



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

30 September 2009

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

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NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

Complementary Protection legislation introduced

After more than eight years of lobbying by RCOA and other agencies, the Australian Parliament is reviewing legislation to introduce a system of complementary protection, to consider the needs of people facing persecution on grounds which fall outside the Refugee Convention but are included in other human rights treaties. The Refugee Convention restricts protection to people facing persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Under current arrangements, there is no clear process for people who may face persecution, torture or death on other grounds – other than to seek the intervention of the Immigration Minister after all other avenues have failed. On September 7, the Rudd Government introduced the *Migration Amendment (Complementary Protection) Bill 2009*, to address Australia's responsibilities under the Convention Against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. RCOA has written to all Federal MPs and Senators, encouraging them to support the Bill. Our letter is at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html#cp>

The Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee is conducting an inquiry into the Bill. RCOA has lodged a submission, expressing support for the Bill and outlining some recommended improvements.

Our submission is at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/submissions.html>

Information about the Senate Committee inquiry, including all public submissions can be found at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/migration_complementary/index.htm

Government foreshadows changes to refugee settlement services

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson, has foreshadowed changes to on-arrival refugee settlement services, following recent national consultations about the future of the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS). Speaking in Brisbane, Mr Ferguson said IHSS was good at meeting immediate needs but less successful at creating sustainable settlement outcomes. He said the Government was considering a new settlement framework, "to provide a continuum from offshore to onshore to deliver long-term sustainable settlement outcomes". "We are considering wholesale improvements in the way in which we address our clients' immediate and longer-term settlement needs, particularly accommodation, pathways to education, training and employment and connections with other settlement and community services," he said. Mr Ferguson's speech is at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/speeches/2009/lf090925.htm>

Immigration detention debts abolished

On September 8, the Australian Senate passed the Migration Amendment (Abolishing Detention Debt) Bill, ending months of political debate about the policy of charging people for their time in immigration detention centres. The policy was introduced by the Keating Labor Government in 1992, maintained by the Howard Coalition Government and had proven to be both highly ineffective and heartless. It failed in its stated goal of recovering costs but still managed to put a heavy burden on many people ultimately given residency in Australia. As a deterrent, it also failed, as the policy was largely unknown internationally or domestically. The legislation passed with the support of Labor, Greens, Independent

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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

and Family First Senators and Victorian Liberal Senator Judith Troeth. In June, four Liberal MPs also supported the legislation in the House of Representatives. To view RCOA's statement on the issue, see http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2009/090908_Detention_debt_abolition.pdf

Attempt to reverse abolition of '45 day rule' falls

Also on September 8, the Senate rejected a Liberal Party motion to disallow changes to asylum seekers' access to employment and Medicare services. Senator Troeth joined Labor and crossbench Senators in opposing the motion. New regulations introduced by Immigration Minister Chris Evans from July 1 replaced the old "45 day rule" with a system which allows more categories of asylum seekers who comply with the Migration Act to support themselves and have access to basic health care while their status is resolved.

Citizenship test exemption granted to people affected by torture and trauma

People who have a "permanent or enduring physical or mental incapacity" will, from November 9, be exempted from the Australian Citizenship Test, following the passage of the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Test Review and Other Measures) Bill through the Australian Parliament. Aimed primarily at providing a citizenship pathway for people who have suffered torture and trauma, particularly refugee and humanitarian entrants, this section of the Bill was amended following debate within the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. The Bill originally provided for an exemption for people who had "suffered torture and trauma outside Australia". The Coalition opposed this, suggesting in the Senate Committee's report that the definition of trauma was so vague "it is almost meaningless and could open the floodgates". The Greens argued (ultimately successfully) that the exemption be expanded to include people who have suffered significant trauma while in Australia, a position also put forward in the RCOA submission to the Committee. The Minister's explanation of the legislation is at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09088.htm> Information on the Senate Committee inquiry into the legislation, including the committee's report, can be found at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/citizenship/index.htm

Iraq and Burma lead source countries for refugees in 2008-09

The Australian Government achieved its target of issuing 13,500 Refugee and Humanitarian visas in 2008-09. In all, 13,507 visas were granted – 11,010 offshore Refugee and Humanitarian visas and 2,497 onshore Protection visas. For the offshore program, visa grants were divided evenly between Africa, Asia and the Middle East (including south-west Asia), with 33 per cent each. The 10 leading source countries for offshore Refugee and Humanitarian visas were: Iraq 2,874; Burma 2,412; Afghanistan 847; Sudan 631; Bhutan 616; Ethiopia 478; Democratic Republic of Congo 463; Somalia 456; Liberia 387; and Sierra Leone 363. The Refugee and Humanitarian Program quota for 2010 is 13,750 places. To view the public statement from Immigration Minister Chris Evans, see <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2009/ce09079.htm>

RCOA examines post-compulsory education and training pathways for refugee youth

With financial assistance from the NSW Minister for Youth, Graham West, RCOA is conducting research into post-compulsory education and training pathways for young people of refugee background. While this research is focusing on NSW, we are looking at different 'models of excellence' from across Australia and identifying gaps and recommendations through consultation with key stakeholders. In the first stage of this research, we looked at current research on this issue, drawing together an annotated bibliography of relevant material. This bibliography, links to other research on refugee youth issues and information on our research can be found at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/youth.html>

Ministers respond to RCOA's plea for action on Sri Lanka crisis

The Ministers for Immigration and Foreign Affairs have responded to RCOA's letter in June about the crisis in Sri Lanka. In his response, Immigration Minister Chris Evans outlines the Government's attitude to granting Humanitarian visas to Sri Lankan citizens affected by the crisis and to the return of Sri Lankans whose claims for asylum have failed. Foreign Affairs Minister Stephen Smith outlines the Government's diplomatic and humanitarian aid responses to the crisis. The Minister's letters and RCOA's original letter can be viewed at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html#srilanka>

ALP releases its national platform

In our previous bulletin, we noted that the Australian Labor Party, at its biennial national conference, had reiterated its support for the policy of excising offshore islands from the Australian migration zone. The ALP has now released the platform approved at the conference, which will form the basis of the party's policies for the 2010 Federal election. The sections on immigration policy, citizenship and cultural diversity can be found at http://www.alp.org.au/platform/chapter_07.php#7migration

COMING EVENTS

Wednesday September 30 2009 – Sydney

Briefing with reporter Eric Campbell

Award-winning ABC Television reporter Eric Campbell has recently returned from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and will join Australia for UNHCR to talk about the country and its people, now facing the deadliest conflict since World War II.

Details: 6pm-8pm; Level 3, Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, 280 Pitt St, Sydney (between Park St and Bathurst St); this special briefing will be free of charge, but RSVP essential to Helie Fitzgerald - hfitzgerald@australiaforunhcr.org.au or (02) 9262 5377.

Thursday October 1 2009 – Sydney

Threat and Menace: Free Public Lecture on Labour Trafficking at UTS

With global migration rising alongside economic downturn, how can Australia respond to the emerging issue of forced labour? In this public lecture, anti-slavery campaigner Associate Professor Jennifer Burn will discuss the need for Australia to make forced labour a stand-alone criminal offence. With the Hon Michael Kirby, former Justice of the High Court.

Details: 6pm drinks for 6.30pm start; UTS University Hall, 745 Harris Street Ultimo; RSVP to robert.button@uts.edu.au by 29 September.

Saturday 3 October to Sunday 11 October – Melbourne

Refugee Camp In Your City

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) will erect a Refugee Camp in Melbourne to show what life is like for refugees and displaced people around the world.

Details: Treasury Gardens, Melbourne; 9am – 5pm daily; free; tours last for 45 mins; go to www.refugeecamp.msf.org.au for more info.

Wednesday October 7 – Sydney

Movie Night fundraiser to benefit the Asylum Seeker Centre of NSW

The evening will include a screening of *Mao's Last Dancer*.

Details: 8.30PM; \$20 admission; Cremorne Orpheum, 380 Military Road, Cremorne; to RSVP, pay or enquiry, please contact Ros Bradley by Saturday 3 October on 0410 690 246 or rsbrad99@bigpond.net.au

9 to 11 October – Wollongong NSW

ART4refugees

A charity art show with all proceeds directly supporting the work of SCARF (Strategic Community Assistance for Refugee Families) Opening night 9 October; Illawarra Grammar School.

Information: <http://www.art4refugees.org.au/>

Sunday, October 11 2009 – Tasmania

The official launch of Tasmanian African Youth Association Inc

Details: 2:30 pm; Benjafield Park, 7 Gormanston Road, Moonah, TAS; please RSVP by October 5, 2009 to Jennifer Kabangu on jenniferkabangu@yahoo.com

Sunday, October 11 2009 – Adelaide

Debate: Australia Needs a Federal Bill of Rights

Julian Burnside AO QC, senior counsel for Liberty in Victoria in the Tampa litigation, will argue in favour of a Federal Bill. Jeremy Moore, counsel for Mr Al-Kateb in *Al-Kateb v Godwin* (2004), is not convinced Australia needs a Federal Bill. The University of Adelaide's Gabrielle Appleby will introduce and moderate the discussion and debate.

Details: 1:45pm for a 2pm start; Elder Hall, North Terrace, University of Adelaide; enquiries: Emma Riggs on 0400 518 670 or emma.riggs@gmail.com. This is a free event and supported by Finlaysons.

Thursday 15 October 2009 – Melbourne

Free Public Lectures: "War reporting, International humanitarian law and the legacy of Balibo"

Journalist and author Tony Maniaty covered the conflict in East Timor in 1975, was European correspondent for SBS's Dateline, Executive Producer of ABC's The 7.30 Report and Senior Advisor, Policy and Program Development, for ABC News and Current Affairs. His latest book is Shooting Balibo: Blood and Memory in East Timor and he was a consultant on the recent movie Balibo.

Details: Lecture 6pm to 7pm, light refreshments until 7.30pm; Monash University Law Chambers, 472 Bourke Street, Melbourne; RSVP: castan.centre@law.monash.edu.au or phone (03) 9905 3327; for further details, visit <http://www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre/events/2009/maniaty-lecture.html>

Friday October 16 2009 – Melbourne

Fitzroy Learning Network Trivia Night Fundraiser

Join FLN for its Trivia Night fundraiser, with the theme "Between the Covers: Books and Music, what's between your covers?"

Details: 7pm; Fitzroy Bowling Club, 578 Brunswick St, North Fitzroy; entry \$15/person and teams up to 10 people; sausage sizzle and salad bar for \$15/head or BYO food (no kitchen or heating up facilities); drinks at club prices. RSVP (03) 9417 2897 or email admin@fitzroylearningnetwork.org.au.

Saturday October 17 2009 – Melbourne

Multicultural Hub first birthday celebration

The Multicultural Hub is owned by the City of Melbourne and is managed by the Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES). Join them on Saturday, 17 October to celebrate a fantastic first year for the Multicultural Hub. Celebrations will include performances, a craft market and a birthday cake. enquiries@multiculturalhub.com.au

Thursday 22 October 2009 – Melbourne

Cultural awareness and communication: Communities from Iraqi and Burmese background

Join Eugenia Georgopoulos from the Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health (CEH), along with Dr Salma Al-Khudairi of Australian Iraqi Forum and Joseph Herrech, Senior Constable Victoria Police for the forum on working with emerging communities.

Details: Registration from 8:45am (allow time for parking) 9am-12pm; Dandenong Hospital, Lecture Theatre, David Street, Dandenong; free event; RSVP by 9 October 2009 to Kanthi Cumine on (03) 9239 5100 or Kanthi.cumine@cgd.vic.gov.au, Margie Pickersgill on (03) 8543 1237 or Margie.pickersgill@centrelink.gov.au

Thursday and Friday 29-30 October 2009 – Shepparton, Victoria

FECCA Conference

The 2009 FECCA Conference "Strengthening Multiculturalism and Building Social Inclusion" will include the topics: Human Rights for Ethnic and Religious Minorities; Multicultural Youth: Identity and Access; Regional Settlement; and Social Inclusion for New and Emerging Communities. Confirmed speakers include: Senator Chris Evans, Minister for Immigration and Citizenship; Senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector; John Gibson, President, RCOA; Clare Martin, CEO, ACOSS; Shaun Brown, Managing Director, SBS.

Details: Eastbank Centre, Shepparton, Victoria; Conference registration costs range from \$110 to \$440 depending on the package; visit www.fecca.org.au or call (02) 6282 5755.

Thursday and Friday 19-20 November 2009

International Conference on 'Migration, Citizenship and Intercultural Relations'

This Conference proposes to examine outcomes of migration and immigration as essential dimensions for contextualizing discussions about national identity, intercultural relations and citizenship, and the formation and representation of cultural identity.

Venue: Deakin University (Melbourne Campus at Burwood)

Details: <http://www.deakin.edu.au/arts-ed/icg/events/conf-2009.php>

Thursday to Wednesday 3-9 December 2009 - Melbourne

Parliament of the World's Religions

The world's largest and most diverse interfaith gathering with over 500 inspiring programs and many inspirational leaders including His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Details: www.parliamentofreligions.org or 1300 852 156

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Out of Africa and Into Court: the Legal Problems of African Refugees

The Footscray Community Legal Centre has produced this report that examines the common legal problems that Refugees and humanitarian arrivals from Africa are likely to encounter in their first five years after they arrive in Australia, identifies the structural issues that give rise to recurring legal problems and makes recommendations accordingly.

http://www.communitylaw.org.au/footscray/cb_pages/images/African%20Legal%20service%20Report%20Final.pdf

The Working with Refugee Families Project

This report from the Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia outlines the findings of a three stage research project designed to examine why recently arrived families from refugee backgrounds are presenting to the child protection system and to identify culturally appropriate strategies and models for intervention. The report is now available at

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/childprotection/documents/RefugeeReport.pdf>

Perceptions of Multiculturalism and Security in Victoria

This report, produced by Monash University for the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victoria, was prepared by Pete Lentini, Anna Halafoff and Ela Ogru from the Global Terrorism Research Centre. A full version of Perceptions of Multiculturalism and Security in Victoria is available at www.arts.monash.edu.au/psi/perceptions-report.pdf

A Case for Justice: Position Paper on the Legal Process of Seeking Asylum in Australia

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre has produced a position paper on the legal process for asylum seekers in Australia. The paper explores the processes and practices in the refugee determination system and cites a number of real-life case studies to illustrate successes and difficulties. The paper can be found at <http://www.asrc.org.au/uploads/File/A%20case%20for%20justice.pdf>

This is my home: report by NEDA

This report by the National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) explores the meaning of belonging, home and social connection for people from non-English speaking backgrounds with a disability. It is based on focus groups conducted earlier this year in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. The report highlights the importance of faith and friendship in understanding belonging and social connection, and emphasises the role of discrimination and poor responsiveness of support agencies in generating exclusion. To access the report, visit http://www.neda.org.au/page/cultural_and_linguistic_inclusion.html.

Renting – What You Need to Know

Renting – what you need to know was produced by the Office of Fair Trading to help address the renting issues faced by newly-arrived migrants and refugees in NSW by introducing them to their rights and responsibilities as tenants. This educational resource is designed to help community workers and educators, service providers and multilingual radio program presenters educate and provide awareness on renting and tenancy rights issues. For copies, email Neeth.Costa@oft.commerce.nsw.gov.au or call (02) 9619 8705.

The two papers by Eurasyllum on the protection of the rights of children

On behalf of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Eurasyllum prepared two papers on the rights of children. The purpose of both papers was to identify, through desk research, interviews and case studies, some of the key policy interventions, legal measures and administrative practices that can best contribute to the protection of the rights and special needs of trafficked children, and irregular immigrant minors and asylum seeking children, in the EU.

"The protection of the rights and special needs of irregular immigrant minors and asylum seeking children" is at:

http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA_Thematic_IMMIGRANT_AND_ASYLUM.pdf

"The protection of the rights and special needs of trafficked children" is at:

http://www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA_Thematic_TRAFFICKED_CHILDREN.pdf

The Australian Human Rights Commission new E-forum on human rights

A partnership between the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Institute for Cultural Diversity has led to the development of a new E-Forum on human rights. www.culturaldiversity.net.au.

OPPORTUNITIES

Now until 2 October 2009 – National Human Rights Medals and Awards

The Australian Human Rights Commission's Human Rights Medals and Awards recognise the often extraordinary contribution to Australian society of a wide variety of men and women committed to issues of human rights, social justice and equality; Nominations are being accepted for the Human Rights Medals, Young People's Human Rights Medal and seven award categories: Law, Community (Organisation), Community (Individual), Literature (non-fiction), Print Media, Television and Radio. For more information, visit www.humanrights.gov.au/hr_awards.

Now until October 9 (first in first served basis) – Victoria 3AW Variety Bike Program

Variety, the children's charity, is once again pleased to offer bikes to disadvantaged Victorian children in time for Christmas. This is a result of the very successful 3AW Variety Radiothon held earlier this year during which listeners were invited to donate money for bikes and helmets and also be given the opportunity to hand over their wonderful gift to the recipients.

Details: Contact the Variety office on (03) 8698 3900 or see the website at www.varietyvic.org.au

Now until 21 October 2009 – National Settlement Grants Program 2010-11 funding round opens

The new DIAC funding round is now open. The SGP provides funding to organisations and local councils for projects aimed at assisting eligible SGP clients to become self-reliant and participate equitably in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival. Enquiries relating to the program can also be directed to the Settlement Grants Program Helpdesk on 1800 453 004. Closing date is: **5pm AEST, Wednesday 21 October 2009**. Further information is at:

<http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/delivering-assistance/settlement-grants/>.

UNSW Centre for Refugee Research training courses

Community Consultations Using Reciprocal Research will be run as a "Training of Trainers", so participants will take part in the full process, and spend time analysing, exploring and practicing the skills needed to use the technique.

Details: Tuesday and Wednesday 3-4 November 2009

Responding to Refugee Women and Girls at Risk: From Asylum to Australia provides participants with an understanding of the extent and nature of risks experienced by refugee women and girls during displacement, in camps, urban refugee settings and resettlement.

Details: Thursday and Friday 5-6 November 2009

Both courses are \$330. Further information: Rebecca Eckert, Research Associate Centre for Refugee Research, University of NSW on (02) 9385 1961 by 23 October 2009.

Employment and Volunteering opportunities

For employment and volunteering opportunities with RCOA member organisations, please visit <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/index.html>

REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

A busy person's digest of some recent 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)

UN envoy arrives in Sri Lanka

The United Nations' top envoy for refugees has met with Sri Lankan authorities to discuss the plight of over 250,000 war-displaced civilians held in camps in the north. Walter Kalin, the UN secretary general's envoy for refugee rights, arrived late Wednesday and will also tour the camps in the island's north before leaving on Sunday, UN and local officials said. Mr Kalin's visit comes as Sri Lanka once again ruled out any foreign probe into the island's rights record amid mounting international calls for war crimes investigations. (*Radio Australia News, 25 September*)

Man gives evidence of the moments before the explosion on Ashmore Reef

Sazdali Salman gave evidence as part of a committal hearing for the two Indonesian men charged with smuggling the 47 Afghan refugees on board the boat that exploded off of Ashmore Reef in April. Mr Salman said the crew and passengers were given a document by Australian Navy officers telling them they would have to go back to Indonesia. "Some Afghani passengers started to say, 'Do not send us back to Indonesia'," he said. "I was afraid that if we returned to Indonesia on this boat it would sink. Other Afghani passengers also said they were afraid and thought that they would drown". The two Indonesian crew members have indicated they will plead guilty in the NT Supreme Court to the charge of illegally bringing more than five people into Australia. (*Northern Territory News, 25 September*)

Identities revealed of the five men who lost their lives

Police revealed the identities of three people whose bodies were recovered after the explosion of the boat off of Ashmore Reef on April 16th. They are Mohammad Ali Ayubi, 45, Muzafar Ali Safarali, 45, and Mohammed Amini Zamen, 38, all from Afghanistan. The identity of the two people whose bodies were not recovered are Awaz Nader, 50, and Baquer Husani, 26, also from Afghanistan. (*Northern Territory News, 25 September*)

Government examines reopening of detention centres

Plans are being drawn up to use Defence bases and possibly re-open detention centres to house an expected surge in asylum seekers. The Rudd Government has formed a high-level task force to review options for alternative accommodation. Government sources suggested that former detention facilities at Baxter, Port Augusta, and Woomera could be re-opened. The Defence Department confirmed it had been approached to draw up plans to house asylum seekers. (*Adelaide Advertiser, 25 September*)

New task force to tackle people smuggling

An Australian-trained task force has begun work in Indonesia to try and catch those responsible for people smuggling. The Federal Government has funded the \$15 million initiative, which has seen 145 Indonesian officers trained and equipped by Australian Federal Police. The new task force has been scattered throughout Indonesia at 12 key people smuggling posts. (*ABC News Online, 24 September*)

New citizenship test focuses on rights and responsibilities

Immigration Minister Chris Evans unveiled a new citizenship test which he says helps people understand their rights and responsibilities instead of focusing on "irrelevant bits of Australiana". Prospective citizens who are still suffering from the effects of torture and trauma will also be exempt from the test, and those struggling to pass will be given more help through training courses. Last year the Government took the decision to dump questions about popular culture and famous sporting identities such as Don Bradman. Mr Evans says the test will now focus on what citizens should know as part of their civic duties. (*ABC News Online, 17 September*)

Indonesia government asylum seeker payoffs questioned

An Indonesian International Relations expert is questioning the Indonesian government's attempts to encourage Afghan asylum seekers to return home by offering them financial inducements. He says greater effort must be made to ensure the asylum-seekers do not return to danger or persecution in their homeland. (*ABC Radio Australia, 15 September*)

Afghans sent back to war zone

Hundreds of Afghan asylum seekers caught in Indonesia as they sought to reach Australia have been sent back to their war-ravaged homeland in the past few months after being offered a financial inducement and allegedly told they have next to no chance of being resettled in another country. Indonesia's director for immigration law enforcement, Muchdor, said 376 asylum seekers - almost all of them Afghans - had been repatriated recently, flown to Dubai and then Kabul under a program managed by the Jakarta office of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Australia provides funding for the IOM in Indonesia, including its repatriation programs. It also funds the detention centres that hold asylum seekers in Indonesia. (*The Age*, 12 September)

Introduction of Complementary Protection legislation to protect victims of torture

Australia is closing a loophole so protection visas can be granted to potential victims of torture or inhumane treatment who currently do not qualify. Women at risk of genital mutilation and so-called "honour killing" if returned to their home countries are among those who may be considered under the new complementary protection provisions. Those at risk of other forms of torture or death are also covered. Victims often do not get visas under the UN definition of a refugee, that is, not on the basis of religion, race, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The new provisions will formalise access to a visa that is currently left to ministerial discretion. (*ABC News*, 9 September)

Liberal defies party on refugees twice

Liberal Victorian Senator Judith Troeth crossed the floor to vote for the Government's bill to scrap immigration detention debt. She also supported the Government's decision to remove a rule giving new refugees 45 days to apply for work and access to Medicare. "Let's grasp a new opportunity to understand the difference between sending the wrong message to those who truly wish us harm, and the right message to those who need our help," Senator Troeth said. "Australia does not have to choose between strong secure borders and compassion for those seeking liberty and freedom. We can have both. I know personally of newly arrived citizens who are living in sheds in Melbourne, dependent on food parcels from churches. That should not happen in a modern, civilized country like this," she said. Senator Troeth said she was morally unable to support the Opposition's move to block the changes. (*ABC News Online*, 8 September)

Federal-State cooperation to put greater focus on refugee services

The Western Australian and Federal governments have pledged to work more closely together to improve services for refugees across WA. A particular focus will be on assisting 3500 African humanitarian migrants who have settled in central Perth over the past 10 years. Two recent state government reports identify key areas requiring improvement as housing, education and training, mental and physical health and jobs. They state more should be done to coordinate services, promote cultural diversity in the public sector, and to train public servants in "cultural competency". (*Perth Voice*, 5 September)

Boat blast victims not yet identified as investigation continues

Authorities investigating the fatal blast aboard an asylum seeker boat in April are still struggling to identify the five people killed in the explosion. The incident occurred when the vessel, carrying 47 Afghan asylum seekers and two crew, was waiting to be escorted to Christmas Island after being intercepted the previous day. The coronial inquiry into the blast near Ashmore Reef on April 16 is not expected to begin before February 2010. (*AAP*, 4 September)

Immigration plan considering Australia's needs

The Department of Immigration is preparing a 50-year migration plan to ensure that intakes consider a range of long-term issues such as climate change, water needs and national security. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 September)

New proposed Convention for Persons Displaced by Climate Change

No mechanism in international law exists to deal with people displaced by climate change. Although often referred to as "climate change refugees", they are afforded no protection under the 1951 Convention, since the international legal definition of refugee requires individuals to already be outside

their country of origin. David Hodgkinson, a special counsel with Clayton Utz and editor of the new online service Climate Change Law and Policy in Australia, has proposed a Convention for Persons Displaced by Climate Change. "Climate change refugees represent a particular category of persons which international mechanisms aren't designed to deal with," Hodgkinson says. "Hopefully, this framework will address the problem rather more quickly and effectively than dealing with existing refugee conventions." (*Australian Financial Review*, 4 September)

Christmas Island a more expensive option than the mainland

Immigration Minister Chris Evans has conceded everything done to keep asylum seekers on Christmas Island could be done cheaper on the mainland. He makes no claims the policy of keeping asylum seekers offshore deters people smuggling. "It offers a message about excision and a strong commitment to ensuring people who seek to come to Australia arrive lawfully," Senator Evans said. Staff at the \$400 million North West Point detention centre receive a food and board allowance of \$190 a day on top of wages from a private contractor, G4S. The facility itself was built by the Howard government at roughly 10 times the price of a comparable prison in NSW. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 September)

Academic urges research on asylum seekers

An academic from Charles Sturt University in NSW is urging the Federal Government to do more research into why asylum seekers are heading to Australia. Roslyn Richardson, Researcher of Immigration Policy, suggests spending some research in Indonesia. (*ABC Radio Karratha*, 3 September)

Refugees from Burma begin to return home from China

Burmese refugees were heading home from China on Monday following the end of fighting between government troops and an ethnic militia, but some experts said the unrest could affect Beijing's relations with Burma. On Monday 31 August, hundreds of refugees who have spent at least the past week in China were transported from camps to the border. At least 4,000 refugees had returned to Burma. About 9,000 remained in seven camps set up to house them in tents and makeshift buildings. (*Associated Press*, 3 September)

White refugee sparks race row

Brandon Huntley, an asylum seeker in Canada, claimed he had been persecuted, abused and repeatedly stabbed because he is a white South African. Canada's decision to grant Mr Huntley refugee status because of his colour has drawn accusations of racism from the South African Government. Mr Huntley cited violent crime and racism in his claim, and he told the Canadian immigration and refugee board that he lived in fear of returning to South Africa. He said he had been attacked seven times by black South Africans, including four stabbings. The immigration board found that Mr Huntley's evidence showed "a picture of indifference and inability or unwillingness" from the South African Government to protect white citizens. There was an angry response from South African's governing African National Congress. (*The Age*, 3 September)

Young asylum seekers brought to mainland for proper care

Immigration Minister Chris Evans permitted 10 detained Afghan young people to come to the mainland without visas for faster processing, proper care and to transition into life in Australia. The Government maintains that there has been no change to the policy of processing asylum seekers offshore. Senator Evans said yesterday he had taken the decision to move the boys out of detention on Christmas Island and into alternative detention in Melbourne because "we could care for them better in Melbourne and we'd be able to finish the processing quicker, and provide better support to them". (*The Australian*, 3 September)

China pushes Burma to stabilise rebel region

China says Burma's north east appears to be calm after renewed fighting between Burmese government forces and rebel militia groups. The fighting, which is ostensibly part of an attempt by the military regime to take control of the area ahead of next year's planned elections, has forced tens of thousands of civilians to flee into China's Yunnan province. (*ABC Radio Australia*, 31 August)

Aboriginal refugee claim

A group of Australian Aborigines asked the United Nations on Wednesday for refugee status, claiming special emergency laws to curb alcohol and sexual abuse in the remote outback have turned them into outcasts at home. Richard Downs, a spokesperson for the 4,000-strong Alyawarra people in central Australia, said the request was given to James Anaya, the United Nations special rapporteur on indigenous human rights, during a fact-finding tour to Australia. The group says the federal intervention has forced them from their land in the Northern Territory and they have been made to feel "helpless, hopeless and worthless" and want the UN to declare them officially "internally displaced". An expert in refugee and human rights law, Professor Mary Crock from the University of Sydney, says that they are unlikely to be successful. (*ABC News/Reuters, 27 August*)

Humanitarian workers say that Australian aid needs to go to cross-border relief

Dr Cynthia Maung visited Australia as part of a delegation of prominent humanitarian workers to seek a government review of Australia's aid commitment to Burma. Her presence boosted a request for a moderate increase in the funding received by the cross-border organisations in Thailand. The Australian government has committed \$29 million in aid to Burma this year, but less than \$1 million will make it to the eastern border region, the region that needs it most. More than 500,000 people are internally displaced in Burma, and another 2 million are living in Thailand. It is believed that the Burmese junta provides about US 70 cents per person each year for health care, and little of that makes it to the conflict zones. (*Irrawaddy Media, 26 August*)

Fortress Europe: solving immigration by outsourced bouncers

Facing a worsening economic outlook and increasing public hostility to foreign workers, Europe's governments are quietly revising their asylum policies. This controversial new approach includes stricter maritime controls in the Mediterranean, including the interception of boats carrying would-be refugees and immigrants before they reach European territory. Those caught by patrol guards are being forcibly sent to Libya, the North African country used by many would-be asylum seekers as a base to set out for Europe. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that in 2008, more than 67,000 people, including African, Asian and Middle Eastern asylum seekers, tried to enter Europe via the Mediterranean. (*On Line Opinion, 25 August*)

Biometric data to be shared

Fingerprints of Australia's immigration detainees will be shared with Britain and Canada as part of a global push to toughen border security and eliminate identity fraud. It is anticipated the US will also join. The database will make it easier to identify people faking asylum claims, hiding criminal histories and travelling under false identities. Senator Chris Evans said the retention of personal information would comply with privacy laws. The associate law professor and head of the UTS Anti-Slavery Project, Jennifer Burn, said the changes would do little to combat the emerging problem of people trafficking. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 22 August*)