



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

March 6, 2008

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

Applications open for AUSCO Guest Trainer program – one-month placements in South-East Asia

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) is supporting an initiative from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to improve the practical information given to refugees as part of the [Australian Cultural Orientation \(AUSCO\) program](#). AUSCO is a five-day program presented to resettling refugees before their departure to Australia. RCOA has undertaken to recruit three Guest Trainers, with good knowledge of refugee settlement in Australia, to participate in one-month placements in mid 2008 in Thailand and Malaysia. Ideal candidates would be involved in refugee settlement services, understand the practicalities of settlement well and have a strong background in training. Personal experience of the resettlement process would be an advantage. Applications close Wednesday, March 26, 2008. To find out more, visit the Employment page on the RCOA website – <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/employment.html>

Community sector submission on Australia's 2008-09 Refugee and Humanitarian Program

After months of community consultations and refining of recommendations, RCOA has released its submission to the Australian Government on the 2008-09 Refugee and Humanitarian Program. The 113-page submission canvasses many issues, including the size and composition of the humanitarian intake, family reunion for refugees, employment issues, housing, language services, international cooperation and Australian support for UNHCR. The submission has been presented to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, and DIAC and provides the basis for RCOA's advocacy with government this year. We would like to express our thanks to the hundreds of people who participated in our consultations and contributed ideas and issues. The submission can be viewed at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/submissions/2008-09_intakesub.pdf

Annual sector meeting with Immigration Minister and DIAC-NGO Dialogue

On February 28, the Refugee Council participated with 24 other organisations in the refugee sector's annual meeting with the Immigration Minister, held in Melbourne. Based on our consultations with members and those participating in the meeting, RCOA raised 12 key issues with Senator Evans:

1. The need for Australia to be developing the capacity to accommodate a larger refugee resettlement program.
2. The need for a Humanitarian Family Reunion visa not linked to the regional quotas of the Australian Government's Humanitarian Program.
3. Giving priority to the family reunion needs of former Temporary Protection Visa holders.
4. Addressing the practical problems faced by recently-arrived humanitarian entrants, especially in housing, language learning and access to employment.
5. The impacts of government funding practices on the refugee settlement services sector, particularly the competitive tendering of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) and the short-term funding of the Settlement Grants Program (SGP).
6. The need for significant reform to Australia's refugee status determination processes.
7. Abolishing Temporary Protection Visas and Temporary Humanitarian Visas.
8. Making the [Community Care Pilot](#) an ongoing program.
9. Restoring work rights to asylum seekers on Bridging Visa E affected by the 45-day rule.

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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

10. Greater support for alternatives to detention.
11. Increasing Australian funding for UNHCR.
12. Positive engagement with the region on protection issues, with regional arrangements reflecting UNHCR's [10 Point Plan of Action](#).

On the following day, RCOA participated in the half-yearly DIAC-NGO Dialogue on Humanitarian Issues. This brought together representatives of 20 organisations with the senior DIAC staff responsible for policy on the refugee and humanitarian program, settlement, onshore protection, compliance and detention. Again, RCOA raised dozens of issues, based on feedback gathered over recent months.

We are currently preparing a summary of the main issues discussed at the ministerial meeting and DIAC-NGO dialogue for distribution to RCOA members.

In the week leading up to Easter, RCOA will join A Just Australia and five other organisations in meetings in Canberra with a variety of MPs and Senators to draw their attention to the issues raised with the Minister, as part of a strategy of building constructive dialogue with members of the new Parliament.

Immigration Minister's comments to Senate Estimates hearing

On February 19, 2008, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee held an Estimates hearing on immigration matters. The transcript of the hearing gives some indications of the thinking of Senator Evans on a variety of policy matters. RCOA has edited the transcript of the Senate committee discussion, reorganising it into a series of topics relevant to refugee policy. It can be viewed at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html#minister>

Submissions on Job Network and Job Capacity Assessments

With new Federal Government Ministers seeking public feedback on a variety of matters, RCOA has responded to requests for submissions on the Job Network (from Employment Participation Minister Brendan O'Connor) and the Job Capacity Assessment system (from Human Services Minister, Senator Joe Ludwig). The two RCOA submissions, which put forward concerns raised in our recent community consultations, can be viewed at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/submissions.html>

Join the Austcare campaign to ban cluster bombs

Cluster bombs have been used in at least 30 countries worldwide. They are hard to control and don't distinguish between those fighting and innocent men, women and children. Unexploded bomblets can sit partially buried amongst crops or hanging in trees for many years. Those who disturb them and survive often lose their limbs or their eyesight. Around two thirds of cluster bomb casualties are injured while undertaking their normal daily activities; one third of these are children. Austcare is encouraging Australians to support a petition to be sent to the Australian Government. The petition can be found at <http://www.austcare.org.au/get-involved/campaigns/help-ban-cluster-munitions/petition-page.aspx>

Refugee Week poster competition

Last month, RCOA invited people to submit photographs and artwork suitable to illustrate the theme "A Place to Call Home" on the 2008 Refugee Week poster. From the many entries received, a panel chose a photograph submitted by photographer Cassandra Mathie, a happy and warm image of the Dut family at home in Brisbane. The poster will be available in April. For information about Refugee Week (June 15-22, 2008), see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/refugeeweek.html>

You can support RCOA's constructive advocacy

As a non-profit organisation with no core funding, RCOA relies on public support to continue its important work in advocating with and for refugees. To support RCOA through membership or a tax-deductible donation, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/index.html>

COMING EVENTS

Friday 29 February to Thursday 6 March – Melbourne

Like Flowers in the Morning: Exhibition

This photographic exhibition showcases the 'My New Aussie Mate' program run by Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre. The program partners new migrants and refugees with an Australian-born friend to help ease the transition to life in a new community.

Venue: Northcote Town Hall, Studio TwO, 189 High Street, Northcote

Details: Open from 10am to 3pm until Thursday 6 March.

Thursday 6 March – Sydney

Film: Bomb Harvest. Set in Laos, this documentary trails the work of Australian Laith Stevens, who teaches the dangerous art of bomb detonation and disposal. This special screening of the limited release feature length documentary will be followed by a discussion with the filmmakers.

Venue: Dendy Opera Quays (Circular Quay, Macquarie Street side)

Details: 6.30pm for 7pm start; \$25 (\$20 UNAA Member/Concession) includes drinks and canapes on arrival. RSVP to Danita Matusch editor@unaansw.org.au or call (02) 9212 0998 or 0415 410 506

Saturday 8 March – Darwin

International Women's Day Dinner

Coordinated by the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory and the NT Anti-Discrimination Board

Venue: Italian Club, 219 Abala Rd, Marrara

Details: 6pm to 12am. Tickets \$25. Call Bebelyn on 07 8945 9122 for all enquiries.

Sunday 9 March – Brisbane

First Amnesty International Film Festival

Venue: Metro Arts Building, 109 Edward Street Brisbane

Details: from 11am until late; Tickets are available at the door prior to each screening. For further information, visit: <http://qld.amnesty.org.au/>

Monday 10 March – Sydney

Sudanese Community Awareness Night: including photographic exhibition and performances

Venue: Bowman Hall, Campbell St, Blacktown

Details: 3.00pm to 8.00pm. For further information contact: Faustino Aboka on 0432 369 338 or equatoriacommunity@yahoo.com

Monday 10 March – Sydney

Conference: Western Sydney Kaleidoscope

Cross cultural stories and experiences of raising happy, healthy and resilient children and young adults.

Venue: Holroyd Centre, 17 Miller Street, Merrylands

Details: 9.30am to 5pm. Cost is \$20 per person. RSVP by 15 February

For further information and registration, contact Amrit Versha on 0423 793 344

Friday 14 March – Melbourne

Lecture: Conflict and Culture: Cultures of war, cultures of peace with Professor Anthony Marsella

Venue: Sunderland Theatre, Medical Building, University of Melbourne

Details: 2.15pm to 4pm. RSVP essential to Sharon Fong - wtfong@unimelb.edu.au or (03) 8344 6376

Friday 14 March – Melbourne

Symposium: Pathways to Understanding Somali Communities in Australia

Venue: Social Sciences, Room 232, Level 2, La Trobe University, Bundoora

Details: 9.00am to 4.30pm. For information, call Yusuf Omar (03) 9479 3268 or 0421 785 194.

Saturday 15 March – Sydney

Concert: "Music Talks Peace" Moving Forward Together – Uniting Voices of the Middle East

Venue: Seymour Theatre Centre

Details: 8pm. For further information and tickets, visit www.musictalkspeace.org

Sunday 16 March – Adelaide

Multicultural Youth Music and Cultural Festival

Venue: Light Square, Adelaide CBD

Details: from 11am. For further information, visit www.mysa.com.au

Monday 17 March to Sunday 23 March - Victoria

CULTURAL DIVERSITY WEEK

For all events and details, visit: www.culturaldiversity.vic.gov.au/

Wednesday 19 to Friday 28 March – Sydney

Harmony Day 2008 – Photography Competition and Exhibition

Supported by Sydney Multicultural Community Services and Randwick City Council, this exhibition aims to showcase originality and expression of culture among community members of Inner and Eastern Sydney.

Venue: Exhibition Launch, 19 March, Bowen Library, Maroubra

Details: For entry forms and further details, contact Yasmine Loupis on (02) 9663 3922.

Friday 21 March – National

HARMONY DAY

For all details, activities and events, visit: <http://www.harmony.gov.au>

Tuesday 25 March – Melbourne

Employment Discrimination Forum: Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria

Venue: Statewide Resources Centre, Level 2, 150 Palmerston Street

Details: 12pm to 4pm. For information and bookings contact: Molly Peterson on (03) 3949 4122.

Sunday 30 March – Sydney

Sydney Royal Easter Show – Day of Cultures: Did You Know? Exhibition

A unique opportunity for community groups and organisations to showcase their culture and their work.

Details: For information, contact Fadi Nemme, Strategic Project Officer, NSW Community Relations Commission on (02) 8255 6725 or fadi.nemme@crc.nsw.gov.au

Tuesday 1 April – Melbourne

Public Lecture and Forum: Defending Human Rights by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Human Rights Defenders, Ms Hina Jilani.

Venue: Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne, 185 Pelham St, Carlton

Details: 6pm - refreshments, 6.30pm-7.30pm – Lecture. RSVP to human-rights@unimelb.edu.au

Sunday 4 May – National

Final date for submission of entries to the 2008 Triumphant Refugee Film Festival

The films will be screened at a special event on 19 June to celebrate Refugee Week.

For all entry details visit: www.triumphant.org.au

Thursday 29 and Friday 30 May, 2008

Conference – Best Practices for Refugee Status Determination 2008 - Italy

Venue: Monash University, Prato Centre, Italy. Early bird registration closes 7 March.

Details: For information and registration forms visit: www.conorg.com.au/conferences2008/index.html

Friday 30 May – Sydney

Art for Refugees Exhibition and Sale

Organised by the Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) team at the University of Western Sydney, this exhibition will raise money for Strategic Community Assistance to Refugee Families (SCARF) projects. The organisers are also looking for artists to exhibit their paintings, sculpture, photography, textiles, woodwork or ceramics.

Venue: Ian Turbott Building, University of Western Sydney, Parramatta Campus

For information visit: <http://www.scarf1.org.au/> or contact Stephanie Borg 15931476@uws.edu.au

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Australian Red Cross Survey: Australian Compassion

To coincide with the launch of the Red Cross Calling Appeal on March 1, the Australian Red Cross have released the results of a survey of 1215 Australians to assess perceptions about which vulnerable groups in the community need greater levels of support and assistance. With 89% feeling that elderly people living alone had the greatest need, 57% believed that indigenous Australians needed more support and only 39% felt refugees and asylum seekers needed more help. For a full copy of the survey visit: <http://www.redcross.org.au/media/RedCrossSurveyReport.pdf>

Asylum Seekers in Greece: Paper by Amnesty International Australia

This article, published by Amnesty International Australia on 28 February, highlights the plight of asylum seekers in Greece who are subject to immigration detention without legal rights and safeguards. Amnesty reports that asylum seekers are often interviewed without an interpreter or lawyer present and while they may not be forcibly returned their claims are not dealt with in a prompt and fair manner. For the full article, visit: <http://action.amnesty.org.au/news/comments/9711/>

Raising Children in Australia: Information Kit and DVD

Produced by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, the kit provides a resource for service providers and a DVD for parents from African backgrounds. The DVD is in English, Arabic, Amharic, Tigrinya, Somali, Dinka, Nuer, Kirundi, Kiswahili, Liberian English and Krio. A booklet on key services for parents and their young children also accompanies the DVD. For further information about the kit and how to obtain the DVD, visit: http://www.survivorsvic.org.au/serviceinn_parenting.php

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)

Bigger say for courts on migrants

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has flagged possible changes to the process of Ministerial intervention following comments made to Senate Estimates recently that he was concerned about the level of discretionary power he held as Minister. Senator Evans has said he supports "independent, transparent and appealable decision making in the resolution of immigration matters." In 2006-07, more than 4000 requests for Ministerial intervention were received by the Department. Senator Evans said many applicants were "using the process of ministerial intervention not only to overcome the decisions taken elsewhere but also to delay their removal from Australia." (*The Age*, 1 March)

Employment outcomes improving for migrant communities

The latest data from the ABS labour force survey points to a changing trend in the unemployment rates of migrant communities, particularly those from English-speaking countries. While the unemployment rate for Vietnamese migrants has dropped dramatically from 14.1% in January 2002 to 4.6% last month, rates for North African and Middle Eastern migrants remains higher than other migrant groups at 12.2%. (*The Australian*, 28 February)

Nauru and Australia hold talks on future relations

Talks have been held between Nauruan Foreign Affairs and Finance Minister, Dr. Kieren Keke, and the Rudd Government on the future of Australian development aid to Nauru. The meeting also highlighted many of the advances made by the Nauruan Government in relation to transparency and good governance. (*Pacific Magazine*, 28 February)

No opposition to closure of offshore detention centres

Federal Opposition Justice spokesperson, Christopher Pyne has said the Liberal Party will not oppose the Government's move to close offshore detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island, but called on the Government to maintain the excision of thousands of islands from Australia's migration zone. (*News.com*, 24 February)

Ombudsman's report highlights cases of long-term detainees

A recent report from the Commonwealth Ombudsman highlights 12 cases of long-term detainees for whom a resolution to their cases or possible release has been problematic. Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has described these as 'legacy cases' from the previous Government and that he has requested advice from the Department of Immigration as to how these cases can be resolved quickly and ways to reduce the number of detainees and the time spent in detention. (*The Age*, 23 February)

Government denies backflip on island excision

Labor has been accused of going back on an earlier promise to reverse the excision of thousands of islands from Australia's migration zone. At the 2007 Labor Conference, the then Immigration

spokesperson Tony Burke said that the Howard Government's excision of the islands was "crazy" and Labor would reverse the policy. References to these comments have since been removed from Tony Burke's speech on the ALP website and refugee advocacy groups are now accusing Immigration Minister Chris Evans of undermining his party's own policies. (*Northern Territory News, 21 February*)

I should not play God: Immigration Minister

Senator Chris Evans has announced he has concerns about the level of discretionary power he has as a Minister with intervening on individual cases. He stated his concerns are also "because of the lack of transparency and accountability for those decisions and the lack in some cases of any appeal rights against those decisions." Senator Evans has appointed Elizabeth Proust to conduct a review of the Ministerial powers contained in the Migration Act. President of the Refugee Council of Australia, John Gibson has welcomed the review saying the issue of Ministerial discretion has been of concern for many years. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 20 February*)

Visa overhaul runs into stumbling block

Labor's pre-election promise to abolish the Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) regime has not been as straightforward to achieve, Immigration Minister Chris Evans said. In response to questions during Senate estimates hearings, Minister Evans has said the Department of Immigration is looking at a number of issues including what will take the place of TPVs and how the changes will affect other visa categories. When asked to provide a timetable for the changes, Senator Evans was unable to do so. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 19 February*)

Government scuttles refugee swap with US

Immigration Minister Senator Chris Evans has told the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee that a plan to swap Cuban and Haitian refugees from the US with asylum seekers intercepted en route to Australia has been abandoned. The plan was originally announced April by former Minister Kevin Andrews. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 19 February*)

Refugee refusal echoes 'Tampa election' rhetoric - Opinion

Immigration lawyer and former director of Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, Kerry Murphy examines the recent case of convicted people-smuggler Ali Al Jenabi who has been refused a protection visa, but will remain in Australia until it is safe to return to Iraq. Murphy discusses the ongoing difficulties this decision will bring in the future for both the Government and Mr Al Jenabi. (*Eureka Street, 19 February*)

Apology ordered for former detainee

Commonwealth Ombudsman John McMillan has ordered the Immigration Department to apologise to a former detainee for the failure to release video footage which allegedly shows the detainee suffering physical abuse. The footage is at the centre of a claim against Australasian Correctional Management, the private company which ran Australia's immigration detention centres in 2004. The Ombudsman's most recent report discusses 25 cases of long-term detainees, 19 of which are suffering depressive illnesses. (*The Age, 18 February*)

Rudd Government scraps controversial \$20m citizenship test campaign

The advertising campaign linked to the citizenship test introduced by the former Howard Government will be scrapped as part of cost-saving measures. The Rudd Government will review the test but a spokesperson for Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner has said the test and values statement will remain. (*Herald Sun, 18 February*)

Refugee sues for detention 'abuse'

A second Iranian refugee is suing the Commonwealth of Australia for the psychological damage and physical abuse suffered while in immigration detention. Last month, the NSW Supreme Court awarded \$800,000 to another Iranian refugee for the permanent psychological damage sustained in detention. The Commonwealth has been given until late February to file its defence. (*News.com.au, 16 February*)

Two Iraqi players win visas

Two of the five members of an Iraqi soccer team who disappeared after an Olympic qualifying match last November have reportedly been granted permanent visas to remain in Australia. Two other players

are awaiting decisions on their visa applications and one person has since returned to Iraq. (*ABC Radio Australia, 13 February*)

Timor rebel Alfredo Reinado's widow refused asylum

The widow and children of rebel leader Reinado are awaiting a decision by Immigration Minister Chris Evans regarding their application for ministerial intervention to allow them to remain in Australia. Living in Perth since 2006, Mrs Reinado's application for asylum was refused by the former Government in May 2007. (*Perth Now, 13 February*)