



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

2 December 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

If you no longer wish to receive this bulletin, please email unsubscribe@refugeecouncil.org.au

We need your support to continue our work

As a small not-for-profit organisation with no core funding, the Refugee Council needs continuing support from the public, through membership and donations. In a complex political environment, an informed and independent voice on refugee policy is vital. Donations to RCOA are tax-deductible. 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 more information about making a donation or becoming a member of the Refugee Council, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/index.html>

NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

RCOA calls for greater regional cooperation and for a gesture of goodwill to Indonesia

In the past three weeks, the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has issued two statements, responding to the unfolding situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia.

On November 8, RCOA called upon the Australian Government to act urgently to resolve the Oceanic Viking impasse, emphasising the importance of finding prompt resettlement options for the refugees involved and calling for greater regional cooperation on refugee protection. The statement can be viewed at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2009/091108_OceanicViking.pdf

On November 17, in response to media reports that the Indonesian Government was considering returning asylum seekers whose claims were yet to be examined, RCOA urged the Australian Government to take action to prevent the return of asylum seekers aboard the Merak boat to situations of persecution. At the RCOA Annual General Meeting in Melbourne on that day, RCOA's members supported a resolution calling for the Australian Government to make an immediate allocation of 500 additional refugee resettlement places, as a practical gesture of Australia's preparedness to work constructively with Indonesia to find solutions for refugees in the region. The media release is available at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2009/091117_Merak.pdf.

Regional asylum issues and cultural orientation explored at RCOA AGM and Public Forum

On Tuesday 17 November, the Refugee Council of Australia held its Annual General Meeting at Melbourne's Multicultural Hub, with the nature of Australia's engagement with Indonesia on asylum seeker issues and the question of post-arrival cultural orientation for refugees explored at public forums held in conjunction with the AGM. Five board positions were up for election, with existing board members returned to each position for another two years – John Gibson (president), Sky de Jersey (secretary), Dr Melika Sheikh-Eldin, Paris Aristotle and Jenny Semple. Motions moved at the AGM included a call for the Australian Government to make an immediate allocation of 500 additional resettlement places (see item above) and a call for the needs of people in protracted refugee situations in Africa and elsewhere not to be forgotten in discussions about Australia's resettlement priorities.

Speakers at the public forum on regional cooperation were Professor James Hathaway (Melbourne University Law School), Dr Savitri Taylor, (La Trobe University) and Dr Elizabeth Biok (RCOA Board), while

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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

those speaking on cultural orientation for refugees were Hailuel Gebre-Selassie (2008 Churchill Fellow), Annerose Reiner (Foundation House) and Margaret Neil (ACCES Services Inc). For a synopsis of the forum, see <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/index.html#09agm>
RCOA's 2010 AGM will be in Brisbane next November.

Annual report records a busy year in refugee policy and research

At the AGM, RCOA released its annual report and audited financial statement for the 2008-09 financial year. The 24-page annual report features a summary of RCOA's busy agenda of research, policy development, community education and representation. It also includes some statistical snapshots of Australia's 2008-09 Refugee and Humanitarian Program and UNHCR's 2009 statistics on global refugee needs. The annual report and financial statement can be downloaded from <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/annualrpts.html>

RCOA releases report on approaches to consulting refugee young people

In 2008-09, RCOA undertook a literature review and series of youth consultations in Victoria, WA, NSW and ACT with the aim of developing a targeted and informed strategy for the ongoing engagement of refugee young people in advocating to have their needs and concerns addressed and ideas recognised at a national level. The *Amplifying the Voices of Young Refugees* project, funded by the Foundation for Young Australians, was premised upon the belief that listening to the voices of young refugees and humanitarian entrants within national forums, such as RCOA's own annual community consultations, will facilitate the development of advocacy strategies, policy recommendations and project initiatives that are informed by and responsive to the priorities of a key and currently under-heard population. View the report at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/Young_Refugees_report.pdf.

Refugee Settlement Policy Network focuses on young people and education

On November 10, RCOA and the Settlement Council of Australia held the first national Refugee Settlement Policy Network teleconference. The theme of the teleconference was "Refugee young people and education: Finding the right time and place". More than 50 participants dialled in from all states and territories to hear Dr Howard Nicholas' keynote presentation. Dr Nicholas is Senior Lecturer in Language Education and Director of the Centre for Regional Education at La Trobe University (Victoria) and is co-author of "Opening the Door: Provision for Refugee Youth with Minimal/No Schooling in the Adult Migrant English Program". Dr Nicholas provided an overview of some of the key issues for refugee young people in education with a particular focus on young people in the older age groups who arrive with a background of disrupted education, as well as changes, opportunities and gaps in education policy. The next Settlement Policy Network Teleconference will be held on Tuesday, February 9 and will explore issues and opportunities in refugee health. For more information about this network and for information about Dr Nicholas' presentation, see www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/spn.html

AUSCO exchange

During November, RCOA held four briefings on the Australian Cultural Orientation Program (AUSCO), to provide feedback to Australian settlement services about how the pre-departure orientation program for refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia is conducted and to discuss how post-arrival orientation can be improved. The briefings were provided by three settlement service workers who have participated in a RCOA-coordinated exchange with AUSCO trainers overseas - Joseph Bol (Wollongong), Annerose Reiner (Foundation House) and Kamalle Daboussy (Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre). Briefings were held in Adelaide, Western Sydney and Melbourne (as part of the RCOA AGM forum), with settlement service workers in other cities participating in a briefing by teleconference. Ms Reiner's presentation can be viewed at: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/current/ausco.html#briefings>

RCOA is currently seeking applications from settlement service workers and their organisations for the 2010 AUSCO Exchange Program. As part of this program, two settlement service providers will host an AUSCO trainer from either Nepal or South-East Asia for 10 to 12 days in February or March. In April or May, a staff member from each of the chosen settlement service providers will participate for a 10-12 day deployment with the AUSCO trainer's colleagues (in Nepal or South East Asia), assisting in the presentation of an AUSCO course and sharing information about the practicalities of settlement in Australia. Applications for the Exchange Program close on Friday (December 4). For information, see www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/ausco.html

RCOA's annual consultation process underway

The Refugee Council annual consultations on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program are underway across Australia. Over a four-week period, we are conducting 24 face-to-face consultations in six states, and four teleconferences for people in NT, ACT and regional cities and towns across the nation. In addition, we are conducting focus group discussions with young people of refugee background and refugee community members in several cities, as well as inviting comment by email and phone. To encourage input, we have produced a brief discussion paper and discussion notes which give some background to specific issues on which we are actively seeking comment. To view the discussion paper and consultation schedule, please visit <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/consultations.html>

Annotated bibliography on refugee settlement in regional areas

The Regional Settlement Working Group of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council has produced an annotated bibliography of research on refugee settlement in regional areas. This bibliography was compiled with the assistance of DIAC's Settlement Planning Branch, drawing together research as at October 2009. It includes references to 32 documents, with web links to 30 of them. To view the bibliography, go to http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/Regional_Settlmt_bibliography.pdf

Parliamentary Committee recommends changes at Villawood detention centre

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works has recommended that the Australian Government proceed with plans to redevelop the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. After a public submission process and hearings in Sydney, the committee completed a report with 10 recommendations, the most significant being that the high-security 'Stage 1' wing be demolished. "Overall, the Villawood Immigration and Detention Centre looks and feels like an antiquated prison," Chair of the Committee Senator the Hon Jan McLucas said: "Stage 1 is in particularly poor condition and once new facilities are built, these buildings should never be used again." To view the committee's report, see <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/pwc/villawood09/index.htm>

Government opens tenders for next round of AMEP

The next round of tenders for Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) services has opened, with tenders now being sought for AMEP general services from January 2011 to June 2014 and for distance learning from July 2010 to June 2014. Under the new tender, AMEP will include: a flexible curriculum with information delivered on Australian society, culture, laws, services and customs; a Settlement Language Pathways to Employment/Training course; and successful features of the Employment Pathways and Traineeships in English and Work Readiness Programs established by the government last year. Tenders close on 22 February 2010. For the government's announcement of the tender round, see <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/media-releases/2009/lf09053.htm>

Real estate interpreting pilot to begin

A new national pilot program will provide free telephone interpreting to participating real-estate agents to help house new migrants. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship, through its Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), is piloting an extension of free telephone interpreting services to selected real estate agents around Australia. Details of the pilot were announced by Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson. For information, see <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/media-releases/2009/lf09050.htm>

RCOA partnership with Jobseeker offers discounted job listings for members

Jobseeker, an online job site run by Infoxchange specialising in community and social sector jobs, including a dedicated section for jobs related to refugees and migrants, offers discounted job listings of \$35 (incl GST) for organisational members of RCOA. To advertise a vacancy on Jobseeker please contact RCOA for access details, at info@refugeecouncil.org.au or on (02) 9211 9333. For more information about Jobseeker and to see current vacancies, visit www.jobseeker.org.au.

Ideas sought for 2010 Refugee Week theme – and introducing a new Refugee Week logo

RCOA is developing plans for Refugee Week 2010 and seeking input on a theme which can potentially be used over the next three years. The idea of a three-year theme is being explored to enable key messages about refugees to be reinforced and also to enable longer term planning. RCOA is currently seeking ideas for suitable themes for Refugee Week. Ideas can be submitted before Friday 18 December to info@refugeecouncil.org.au

In 2010, RCOA will be encouraging the use in Australia of an international Refugee Week logo, developed in the UK. The logo features vibrant colours to represent the diversity and energy brought to a welcoming country by refugees of many backgrounds. To see the logo and for more details on our search for a suitable 2010 theme, visit http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rw_index.html

COMING EVENTS

Thursday to Wednesday 3 to 9 December - Melbourne

Parliament of the World's Religions

The world's largest and most diverse interfaith gathering with over 500 inspiring programs and many faith leaders, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

For information, visit www.parliamentofreligions.org or call 1300 852 156

Friday 4 December to Sunday 13 December - Sydney

Ethiopia 'Highland': a photographic documentary of Ethiopia's youth

An exhibition of the work of photographer Georgina Lampe, depicting proud and dignified young people from Ethiopia, with donations collected to support the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa.

Details: Red Door Gallery, 24 Morris St, Summer Hill. Exhibition opening Friday 4 December 6-8pm. More information: www.reddoorgallery.com.au or (02) 9799 7830.

Tuesday 8 December - Melbourne

"Indonesia: the new Pacific solution?"

A discussion forum on refugee rights and social justice in Asia-Pacific, with Pamela Curr, Campaign Coordinator at the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, and Setyo Budi, Indonesia solidarity activist and presenter on the Asia Pacific Currents show on Radio 3CR. Presented by Indonesia Solidarity Forum and the University of Melbourne Indonesian program.

Details: 6pm-8pm. Cussonia Court, Room 2, Ground floor, Old Quad, University of Melbourne. <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=182785942707&ref=mf>

Wednesday 9 December 2009 - Canberra

Human Rights Day event

The United Nations Association of Australia (ACT) is holding a forum on "Human Rights and Seeking Asylum" with the UNHCR Regional Representative, Richard Towle, and policy expert and academic, Dr Susan Harris Rimmer.

Details: 5.45pm for 6.00pm start; ACT Legislative Assembly, London Circuit. Suggested donations \$5 for UNAA members, \$10 for non-members. To reserve a seat, email UNAAACT@cyberone.com.au

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

New online resource for police working with new communities

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services Laurie Ferguson has announced the launch of the new online resource for police, *Taking the Initiative - police working with Australia's diverse communities*. *Taking the Initiative* has been designed for police around Australia to help them get to know what other jurisdictions are doing to improve their relationships with emerging communities in Australia. It is also a useful resource for settlement service providers to learn about how the police plan and implement particular strategies. *Taking the Initiative* contains links to important resources for police, including the Department of Immigration and Citizenship profiles of new communities such as Sudanese, Congolese, Karen and Chin Burmese. For more information, visit <http://www.immi.gov.au/gateways/police/>

Report on findings from IHSS consultations

Between June and August, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) held consultations with community organisations and government agencies around Australia to seek feedback on the current IHSS program and identify areas for program improvement. More than 460 individuals attended sessions, representing 217 community organisations and 82 government agencies. A discussion paper was also released and elicited 86 submissions. (RCOA's written submission is available online at www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/submissions/0908_IHSS.pdf.) A summary report on the

findings from this consultation process has been released by DIAC reflecting the main themes discussed across the various consultation sessions (available at: www.immi.gov.au/about/contracts-tenders-submissions/ihss-procurement.htm). Information from the consultations is being considered in the development of the new IHSS service delivery model and tender documentation. A request for tender is due to be released in January 2010 and all relevant tender documentation will be available on the AusTender website <https://www.tenders.gov.au/>.

New research on detention conditions for asylum seekers in Indonesia

Victorian lawyer and refugee advocate Jessie Taylor recently released *Behind Australian Doors: Examining the Conditions of Detention of Asylum Seekers in Indonesia*, a report documenting findings from a visit to 11 detention facilities made in July 2009. According to estimates by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2000 asylum seekers and refugees are currently being held in prisons, detention centres and compounds across Indonesia. Taylor found living conditions for the asylum seekers range from “acceptable to appalling” and that UNHCR staff processing detainees are “hugely under-resourced and overworked”. The deficiency of processing arrangements means it is not uncommon for people to wait 24 to 36 months between their initial registration and their refugee status determination. The report is available online at: www.law.monash.edu.au/castancentre/news/behind-australian-doors-report.pdf

Background briefing: Boat arrivals in Australia since 1976

The Department of Parliamentary Services has released a background briefing paper providing an overview of the historical and political context surrounding boat arrivals in Australia since 1976. It includes background on the global context; government policy responses; trends in public opinion on the issues; and links to some of the key resources. This publication also includes boat arrival figures drawn from available sources, including media reports, ministerial press releases and figures supplied by DIAC. Available from: www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2009-10/BoatArrivals.pdf

Explanation of refugee entitlements to social security

Given the prevalence of emails in which false claims are made about Centrelink entitlements for refugees, the Federal Parliamentary Library has released a Background Note that describes the current situation with regard to refugee entitlements to social security and other assistance. It can be viewed at http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/sp/AustGovAssist_Refugees.pdf

New field manual for integrating community-based protection across humanitarian programs

Safety with Dignity: a field manual for integrating community-based protection across humanitarian programs has been developed by ActionAid staff working with local partners and communities, to improve information on approaches to humanitarian protection. The manual provides practical guidance for NGO field staff on integrating community-based protection into their programs across diverse contexts. It draws together key protection concepts, methods and tools being used and developed by humanitarian agencies into one user-friendly manual. The manual is available at: http://www.actionaid.org.au/images/stories/docs/publications/2009/safety_with_dignity_actionaid_2009.pdf.

Report on African refugees' experience of gas and electricity contracts

The Footscray Community Legal Centre has published its report *The African Consumer Experience of the Contestable Energy Market in the West of Melbourne*. The report is at the Essential Services Commission website: <http://www.esc.vic.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/EF10AA77-A792-4907-B5B3-8A4512CB1AA9/0/TheAfricanConsumerExperienceoftheContestableEnergyMarket20090716.pdf>.

OPPORTUNITIES

Call for Papers for Diversity in Health 2010 Conference

The Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health invites researchers, health practitioners, community organisations and migrant and refugee services to submit papers that offer a critical, analytical and reflective look at issues of concern or models of good practice to present at the conference. Papers that canvass innovations in service delivery and new challenges facing service providers are most welcome. The call for papers closes on Monday 8 February 2010. For more information, visit <http://www.ceh.org.au/dih-callforpapers.aspx>

Victorian Government offers Interpreter scholarships

The Victorian Multicultural Commission is offering scholarships to study emerging languages (Dari, Dinka, Hazaragi and Tamil) to students enrolled in the RMIT Diploma of Interpreting. In 2010, scholarships of \$2,000 are being offered. This amount will cover the cost of course fees for a Government-funded place in the Diploma of Interpreting. NAATI paraprofessional accreditation costs will also be covered for students who complete the course with a grade of 70% or higher. Visit www.multicultural.vic.gov.au and download an Interpreter Scholarship Program Application Form. Applicants must also complete an RMIT Direct Application Form which can be downloaded from www.rmit.edu.au/programs/applications/forms. Applications close 7 January 2010. For more information, call Leah Bramhill (03) 9651 0675.

Home Lands Project seeking participants

The Centre for Multicultural Youth is staging a three year project called Home Lands. This is an internet project where young people (ages 18-25) from refugee backgrounds in Melbourne have the opportunity to learn multimedia skills and communicate with other young people overseas from their 'homelands'. The 2010 Karen Home Lands project is open to new and past participants, and training will begin in November/December 2009. Visit <http://www.culturaldevelopment.net.au/homelands/index.htm> or contact Bree McKilligan, Project Manager, on (03) 9340 3726 or bmckilligan@cmy.net.au.

New multicultural women's magazine - UNEEK

UNEEK Magazine is a multicultural women's magazine for all Australian Women. UNEEK aims to bring Australian women and communities together by combining stories and articles from diverse cultural communities into a single mainstream publication. UNEEK Magazine strives to showcase how well multiculturalism is working in Australia and how it can thrive and flourish as women further network together to make gains personally, socially, cross-culturally and professionally. For information, visit www.uneekmagazine.com.au/subscribe

Music workshops for refugee young people

Young people of refugee background in Melbourne are invited to learn music, write songs and be part of recording a CD in workshops with the RISE music team. The RISE Music Program is a creative and safe space for underemployed young refugees to build up their own style of music. Workshops are open every Tuesday from 7pm to 9pm. For more information contact RISE on (03) 9639 8623 or email admin@riserefugee.org.

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre seeking Christmas presents

Melbourne's Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) is inviting people to bring cheer into the lives of asylum seekers by donating practical Christmas gifts. ASRC is seeking donations of international calling cards for members to be able to contact family, movie ticket vouchers for teenage asylum seekers to attend a film over the Christmas break, Big W, Target or Kmart gift cards to assist with basic necessities and USB sticks for people who will be studying after the Christmas break. Bring or post these donations in to the ASRC Material Aid Program at 12 Batman St, West Melbourne VIC 3003. For any enquiries, call Barney Frankland on (03) 9326 6066 or email barney.f@asrc.org.au.

The 2010 Community Sector Survey is now open on-line

This Australia-wide survey is conducted regularly by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) to provide valuable information/evidence that assists our sector. The survey should be completed by non-government, non-profit organisations providing services directly to the public. The information that organisations provide contributes to an important body of knowledge about the community sector. The data collected in this survey informs sector advocacy, and provides government and the media with a snapshot of how the sector and disadvantaged Australians are faring. The closing date is Wednesday 16 December. http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=2bs3WQz7Sn1XWszSZQxVLOg_3d_3d.

Employment and Volunteering opportunities

Please visit <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/employment.html> and <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/getinvolved/volunteer.html> for employment and volunteering opportunities.

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)

Inquiry launched into Christmas Island riot

The Immigration Department has launched an inquiry into a riot at the Christmas Island Detention Centre. It is believed 150 Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum seekers attacked each other with pool cues, tree branches and broom handles. Staff at the centre brought the riot under control within 30 minutes. Thirty-seven detainees received medical treatment on the island and another three were flown to Perth with broken bones. (23 November, ABC News Online)

Disease and monsoon strike boat in Merak port

Asylum seekers on the boat in the Indonesian port of Merak say sickness is sweeping through their ranks, with several taken to hospital at the weekend suffering acute diarrhoea. The 255 Tamil asylum seekers have staged a sit-in on the wooden fishing boat, refusing to enter Indonesian detention amid threats they would be immediately returned to Sri Lanka. Monsoonal rains lashed the boat at the weekend, worsening conditions on the vessel which has only one toilet and limited shelter for sleeping. (23 November, *The Australian*)

Mothers and infants behind detention centre bars

The women and children from the *Oceanic Viking*, now being held behind bars in an Australian-funded Indonesian immigration centre, have described their conditions in detention as "like jail", and have pleaded for help. Despite assurances from the Rudd Government that the five women and five children among the group of 78 asylum seekers would not be housed in detention and would be able to come and go as they please, they have been moved into a locked room in Tanjung Pinang's old detention centre. This is next door to the new facility which is housing the 68 men from the ship. (20 November, *Sydney Morning Herald*)

Government denies asylum seekers 'promise'

The Federal Government is insisting the Sri Lankan asylum seekers from the *Oceanic Viking* were given no guarantees of resettlement in Australia. The last of the 78 Sri Lankans left the Australian Customs vessel for processing in an Indonesian detention centre. Immigration Minister Chris Evans said the Australian Government had given no undertaking to the group. "They will be offered resettlement in resettlement countries," Senator Evans said, adding that could mean Australia, Canada, New Zealand or a Scandinavian nation. "There's no guarantee they will come to Australia. That was never part of the offer." (19 November, *The Australian*)

Asylum seekers to disembark

Promises of swift resettlement in Australia are believed to have ended a month-long impasse with asylum seekers onboard the *Oceanic Viking*. The remaining 56 Sri Lankans are to leave the Australian Customs vessel in Indonesia. They will follow 22 others who agreed to leave the vessel for the Tanjung Pinang detention centre. (18 November, *Herald Sun*)

Malaysia agrees to criminalise people smuggling

Malaysia has agreed to criminalise people smuggling after pressure from Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to help stem the flow of asylum-seekers arriving in boats off northern Australia. The Prime Minister was unable, however, to finalise a new accord with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on dealing with asylum seekers picked up in Indonesian waters. The pair met in Singapore at a meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) group. Kevin Rudd publicly thanked Malaysian Prime Minister Dato Sri Mohd Najib for indicating his government would heed Australian requests that it toughen its laws to make people smuggling illegal. (16 November, *The Australian*)

Police fire on asylum seekers

Indonesian police have defended their decision to open fire on a boatload of Afghan asylum seekers heading for Australia. A skipper, 18, and an asylum seeker were shot and wounded as their boat tried to flee an Indonesian coast guard vessel, which intercepted them off Rote Island, less than 90 kilometres from Australian waters. Having refused orders to stop, the large wooden cargo boat, loaded with 61 Afghan asylum seekers and nine Indonesian crew, tried to outrun the Indonesian boats. The skipper

was shot once in each arm and wounded in the chin. The Afghan asylum seeker was shot in the left shoulder. Both are in a stable condition in Bayangkara Hospital in Kupang, on the island of West Timor. (16 November, *The Age*)

Indonesia planning to deport Sri Lankan asylum seekers

Indonesia has signalled that it is planning to deport Sri Lankan asylum seekers at Merak who have spent more than a month at the Javanese port refusing to leave their vessel. A senior Government source says Indonesia is losing patience with the asylum-seekers. If necessary, Indonesia is prepared to force 130 of the Sri Lankans onto a navy warship to return them to the country they fled despite their claims of persecution by the Sinhalese-dominated government. The deportation plan marks a significant hardening in Indonesia's policy towards irregular immigrants, and undermines the so-called "Indonesia solution" and Australia's hopes to negotiate a framework where both countries agree on a method of intercepting and processing boat people. (16 November, *The Australian*)

Sri Lankan Ambassador to the UN claims Tamils are 'economic refugees'

Sri Lanka has dismissed any suggestion Tamils are oppressed within its borders, saying those aboard the *Oceanic Viking* were drawn to Australia by its "magnetism" rather than the need for asylum. Sri Lankan Ambassador to the UN Palitha Kohona last night denied the Tamils aboard the vessel had started their journey from his country, describing them as "economic refugees looking for greener pastures". Mr Kohona said there were no push factors forcing boatpeople to leave Sri Lanka, only pull factors from Australia. But in an apparent contradiction of his claim that his country was "perfectly certain" the 78 Tamils on the *Oceanic Viking* had not originated from Sri Lanka, Mr Kohona said he believed they should be "returned" to Sri Lanka. "Personally I think they should be returned to Sri Lanka – that is where they belong, and if that happens it is quite likely others will not make this journey again," Mr Kohona said. The Sri Lankan government claims the majority of boats taking asylum-seekers to Australia are organised by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. (12 November, *The Australian*)

Tamils offered arrangement to leave boat

Australia has offered to resettle Sri Lankan refugees aboard the *Oceanic Viking* within six weeks in a bid to persuade them to go ashore to Indonesia. Asylum seekers already registered with the UNHCR—believed to be 30 of the 78 Sri Lankan asylum seeker—would be given protection within three months and will be resettled in Australia. The Federal Government says some of the Sri Lankans are highly traumatised and it is not humane to keep them on the *Oceanic Viking* indefinitely. An extract from the written offer from the Australian embassy in Jakarta states "Australian officials will assist you to be resettled within four to six weeks from the time you disembark the vessel. If you have already registered with UNHCR, Australian officials will assist with your UNHCR processing. If you are found to be a refugee, you will be resettled within 12 weeks from the time you disembark the vessel." Immigration Minister Chris Evans says the offer, made last week, remains the basis of negotiations and is designed to give the asylum seekers some reassurance about how they would be treated. (12 November, *ABC Radio AM*)

Storm erupts over detention cells at Christmas Island

The Rudd Government's decision to isolate difficult asylum seekers has sparked outrage among refugee advocate groups, with revelations that a block of Guantanamo Bay-like cells is being used inside the immigration detention centre at Christmas Island. Six people who participated in a protest on 30 October are now fenced in the centre's Red Block and sleep in small metal cells built by the Howard government to hold the most dangerous or unstable detainees. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship said the block was being used for the safety of the men and the safety of others. The department said it had been adapted and now had an "open-plan living environment". (10 November, *The Australian*)

Foreign Ministers outline agreement

Australia has made an agreement with Sri Lanka to help track down people smugglers in return for greater co-operation in reducing asylum-seeker numbers. Australia will also contribute an extra \$11 million, on top of \$38 million already given, to help the process of resettling about 250,000 mostly Tamil civilians still being held in detention camps in the former northern conflict zone. In a joint press conference with Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, Foreign Minister Stephen Smith

emphasised the importance of apprehending and prosecuting criminal syndicates behind the people smuggling trade. (10 November, *The Australian*)

Indonesia rejects Australian asylum proposal

Indonesia has rejected a proposal from Australia that 78 asylum seekers aboard the *Oceanic Viking* be housed in community accommodation on Bintan Island. Indonesia insists the Sri Lankans should be placed in an Australian-funded detention centre. The Indonesian Government confirmed that the Australian Government had asked it to consider housing the 78 asylum seekers - currently aboard the Australian customs ship - in community housing on Bintan Island. (10 November, *ABC Radio Australia*)

Asylum seekers on Oceanic Viking make 'final decision'

After weeks of negotiations, 78 Sri Lankans aboard the *Oceanic Viking* have rejected all offers from Australian officials and declared that their 'final decision' is to remain on the Australian ship. In handwritten letters thrown from the *Oceanic Viking*, the 78 Sri Lankans still on board have announced they are rejecting all offers made by Australian officials in negotiations over the past few weeks. Addressed to the 'Head of Immigration Resettlement Unit at the Australian Embassy' the letters say 'you talked to us' about '[giving] us resettlement very quickly' if the group agreed to go ashore in Indonesia. 'We are not ready to go back to Indonesia. This is our final decision'. The letters also allege mistreatment by Australian customs officials, who have allegedly tried to 'push' the asylum seekers ashore by giving little food and not allowing them to shower and 'using bad words'. (6 November, *Radio Australia*)

Unions to give donations to asylum seekers

Two of Australia's unions—the Maritime Union of Australia and the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union—will donate \$10,000 to the 78 asylum-seekers locked in a stand-off with crew aboard the Customs vessel *Oceanic Viking*. The MUA and CFMEU announced they would make the donation when the 13 civilian crew members aboard the *Oceanic Viking* were next rotated. MUA national secretary Paddy Crumlin said the money was a humanitarian gesture and would not be used for "political" purposes. (6 November, *The Australian*)