in a third country, authorities in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, USA, Canada and New Zealand have confirmed that no official request has been made to resettle the refugees (*The Age*, 24 September). A spokesperson for the Sri Lankans has said they will be happy to settle in any country that will accept them, in order to relieve their ongoing situation on Nauru (*The Age*, 15 September). The Federal Government has also rejected an offer made by the ACT Government to resettle the refugees (*The Canberra Times*, 14 September).

Federal review urged of imminent deportations

South Australian Public Advocate John Harley has raised concerns about the planned deportation of two men previously held at Baxter Detention Centre. The men, from Tanzania and China, have both received treatment at Glenside Psychiatric Hospital for mental illnesses sustained during their detention. Grave concerns are held for their safety and well being if returned to their country of origin and it is hoped that the Immigration Minister will intervene on humanitarian grounds. (*ABC Online*, 21 September)

Smuggler wins the right to hearing

An Iraqi man detained in Villawood has won the right to have his claim for protection heard by the Federal Court. Convicted of people-smuggling in 2002, the man lodged an application for a protection

visa 14 months ago. Despite the Government's 90-day time limit on immigration decisions, the man has not yet received a decision. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 18 September*)

Citizenship test remains confidential

Opposition Immigration spokesperson, Tony Burke has criticised the Government for not releasing the questions which will form the new citizenship test. The resource booklet which accompanies the test has also been amended to include five prominent historical female figures and refers to Australian "values" as welcoming and successfully integrating migrants rather than the draft version absorbing and integrating them. (*The Age, 18 September*)

Migration agents' standards to be probed

The Government is set to review migration agents practice in a review announced by Assistant Immigration Minister, Teresa Gambaro. Seeking submissions by October 26, the review will explore whether existing regulations, complaints mechanisms and standards are sufficient. The review is also seeking feedback on whether applications lodged through migration agents should receive priority. (*The Age, 12 September*)

Refugee laws changed best moment: Baird

During his final speech to Parliament, retiring Liberal MP Bruce Baird said that his greatest political achievement was to have amendments made to migration regulations in 2005 which saw a 90-day time limit placed on immigration decisions and the removal of all women and children from detention centres. Abstaining from voting, Mr Baird also ensured that a Government Bill in 2006 to process all asylum seekers offshore was not passed. (*The Age, 11 September*)