



# Refugee Council of Australia

## **BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS**

**November 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](mailto:info@refugeecouncil.org.au).

*Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia*

### **NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL**

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#### **Have your say on the future of Australia's refugee program**

The Refugee Council of Australia is holding its annual national consultations on the future of Australia's resettlement program. Consultations are being held across the country in every state and territory capital city and several major regional centres. The consultations cover a range of issues relating to resettlement, including a particular focus on housing and employment. We would also like to hear about positive community initiatives developed to address challenges confronting refugees establishing their new home in Australia. This is an excellent opportunity to share your thoughts, suggestions and concerns about Australia's resettlement program. Your feedback will contribute to our submission to the Minister and Department of Immigration and Citizenship about future directions for the program. As refugees and people who work with refugees and humanitarian migrants, your participation in these consultations will be invaluable. We would particularly welcome input from people working on these issues who are not located within the refugee sector.

If you cannot make it to our face-to-face consultation meetings, but would like to contribute your views, please contact us and we will arrange a phone interview. You can also email your thoughts to [policy@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:policy@refugeecouncil.org.au) or contact Anna Samson on (02) 9211 9333. Details of coming consultations are available at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au>

#### **Australian NGO reps take concerns to UNHCR gathering**

In September and October, the Refugee Council's President John Gibson, Board Member Grant Mitchell and National Policy Director Anna Samson attended the UNHCR NGO Consultations and Executive Committee (ExCom) Meetings in Geneva, Switzerland. Our three representatives were among 28 Australian non-government representatives who attended the gatherings.

ExCom has traditionally been the purview of UNHCR member states and professional NGOs who use these meetings as an opportunity to raise, at an international level, regional refugee protection issues. However, this year, the Council worked with Oxfam Australia, Caritas Australia and the National Council of Churches Australia to fund the participation of two refugee community leaders, Tenneh Kpaka and Tony Ogeno Oyet, at the conference. Together with three other refugee representatives from Australia, Tenneh and Tony were able to share their first-hand experiences of displacement and resettlement with UNHCR agency staff, field workers, policy advocates and government officials. Their invaluable contribution was personally acknowledged by the High Commissioner, Antonio Guterres and by the NGO community more broadly. The main international NGO statement to the ExCom meeting was made by Aguil de Chut Deng, a Sudanese-Australian woman from Canberra – in the same week as Australia's Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews was criticising the integration of Sudanese refugees in Australia.

Among the issues discussed at ExCom were the Conclusion on Children at Risk, offshore processing, interception of asylum-seekers in mixed migration flows, addressing the problems confronting internally displaced people, protracted refugee situations in Burma and Sudan, detention of refugees and asylum-seekers, cluster approaches to service delivery, UNHCR refugee status determination and the Iraq refugee crisis. The Refugee Council is preparing a more detailed report on the outcomes of conference to be distributed shortly.

### **Community response to Immigration Ministers comments on African refugee intake**

The public debate about refugee issues has been dominated since the beginning of October by comments by Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews about the integration in Australia of African refugees. On October 15, 68 organisations combined to support and fund the publication of an open letter in The Australian newspaper, acknowledging the positive contribution refugees from many African nations were making to Australian life. This open letter and other community responses to Mr Andrews' comments can be found at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html>

A number of organisations have responded with community campaigns:

- The Multicultural Youth Pledge campaign, launched recently by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI), aims to challenge myths and reintroduce some balance back into the debate on the settlement of migrant and refugee young people. Download the media release and sign on to the campaign at [www.cmyi.net.au](http://www.cmyi.net.au)
- Oxfam Australia is running a campaign in support of African refugees and the preservation of a just humanitarian program. To add your voice to the chorus send an email to your local Member of Parliament by typing in your postcode [here](#).
- The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre has put together an email campaign asking people to complain to Channel 7, 9 and 10 for their inaccurate media coverage on Sudanese refugees. To make a complaint against Channel 7, 9 and 10, click [here](#).

### **Refugee Council's AGM Forum to explore refugee resettlement issues**

The long-term implications of the Immigration Minister's comments on the refugee resettlement program will be discussed at the Public Forum held in conjunction with the Refugee Council's Annual General Meeting on Monday, November 19 at NSW Parliament House, Sydney. Speakers at the forum will be: Ajang Biar, Sudanese community leader, Sydney; Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Manager, IHSS Settlement Partnerships, AMES Victoria; and Kevin Liston, Director, Australian Refugee Association, Adelaide. The public forum will begin at 2.30pm, followed by the Annual General Meeting at 4pm. RSVP to (02) 9211 9333 or [admin@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:admin@refugeecouncil.org.au) by November 14.

### **Farewell to a politician with integrity**

Earlier this month, Australia lost one of its greatest champions for the rights of refugees in the Federal Parliament, Peter Andren. As the dedicated Independent member for Calare, a rural seat in Central West NSW, Peter was willing to take a principled stand on issues that left other politicians for whom the political stakes were not as high scratching for euphemisms or notably silent. His conduct was a testimony not only to the ideals of representative democracy but to the strength of Peter's character. He spoke out strongly in favour of numerous electorally unpopular causes but his electors voted for him in ever-increasing numbers – a clear sign that many electors value integrity over populism. For those of us concerned about the Federal Government's actions over Tampa, the "Children Overboard" affair and the Pacific Solution, we could always rely on Peter to raise his voice of reason, compassion and decency. Peter will be sorely missed but his 11 years in Parliament will long be remembered as a sign of hope for Australians committed to integrity in politics.

### **RCOA and AJA call for protection visas for seven Burmese on Nauru**

On October 15, the first anniversary of the Burmese asylum seekers on Nauru lodging applications for protection visas with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Refugee Council released a joint statement with A Just Australia, calling for the Australian Government to grant visas to the seven men. A copy of the statement can be viewed at:

[http://www.ajustaustralia.com/mediareleases\\_latest\\_view.php?id=000A0DE2-196C-334A-F69718B29565AA3D](http://www.ajustaustralia.com/mediareleases_latest_view.php?id=000A0DE2-196C-334A-F69718B29565AA3D)

### **Support the Refugee Council's work by becoming a member**

In the past year, membership of the Refugee Council of Australia has grown by more than 80 per cent to 262 members – 110 organisational and 162 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>

## COMING EVENTS

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### **Wednesday, 14 November – Sydney**

#### **Acclaimed author Christos Tsiolkas speaks on tolerance, “Why Can’t We All Get Along?”**

Presented by PEN International, this special event is a conversation with journalist David Marr and will be introduced by playwright David Williamson.

*Venue: The Australian Hall, 150-152 Elizabeth Street, Sydney (near Museum station)*

*Details: 6.00pm, \$22/\$12 Concession. Bookings: MCA Ticketing: 1300 306 776 or [www.mca-tix.com](http://www.mca-tix.com)*

### **Wednesday, 14 November – Melbourne**

**“In Our Shoes” Digital Storytelling Launch** presented by Monash Youth and Family Services (MYFS) in partnership with Southern Ethnic Advisory and Advocacy Council (SEAAC)

*Venue: Clayton Hall, 264 Clayton Rd, Clayton*

*Details: 6.30pm, For more information contact Mick (03) 9561 7359 or Steve (03) 9563 4130*

### **Saturday, 24 and Sunday, 25 November – Melbourne**

#### **Festival of Africa**

African arts and culture will be on display for everyone to enjoy and raise the profile and understanding of Africa in Australia, offering an outstanding program of theatre, dance, music and community events

*Venue: The Camberwell Centre, 340 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, (cnr Bourke and Riversdale Rds)*

*Details: For more information please visit [www.festivalofafrica.com](http://www.festivalofafrica.com)*

### **Sunday, 25 November – Melbourne**

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

*Venue: St George’s, 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*

### **Sunday, November 25 – Sydney**

#### **Seminar: “Burma Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”.**

Part of the B’nai B’rith NSW Social Justice Series, the seminar explores the situation of Burmese refugees coming to Australia, their background and the current situation in Burma. Speakers: a member of Sydney’s Burmese community; Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia; and Connie Levett, Immigration Reporter, Sydney Morning Herald.

*Venue: B’nai B’rith NSW, 22 Yurong St, East Sydney.*

*Details: 7pm. Cost: \$5 (supper). RSVP: Ernie Friedlander (02) 9361-6035.*

### **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](http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/conferences.html)*

### **Thursday, 29 November to Sunday, 2 December – Melbourne**

#### **Thursday, 6 December – Sydney**

#### **Sunday, 9 December to Monday, 10 December – Perth**

#### **Human Rights Arts and Film Festival: Rights! Camera! Action!**

For full details and events please visit: <http://www.hruff.org.au/>

### **Thursday, 6, Friday 7, and Saturday 8 December – Sydney**

#### **Refugee Conference: 'Sharing our Stories, Sharing our Strengths' hosted by UWS.**

A conference for people who came to Australia seeking safety to learn from one another.

*Venue: University of Western Sydney, Bankstown Campus*

*Cost: Free for people with refugee backgrounds or members of refugee community groups. Cost for others wishing to attend.*

*For further information visit [www.startts.org.au](http://www.startts.org.au)*

**Monday, December 10 – Sydney**

**Welcome African Refugees – Multicultural Morning Tea.**

Performance by Pape Mbaye and Nguewell Percussion Group. Guest speakers: Tanya Plibersek MP, Federal Member for Sydney; Andrew Sankoh, PhD student researching integration of African refugees; Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia; and Simon Rice, human rights lawyer

Venue: *Upstairs at Alexandria Town Hall, 73 Garden St, Alexandria*

Details: *10am-11.30am Sponsored by Redfern Legal Centre (02) 9698 7277 and South Sydney Community Aid Multicultural Neighbourhood Centre (02) 9319 4073.*

## **NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS**

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### **Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Election report card**

The ASRC has recently released a report card assessing each party's policies regarding refugees and asylum seekers. To view the report card please visit:

<http://www.asrc.org.au/uploads/File/journeys%2007.pdf>

### **New report: The Relocation of Refugees from Melbourne to Regional Victoria**

This report, produced by Victoria University's Institute for Community, Ethnicity and Policy Alternatives in June 2007 provides a comparative evaluation and analysis of refugee migration to Warrnambool and Swan Hill in Victoria. The full report is available at <http://www.vu.edu.au/Research/ICEPA/index.aspx>

### **Refugee Youth Report: Adolescent refugee perspectives on psychological well-being**

This research, first published in January 2007 by the Centre for International Health, Curtin University, WA explores how adolescent refugee children perceive issues of migration, loss, resettlement and acculturation. Conducted across four government schools in WA, the research also makes a series of recommendations for school-based strategies to promote psychological well-being. The full paper can be found at <http://www.developmentgateway.com.au/jahia/Jahia/pid/4686>

### **New paper: Constructions of racism in the Australian parliamentary debates on asylum seekers**

By Danielle Every, University of South Australia and Martha Augoustinos, University of Adelaide, this paper examines parliamentary speeches of politicians opposing Australia's asylum laws and the implications of 'new racism' on anti-racist discourse. First published in *Discourse and Society*, 2007 by SAGE Publications the full paper is also available at [www.safecom.org.au/every-augoustinos-racism.htm](http://www.safecom.org.au/every-augoustinos-racism.htm)

### **New research - Migration: Destruction and Reconstruction of the Self**

By Renu Narchal, School of Psychology, University of Western Sydney, this research explores the impact of migration experiences on attachment patterns which are so significant in developmental processes and notions of the self. Published recently in the *E-Journal of Applied Psychology*, the full research paper can be found at

<http://ojs.lib.swin.edu.au/index.php/ejap/article/view/80/107>

### **Dropped from the Moon: the settlement experience of refugee communities in Tasmania**

By Jo Flanagan, this highly detailed research project produced by Anglicare Tasmania explores the experiences of refugees settling in Tasmania and makes a series of recommendations towards improving settlement outcomes and retaining refugee communities in Tasmania. The report can be found at:

[http://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=34&Itemid=81](http://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=34&Itemid=81)

### **Another Country – Insight, SBS (30 October)**

*Insight* travels to Melbourne's City of Greater Dandenong to go inside a community where tensions are running high. In a special edition, *Insight* brings together Sudanese leaders, police, local council and concerned residents to discuss the problems facing this troubled community. For a full transcript and video of the program, please visit [http://news.sbs.com.au/insight/another\\_country\\_133895](http://news.sbs.com.au/insight/another_country_133895)

## **REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA**

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**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)

### **Bhutan's refugees to be resettled from Nepal within months**

The Nepalese Government has given long-awaited clearance for Bhutanese refugees to be resettled in third countries. The United States has indicated it will resettle up to 60,000 of the estimated 100,000 refugees and Australia will be among several other countries to offer resettlement places to the refugees who have been in camps for 17 years. (*Reuters AlertNet, 6 November*)

### **Crisis talks in Burma**

In a second visit to Burma to press for political reform, UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari will meet with detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and with senior junta officials during a six-day visit. (*The Australian, 5 November*)

### **Suspend Muslim immigration: Hanson**

Queensland Senate candidate Pauline Hanson has again called for a moratorium on Muslim immigration because of the need to "protect our culture". Campaigning under the newly registered Pauline's United Australia Party, Ms Hanson has stated she will block legislation in the Senate she does not agree with if she holds the balance of power. (*The Australian, 4 November*)

### **Labor and Coalition score badly on refugees**

Melbourne's Asylum Seeker Resource Centre has released a report card assessing the policies of the Coalition, the ALP, Greens and Democrats in the lead-up to the Federal election. Both the Coalition and the ALP scored poorly because of their support for mandatory detention and the 'Pacific Solution', although Labor's score improved slightly because of their promise to abolish the Temporary Protection Visa. The Greens and Democrats both scored an 'A+' for their policies. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 3 November*)

### **Clubs eager for refugees**

Responding to recent negative representations in the media, football clubs in Melbourne's south east are opening their doors to young African refugees, offering them a social and healthy pastime. (*Dandenong Star, 1 November*)

### **Three Burmese want asylum in Australia**

Protection claims of 3 Burmese men in Papua New Guinea are currently being assessed by UNHCR officials and their request for resettlement in Australia will only be considered if the PNG authorities do not accept the men. A UNHCR representative in PNG has said the men are persons of concern who claim they will be jailed if returned to Burma. (*The Age, 1 November*)

### **Andrews tempers integration remarks, Sudanese group says**

At a recent meeting with Sudanese community leaders in western Sydney, Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews reportedly said that he had been "misinformed" in relation to the ability of Sudanese refugees to integrate into Australian society. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 31 October*)

### **Escape from a life in limbo**

Almost seven years after being rescued by the Australian Navy off Ashmore Reef and after the High Court ruled he could be kept in indefinite detention, stateless asylum seeker Ahmed al-Kateb has been given permission to remain in Australia. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October*)

### **Malcolm Fraser calls for bill of rights**

In an address to the University of Melbourne Law School, former Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser reiterated his call for the establishment of a federal bill of rights to ensure that judicial process was not eroded in the face of national security concerns. He spoke about the detention of children, the "Pacific Solution" and the deportation of Australian citizens as incidents that demonstrated the need for a bill of rights. (*The Age, 25 October*)

### **Victorian police officer visits refugee camps on Thai-Burma border**

A Victoria Police Multicultural Liaison Officer from Dandenong in Melbourne's south east is visiting Burmese refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border to learn more about the conditions and situation

facing Australia's growing Burmese refugee community. The officer is also involved in training staff to present the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program to refugees before they arrive. The AUSCO program provides refugees with information about life in Australia and what they can expect to encounter when they arrive. (*Dandenong Star, 25 October*)

### **Burmese refugees begin hunger strike in Sydney**

To mark the 12<sup>th</sup> year of the detention of democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, ten Burmese refugees have begun a two-day hunger strike outside the Chinese consulate to demand an end to Beijing's support for the military junta. The hunger strike also comes as Australia imposes financial sanctions on top military figures and cabinet ministers in Burma. (*Radio Australia, 25 October*)

### **Australian lawyer urges acceptance of Burmese refugees held on Nauru**

Immigration lawyer David Manne said that the Australian Government's plans to help Burmese refugees should begin with the resettlement of the seven Burmese refugees held in detention on Nauru for more than a year. (*Radio NZ International, 24 October*)

### **Downer opens door for Burmese refugees**

Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer has said that priority should be given to the resettlement of Burmese refugees fleeing the recent violent crackdown against pro-democracy demonstration. (*ABC News Online, 23 October*)

### **Lismore Mayor says welcome mat out for refugees**

At a meeting with Foreign Minister Alexander Downer and local refugee communities, Lismore City Council Mayor Merv King said that Sudanese refugees were welcomed in the community and were integrating well. (*ABC News Online, 24 October*)

### **Burmese detainees on Nauru protest at visa delays**

Seven Burmese asylum seekers from the persecuted Rohingya minority that have been detained on Nauru for more than a year staged a small, peaceful protest to draw attention to the fact that despite the High Court of Australia ruling that their claims must be processed, decisions regarding their cases have still not been made. In a joint statement, the Refugee Council of Australia, Oxfam Australia and A Just Australia have accused the Australian Government of breaching its responsibility to the men and leaving them in limbo on Nauru. (*The Age, 23 October*)

### **Refugees fear for future, say leaders**

Community leaders have said that many Sudanese refugees, including women and children, are fearful about their futures in Australia and the Sudanese community is concerned about increased incidents of racial abuse and violence towards them following remarks made by Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews. Community leaders have also praised Victoria Police for correcting misinformation about crime rates among African refugee groups. (*The Age, 23 October*)

### **Sudanese 'dropped in a strange land'**

Research undertaken by Victoria University's Institute for Community, Ethnicity and Policy Alternatives has shown that 70% of Sudanese refugees received no information about Australia before they arrived and many experienced negative treatment and negative perceptions after arrival. (*The Age, 23 October*)

### **Africans invite Hanson for a coffee**

Speaking at a public forum, a representative of the Queensland African Community Council has invited Senate candidate Pauline Hanson to meet 'one-on-one' to correct her recent public comments and policies against African refugees. (*West Australian, 21 October*)

### **Burma crackdown 'intensifies'**

Speaking to SBS' Dateline program, Dr Sein Win has said that the impact of recent crackdowns by Burma's military could be much worse than originally thought, with the numbers of people killed or tortured much higher than reported. The military junta have also admitted that over 3000 people have been arrested and detained following peaceful pro-democracy protests, despite a UN demand that all prisoners be released. (*SBS Online, 18 October*)

### **SIEV X memorial 'damaging' to other monuments**

Federal Territories Minister, Jim Lloyd has criticised a decision to grant an extension to the temporary SIEV X Memorial on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin saying that its continued installation is damaging to other permanent monuments. *(ABC Online, 17 October)*

### **UN warns of northern Iraq refugee crisis**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres has warned of a potentially new refugee crisis in northern Iraq as the Turkish Cabinet seeks permission from the Parliament to launch an attack against Kurdish separatists. *(Stuff.co.nz, 17 October)*

### **Deported Sri Lankan man sparks row**

A Sri Lankan asylum seeker was taken from Melbourne's Maribyrnong Detention Centre in handcuffs and wearing a helmet for deportation back to his homeland. Despite making claims of torture in Sri Lanka, his asylum application was rejected by the Immigration Department and subsequent appeals to Minister Kevin Andrews failed. Refugee advocates have stated they fear for the man's safety on return. *(Herald Sun, 17 October)*

### **Sudanese speak out**

Local refugees, among some 700 Sudanese who have settled in NSW's Hunter region, have spoken out against comments made by the Immigration Minister and the decision to cut Australia's African intake. Members of the community have said that rather than punishing refugees, the Government needs to focus attention on providing more assistance and support to new arrivals. *(Newcastle Star, 16 October)*

### **Government denies Sri Lankan refugee delay**

Responding to criticism from lawyers and refugee advocates that there is a deliberate delay in the resettlement of 72 Sri Lankan refugees on Nauru, a spokesperson for Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews has said that discussions were underway with a number of countries, but would not reveal which countries were involved or what the timeframe for resettlement would be. *(The Age, 16 October)*

### **Nats MP urges better resources for refugees**

At a meeting with over 200 Sudanese community members in Wagga Wagga, Federal Nationals MP Kay Hulls said that more should be done to assist and support refugees and that more resources are needed to ensure better pathways to settlement. *(ABC Online, 14 October)*