



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

4 February 2010

Welcome to the latest bulletin from the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA). 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

NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

RCOA and A Just Australia join forces

On December 14, members of the refugee policy advocacy organisation, A Just Australia (AJA), voted in favour of a motion to merge the AJA campaign with the work of RCOA. This motion, proposed by members of the AJA board and supported overwhelmingly by its membership, brings together two of the most significant independent voices on refugee policy. AJA's National Coordinator, Kate Gauthier, has joined RCOA's staff as Communications Manager and, in this role, will continue to direct the AJA campaign. AJA's Deputy Chair, Phil Glendenning (of Sydney's Edmund Rice Centre), has joined the RCOA board, joining three current RCOA board members who have previously served on the AJA board. While RCOA's formal structure remains unchanged, the AJA campaign will be retained by RCOA as a major focus of its public education and advocacy work. AJA members will be encouraged to join RCOA's growing individual membership and supporters of both organisations will be offered regular information and campaign updates. Our aim is to build a stronger national network, providing people with constructive opportunities to express their support for fair treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. The first of the new AJA campaign bulletins will be released in coming weeks.

Refugee Council completes national consultations

RCOA has completed its national consultations on Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program and presented its annual submission to the Australian Government. The consultation process, conducted in November and December, was extensive, involving more than 430 people from 33 cities and towns in eight states and territories. Participants included refugee and humanitarian entrants from at least 17 countries of origin and representatives of more than 180 organisations. The submission includes community views on the planning of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, visa processing and asylum policy concerns and a wide variety of settlement issues for refugees, as well as thoughts about how the refugee program could be better promoted to the Australian public. The submission also draws together key statistics on Australian immigration, global refugee needs and resettlement trends. It includes 59 recommendations to government, providing concrete planning suggestions for how Australia's refugee program and recommendations on issues as diverse as post-arrival orientation, employment and family support. RCOA presented the submission to Immigration Minister Chris Evans on January 27 at the Minister's annual meeting with peak bodies and national organisations. The submission will be discussed further with senior DIAC officials in coming weeks prior to its public release. RCOA appreciates the support of the 38 organisations which hosted local consultations and the hundreds of people who participated.

Challenging misleading statements about refugees

One of the clear messages from RCOA's community consultations was a strong desire for more effort to be put into challenging misleading and incorrect public statements about refugees and asylum seekers. These concerns were outlined in Section 6 of our submission (pages 92-104). Within our limited capacity, RCOA is taking up as many opportunities as we can to do this – and we'd be very happy to

Suite 4A6, 410 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia
Phone: (02) 9211-9333 • Fax: (02) 9211-9288
info@refugeecouncil.org.au • Web: www.refugeecouncil.org.au
Incorporated in ACT • ABN 87 956 673 083

The Refugee Council of Australia represents
non-government organisations and
individuals working with and for refugees
in Australia and around the world

hear from people who would be prepared to help us do this. One statement we have recently challenged were comments from Victorian Family First senator Steve Fielding, who returned from Christmas Island comparing the detention centre to a motel and talking about refugees getting a “gold pass” to Australia. RCOA’s public response was taken up by a number of media outlets. It can be found at http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2010/100129_Fielding.pdf During January, media outlets regularly approached RCOA to comment on statements from the Opposition Leader and Shadow Minister for Immigration which tried to present the processing of valid asylum claims as resulting from “soft border control” policies. RCOA CEO Paul Power was interviewed by SBS radio on the numbers of boat arrivals, and said the Opposition suggestion of turning boats around could result in people being killed. [SBS Ethnic Radio, World View](#), 3 February (story starts at 10 mins 30). Refugee Council President John Gibson, took [Derryn Hinch of 3AW](#) to task over his use of the term “illegals.”

WA and Victorian agencies chosen for AUSCO exchange

Senior refugee settlement service workers from Perth and Melbourne have been chosen for the next stage of the exchange between Australian settlement services and the Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program. Volker Schafer, IHSS Case Coordinator for Centrecare (WA), will participate in an exchange with the AUSCO training team in Thailand. Later this month, Centrecare will host AUSCO trainer May Sandar Win, enabling her to share information about AUSCO with services in WA and to learn more about the practicalities of refugee settlement and support in Australia. In March, Volker will join May and her AUSCO colleagues in Thailand for a short deployment as a Guest Trainer. In May and June, Poly Kiyaga, IHSS team leader with AMES (Victoria) will participate in a two-way exchange with Neera Chaulagai from the AUSCO team in Nepal. AUSCO is a five-day orientation program, funded by the Australian Government and currently presented by the International Organization for Migration, delivered to refugee and humanitarian entrants prior to their departure for Australia. RCOA has been involved since 2008 in coordinating exchanges between AUSCO and Australian settlement services, to enhance the connection between the pre-departure and post-arrival orientation processes for refugee and humanitarian entrants. Volker and Poly were chosen after a highly competitive application process, involving 28 applicants from settlement services around Australia.

Australians honoured for support of refugees

The Australian Honours List announced on Australia Day 2010 included 10 people whose work in the community has included the support of refugees: Mr **Hieu Van Le** AO, of Burnside SA, a former refugee from Vietnam who is Lieutenant Governor of SA and chairman of SA Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission; Dr **Mohammed Taha Alsalami** AM, Fairfield NSW, an active member of Australia’s Iraqi community who has served on the Australian Government’s Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council (1997-2007) and Immigration Detention Advisory Group (2001-09); the Hon **Bruce Baird** AM, Queenscliff NSW, former Federal MP and NSW Government minister and now chair of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council; Professor **Jude Butcher** AM, of Burwood NSW, founder and chair of the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education since 1992; Mr **Ken Habak** OAM, Corrimal NSW, Chairperson of Illawarra Ethnic Communities Council since 2001; Ms **Margaret McGregor** OAM, Kensington SA, who has supported immigration detainees, asylum seekers and refugees through the Circle of Friends and other networks; Ms **Denise Nichols** OAM, of Montmorency Vic, who has worked for 20 years with international aid and refugee programs through agencies including Oxfam, International Needs Australia, AnglicORD, Jesuit Refugee Service and International Women’s Development Agency; Mrs **Frances Orford** OAM, of Bunya Qld, who has supported refugee entrants as coordinator of ESL programs at Yeronga State High School; Mr **Erwin Richter** OAM, of Wagga Wagga NSW, who has coordinated refugee support programs through the Lutheran Church; and Mr **Anthony Sukari** OAM, Thornleigh NSW, whose community roles have included being Chairperson of MigrantLINK.

The Australian of the Year for 2010 is Professor **Patrick McGorry** of University of Melbourne, an international leader in youth mental health, who has worked extensively with survivors of torture and detainees in immigration detention.

New Melbourne office for RCOA

RCOA’s Melbourne office has moved. For the past three years, we have been renting space at the Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health (CEH) in Carlton but CEH’s growing need for office space prompted us to look elsewhere. In January, we took up the offer of space within the AMES Settlement office on Level 5 at 255 William St, Melbourne (near Flagstaff railway station). Our new Melbourne phone number is (03) 9600 3302, our fax is (03) 9626 4679 and our postal address is now PO Box

12957, A'Beckett Street VIC 8006. The email address remains melbourne@refugeecouncil.org.au The contact details for our Sydney office remain the same. We thank both CEH and AMES for supporting our work through generous leasing arrangements.

COMING EVENTS

Until Sunday 14 February 2010 – Sydney

Rockin' the Boat Exhibition

This diverse exhibition aims to contribute to the debate on refugees, asylum seekers and fear politics in the age of terror and climate change.

Details: At The Vanishing Point - Contemporary Art Inc (ATVP) gallery, 565 King Street, Newtown NSW. For further information visit www.atthevanishingpoint.com.au.

Thursday 11 February 2009 – Sydney

Film Screening - Building Strategies for Social Enterprise: Strategies for Local Development

Parramatta Region Social Enterprise Hub partners, Social Ventures Australia (SVA) and Parramatta City Council, invite you to a special screening the film. The film documents a number of local social enterprise projects in the Philippines and provides a practical look at steps being taken to promote community development. Professor Katherine Gibson, UWS, one of the film's narrators and producers, will talk about the social enterprises featured in the film. The event will close with facilitated Q&A and the audience will have the opportunity to ask questions and explore the lessons learned in relation to developing social enterprises in Sydney.

Details: 10am-12pm (lunch provided); Training room, Level 4, 146 Marsden Street, Parramatta; RSVP (places are limited) to Ruth Johnstone on 0413 185 551 or johnstone@socialventures.com.au

Saturday 20 February 2010 – Adelaide

Music of the Silk Road

A sublime concert of traditional, devotional, classical and Sufi-style music from the ancient silk trade routes of Afghanistan, India and the Middle East.

Details: 7.30pm; \$15/\$12; SA Folk Centre, South Road and George Street, Thebarton. Book at: FringeTix on 1300 374 643 or www.adelaidefringe.com.au

Sunday 21 February 2010 – Melbourne

Palmera Projects Human Race '10

Human Race is Palmera Projects' annual signature fundraising event. It is a half-day foot race around inner Melbourne, where teams of four must navigate to a series of checkpoints spread around town, in the spirit of The Amazing Race. Money raised from the event will be used to support humanitarian aid and development projects within Australia and internationally, including projects at Melbourne's Asylum Seeker Resource Centre.

Details: To register, e-mail mail@palmeraprojects.org or visit www.humanrace.org.au To volunteer to assist on the day, contact Anjana Arunachalam at anjana.a@palmeraprojects.org

Thursday 25 February 2010 – Melbourne

'Points of Departure': Building Advocacy for Immigrant and Refugee Women

This seminar, held by the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH), will focus on the settlement and health-related challenges faced by immigrant and refugee women from both established and newly arrived communities. How our knowledge of these issues influences advocacy will also be explored. The seminar will also underscore that for effective advocacy to be achieved, the voices of immigrant and refugee women must be heard.

Details: \$65 per person (includes lunch); 9:00am-2:00pm; Suite 207, Level 2, Carringbush Building, 134 Cambridge Street, Collingwood VIC 3066; for further information visit www.mcwh.com.au or contact MCWH on (03) 9418 0999 or reception@mcwh.com.au.

Saturday 27 February 2010 – Melbourne

Free the Casablanca 7 fundraising event

Your opportunity to celebrate the Saharawi national day in 2010 is offered on this day, with music, dinner followed by more music. Music will be provided by Tom Bolton, Anthea Sidiropoulos, The Conch,

Adam Lawler, Naomi Jones, Irine Vela and others. Proceeds will be divided between the Australia Western Sahara Association and the Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA) Western Sahara Projects fund.

Details: from 3.00pm (with dinner at 7.00pm); entrance donation of \$10 for music only or \$40 for a three course meal (drinks available at bar prices). Venue: Clare Hotel, 421 Rathdowne Street, Carlton; to book, call Georgia 0425 702 975 and pay on the night.

Friday 26 February, Friday 12, Saturday 13 and Sunday 14 March 2010 – Adelaide

Africa Down Under – Variety show

Jive in the Jungle with The Nile Band and Afro-Reggae Band, laugh with standup comedy routines and groove to the hip-busting dances, all while dining on delicious African food. Presented by MRC ARTS.

Details: 7.30pm; SA Folk Centre, Cnr South Road & George Street, Thebarton; (08) 8217 9512 or email keith@mrca.com.au. Book at: FringeTix on 1300 374 643 or www.adelaidefringe.com.au.

Until Sunday 28 February 2010 – Australia wide

Express Your Reality Art and Writing Competition

Oxfam Australia and Culturalista are holding a creative arts competition to provide current and former refugees with an opportunity to express themselves to a diverse and engaged audience. Entries must express the reality of being a refugee, past, present or future. Entries can be in any visual or writing form (e.g. paintings, photos, stories, poems, news, sculpture) with a \$500 prize for each section. All entrants have the chance to be part of an exhibition at Oxfam's Refugee Realities simulation in Canberra 2010 and/or published in Culturalista magazine. Entrants can be any age and live (primarily) anywhere in Australia. All entrants must be current or former refugees.

Details: entries close 28 February 2010; for more information contact Dustin on 0428 385 272 or expressreality@oxfam.org.au, or visit www.culturalista.org.au/expressreality.html.

Until Sunday 28 February 2010 – Australia wide

Call for submissions: Culturalista Volume 5

Culturalista is a collaborative project that publishes the diverse voices of Australia in a printed and online zine that reaches thousands of people throughout Australia. Submissions can include: paintings, photography, stories, or anything else that can be printed! The theme for the next issue is hope and all creative responses and interpretations are welcomed.

Details: submissions close Sunday 28 February 2010. For more information, contact Dustin on 0428 385 272 or info@culturalista.org.au, or visit www.culturalista.org.au.

2-7 and 9-13 March - Adelaide

The Magic Waterhole

A traditional African story with an explosion of excitement African-style! A sensational show with puppets, comedy, dance, costumes and drumming, presented by MRC Arts.

Details: 8.00pm; \$15/\$12; Puppet Palace, The Garden of Unearthly Delights, Rundle Park (end of Rundle Street). Book at: FringeTix on 1300 374 643 or www.adelaidefringe.com.au.

Friday 12 March 2010 – Melbourne

Australian Karen Foundation Trivia Night

AKF invites you to a fun-filled night including three courses of Karen cuisine, wine and refreshments, and of course the most wild and original trivia night in town hosted by trivia masters Dave Browning and Michael Camelleri. All proceeds from the night go towards the ALCC School, Mae La Refugee Camp on the Thai-Burma border to support teachers' salaries and the replacement of ageing computers.

Details: 7.00pm; \$80/\$60 for AKF members and concession card holders, Free entry if you sign up as ALCC School Sponsor (min \$10 per month) on the night; St. Stephen's Church Hall Richmond, enter via corner of Docker St and Richmond Tce, Richmond (Melway 2G K8); RSVP by 26 February to your table captain or Katherine Fell at katherinefell@hotmail.com or David on 0406 628 814.

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Report on policing and refugee settlement in regional Australia

This final report from the Australian Research Council Linkage Project by Danielle Campbell and Roberta Julian, entitled 'A conversation on trust: community policing and refugee settlement in regional Australia' from the Tasmanian Institute of Law Enforcement offers strategies and research involving

perspectives of police and the members of newly arrived African communities in regional Australia. The report recommends strategies to encourage and enhance positive relationships between refugees and police in regional Australia. See the publication at http://www.utas.edu.au/tiles/publications_and_reports/research_reports/research_reports_pdf/A%20Conversation%20on%20Trust.pdf

Useful resources for police at Department of Immigration website

"Taking the Initiative" on the DIAC website has been designed for police around Australia to understand what other jurisdictions are doing to improve their relationships with Australia's new arrivals. To view resources including case studies and community profiles, visit <http://www.immi.gov.au/gateways/police/home/>

'Rebuilding Zimbabwe: Australia's role in supporting the transition'

With Australia becoming the first major donor country to provide assistance to Zimbabwe's new power-sharing government in March 2009, Joel Negin and Jolyon Ford explore a number of areas where Australian aid can provide support to the country's fragile recovery process. Their report from the Lowy Institute is now available online at <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/PerspectivesOnAfrica.asp>.

Churchill Fellowship report by Halleluel Gebre-Selassie

This report on integration strategies of migrant and refugees was launched by Hon Lindsay Tanner MP in October 2009 and details the strategies in five countries, including, New Zealand, the UK and the United States. The report is available at http://www.africanoz.com/af_study/integration.pdf.

Sudanese Community History Project now online

An important oral history project recording the migration journeys and settlement experiences of southern Sudanese refugees now living in Blacktown, Western Sydney is now online. To view the stories, visit <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/sudanesestories>

The Vitamin D Deficiency In Victoria Stakeholders' Forum

This well attended forum, held on the 23 October 2009 and organised by the Department of Health and partners, provided an opportunity to discuss progress on strategies to prevent Vitamin D deficiency in Victoria and to identify next steps for the state.

Visit http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/literature_57937/Vitamin_D_forum_231009 to view action notes from the forum.

Technology's Refuge research report now available online

UTS Shopfront is pleased to present the publication of its latest monograph, "*Technology's Refuge: The Use of Communication Technologies by Asylum Seekers and Refugees*". The report can be downloaded from the UTSePress at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2100/928>.

OPPORTUNITIES

New African Communities Council of Tasmania

The African communities of Tasmania have formed of the first ever African Communities Council of Tasmania. The Council was formed at meetings on 15 and 22 November 2009, with founding members representing a diverse range of national and ethnic groups from Botswana; Democratic Republic of Congo; Ethiopia; Liberia; Sierra Leone; with Somalia formerly admitted member on the second day; Sudan; and Zimbabwe. In order to provide better representation for the large African community other countries are encouraged to contact the Secretary (markodwogo5005@yahoo.com.au) for procedures on how to join the Council.

Social Studio officially launched

The Social Studio is a non-profit social enterprise established to create employment and education opportunities for youth from the refugee community through clothing design, production and retail. The studio is located at 128 Smith Street, Collingwood, Victoria and has about 20 young people involved as students and staff. For more information, visit www.thesocialstudio.org.

Social support group for women

A social support group for women from Afghanistan and Iran is currently being run at North Yarra Community Health Centre, on Fridays at 2pm. It is a great opportunity for women from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds to connect, share their experiences and learn skills such as English and computer skills. The group also goes on some outings throughout the year. The group has varied in its membership over the years and is looking to welcome new members. Contact Melinie Ridge on (03) 9411 4333, extension 325.

Contribute to the National Cultural Policy Framework

An online consultation is being held in which interested people are invited to contribute to the National Cultural Policy web forum, which will be used to help develop a National Cultural Policy. Discussion on local or national cultural issues and ideas are welcome on www.nationalculturalpolicy.com.au and formal submissions are also invited.

Overcoming barriers faced by aged CALD trauma survivors

This new project evaluation report has been released by Murdoch University along with the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS). Email reception@asetts.org.au for enquiries regarding the project and report.

Home Lands Internet Project

The Home Lands Project is a project in which young Karen people have the opportunity to connect with their homeland. The Centre for Multicultural Youth is staging part two of this project, involving photography, video and internet communication. The project is for young (18-25 years) Karen people. See <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rhrc/homelands.html> for more information.

Refugee Health Fellows program extended

Funding has been provided by the Department of Health to continue the refugee health fellows program for a second year. Dr Tom Schultz is the newly appointed fellow at Royal Melbourne Hospital and Dr Collette Reveley will continue at the Royal Children's Hospital. These roles provide valuable education and support to GPs and specialists caring for people from refugee backgrounds, particularly in outer metropolitan and rural areas. Email RefugeeHealth@mh.org.au for further information.

Actors wanted

Melbourne Playback Theatre Company is seeking male and female actors with strong skills in improvisation. They are particularly interested in actors aged 20-30, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For more information, call (03) 9690 9253 or submit a resume, photo and cover letter outlining your interest, relevant experience and availability to recruitment@melbourneplayback.com.au

Diversity in Health Conference 2010

Diversity in Health 2010 will be held at the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre from 7-9 June 2010. Papers are now being received for the conference and early bird registrations are open. Visit <http://www.ceh.org.au/dih/> for more information.

Employment and Volunteering opportunities

Please visit <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)

TV news broadcast inaccurate stories about Sudanese refugees

The Australian Communications and Media Authority found that Channels Seven, Nine and Ten had breached the Commercial Television Code of Practice, by broadcasting news segments with CCTV footage of a person being arrested who was not Sudanese. The watchdog found that the verbal commentary and footage meant that the CCTV footage of violence attributed to Sudanese gangs was

not presented accurately as viewers would have inferred they were being shown visual evidence of Sudanese gang activity. (*Daily Telegraph, 1 December*)

Detention camps in Sri Lanka begin to empty

Around 128,000 Tamils at Manik Farm who fled fighting between government troops and separatist Tamil Tiger rebels, will remain there for now while they await resettlement in their home villages. The Government has stepped up the process of returning people, even though much of the north was devastated by the fighting and littered with minefields, and basic services such as transport, health and education are yet to be fully restored. Some Tamils, especially in the north, fear discrimination and harassment following the Tigers' defeat. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 2 December*)

Christmas Island expansion could see temporary use of tents for asylum seekers

DIAC says capacity of the Christmas Island Detention Centre will be boosted to hold as many as 2200. A new compound will be built by March, with plans to house asylum seekers in tents until then. The expansion will cost the Federal Government \$45 million more than it budgeted for this year. The extension provoked an angry response from the co-ordinator of A Just Australia, Kate Gauthier. "That \$45 million is throwing good money after bad," Ms Gauthier said. "When the Government came in, it agreed detention on Christmas Island was a bad policy but said it was obliged not to waste taxpayers' money and use the facility if they needed it. Now they are going one step further." The Australian Human Rights Commission said yesterday it was concerned about the level of community support and services available to people held on the small island. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 3 December*)

Abbott says asylum seekers should have been removed

Australia's new Federal Opposition Leader has indicated that if he were in charge, he would have taken a tougher approach to getting a group of Sri Lankan asylum seekers off the Oceanic Viking off the ship. "If 70 people invaded the Prime Minister's office, it wouldn't matter how good the cause was, they would be removed. I think the people who were on the Oceanic Viking should have been removed," he said. (*Radio Australia, 3 December*)

Migration numbers at record high

THE number of permanent and long-term migrants arriving in Australia has soared to more than 500,000 a year. Almost two-thirds of our population growth is now coming from net overseas migration, which has trebled in just five years to a record 285,347. (*The Age, 4 December*)

UN condemns detention centres

The UN's Special Rapporteur on Health, Anand Grover, has called for the detention centre on Christmas Island to be closed down after spending 12 days visiting Australia's prisons, detention centres and indigenous communities. He said it is isolated and inaccessible and its excision from Australia means asylum seekers there can't access the same legal help as those on the mainland. (*SBS World News, 4 December*)

Biometric tests for asylum seekers

Asylum seekers in Melbourne and Sydney are being asked to provide an image of their face and a scan of their fingerprints as part of a six-month voluntary trial of a scheme to gather biometric data. The data will be checked against records in the United States, Britain, Canada and New Zealand in a search for multiple identities and criminal backgrounds. The scheme has been criticised by refugee and privacy advocates. (*The Age, 5 December*)

Liberals steer to the right on boats

Sydney MP Scott Morrison will be appointed to the immigration portfolio as Tony Abbott moves to harden the Coalition's stance on immigration. RCOA chief executive Paul Power criticised the system of offshore processing, saying it made more sense to manage asylum-seekers on the mainland. "Years of strident political debate has led to a situation where decisions are made to minimise political embarrassment to a government," Mr Power said. "Both major parties have done that." (*The Australian, 8 December*)

Boat person shot dead by Sri Lankan soldiers

A would-be asylum seeker is believed to have been shot dead by the Sri Lankan army as he tried to board a refugee boat bound for Australia. Sri Lankan media has reported that soldiers surprised a group of about 40 people on a beach near the east coast city of Batticaloa on Friday night as they were

preparing to make the dangerous journey out of the country. One man was shot dead and another was arrested but the rest managed to escape, media said. (*West Australian*, 8 December)

Australia reassures Indonesia on resettlement for Tamils

Australia has assured Indonesia it will honour its commitment to rapidly resettle the 78 Tamil asylum seekers who spent almost a month aboard the Oceanic Viking. Home Affairs Minister Brendan O'Connor on Tuesday said Australia was working closely with Indonesia and UNHCR to assess the Tamils' asylum claims and begin resettlement. (*AAP in Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 December)

Morrison denies swerve to the right on refugees

The opposition's newly appointed immigration spokesman, Scott Morrison, has denied he will steer the Coalition sharply to the Right, but has indicated he will seek to leverage the Howard-era record on border security in the upcoming election. Mr Morrison – a former NSW Liberal Party director – said he shared former MP Bruce Baird's sympathy for refugees. "But where I disagree with him is I believe in a very strong scheme, a very orderly scheme," Mr Morrison said. (*The Australian*, 9 December)

Indonesia to pass laws on people smuggling

Indonesia's government hopes to enact people-smuggling laws by next year, with penalties of up to 10 years' jail for those convicted of the offence. The new laws would also make it easier for Indonesia to extradite suspects to Australia to face prosecution, where people smugglers can face up to 20 years' jail. Indonesia is catching increasing numbers of people smuggling suspects with the help of new Australia-trained and funded specialist strike teams. (*AAP in Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 December)

DIAC signs immigration residential housing contract with Serco

DIAC today announced the signing of a five-year contract with Serco Australia Pty Ltd, valued at about \$45 million, which covers the provision of detention services at immigration residential housing (IRH) and immigration transit accommodation (ITA) in four cities. Serco currently delivers immigration detention, custodial, rehabilitation, defence, health, education, transport and other services in a number of countries including Australia. (*Department of Immigration and Citizenship*, 11 December)

Christmas Island resident angry at overcrowding

Christmas Island's two immigration detention facilities are almost full to capacity, with 1448 asylum-seekers waiting for their refugee claims to be processed. Tension is rising at news that Christmas Island's permanent population, already sharing the island with a visiting workforce of about 300, may soon need to make room for more public servants and service providers. Locals are angry at rising rents and food prices, and by what they perceive as a crowding effect on the usually quiet territory of just 135 sq km, of which 63% is national park. In meetings with federal ministers the Shire of Christmas Island has asked for massive investment to ease the pressure. (*The Australian*, 12 December)

Indonesia prevented almost 2000 asylum seekers from travelling

Indonesian authorities have prevented almost 2000 asylum-seekers from travelling to Australia in the past 12 months. The interceptions were the work of the Indonesian National Police, operating in close consultation with the AFP in disrupting the unauthorised voyages, most of which used Indonesia as the jumping-off point for the final trip to Australia. In the same period, Indonesian authorities disrupted 85 suspected people-smuggling ventures, the AFP revealed. (*The Australian*, 15 December)

Plans to use Darwin detention centre

The immigration detention centre in Darwin was being considered as a contingency if pressure remained at Christmas Island, with a spokeswoman for Immigration Minister Chris Evans saying "irregular maritime arrivals" would continue to be processed on Christmas Island and any shift in accommodation to the mainland would not affect their legal status. If the secure facility in Darwin were to be used, it would only be for single men housed on Christmas Island who are close to leaving detention. (*The Age*, 15 December)

Indonesia intercepts asylum boat

Indonesia has declared a Pakistani man and four locals as suspected people-smugglers after a group of 47 Afghan migrants were intercepted as they planned to reach Australia. The 40 Afghan men, two women and five children were arrested on Thursday on eastern Lombok island in a house belonging to a local resident. The alleged people smugglers will be charged with human trafficking and immigration offences, a police spokesman said. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 December)

78 Sri Lankans rescued by Oceanic Viking granted refugee status

All of the 78 Sri Lankan asylum-seekers rescued by the Customs ship Oceanic Viking have been assessed by UNHCR and found to be refugees, increasing the pressure on the Rudd government to find a home for the Tamils. (*The Australian, 16 December*)

Amnesty criticises conditions on Christmas Island

Amnesty International Australia's Graham Thom, who recently inspected facilities on Christmas Island, said the conditions made it impossible for the Federal Government to maintain it had a humane immigration policy. Amnesty criticised what it describes as prison-like conditions for children, many of them without a parent or guardian, and the use of tents to house asylum seekers. Many asylum seekers, including some unaccompanied minors, had been in detention for more than six months, while some had been there for close to a year. In the meantime, Christmas Island's residents will receive a \$50 million boost to the island's infrastructure as the Rudd Government seeks to placate the permanent population for the burden of its offshore detention program. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 16 December*)

Merak Tamils seek same deal as Viking

As the resettlement of 78 Sri Lankan asylum seekers who disembarked from the Oceanic Viking is given priority, 254 of their compatriots, including 31 children, remained on their boat in increasingly squalid conditions in the Indonesian port of Merak after more than two months, unable to get even a first meeting with UNHCR. Eight people who left the boat a few days after it arrived were assured they would be processed by the UNHCR. However, after a few days in community housing, they now share a crowded cell in a central Jakarta immigration centre and have not been allowed access to UNHCR, which assesses refugee claims and arranges resettlement. One of the men on the boat in Merak has returned to Sri Lanka because his mother was gravely ill. He was detained by authorities at Colombo airport and remains in prison. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 18 December*)

First Oceanic Viking refugees arrive

The first of the refugees from the Oceanic Viking have arrived in Australia. Two Sri Lankans flew into the country yesterday and 13 others are on their way to Canada via a UN resettlement centre in Romania. The group of 78 was rescued at sea by the Australian Customs ship before being taken to Indonesia's Bintan Island, where they refused to disembark for a month. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has now determined that all of the Tamils are refugees and it is negotiating with other countries about resettling the remaining 63 refugees. (*ABC Online, 21 December*)

Tamil Tigers 'identified on asylum-seeker boat'

THE Sri Lankan government says it has identified up to three former Tamil Tigers seeking asylum in Australia on a boat moored at the Indonesian port of Merak. Sri Lankan government officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, have confirmed remarks made by the Sri Lankan High Commissioner to Australia. But they emphasise that a definitive identification is impossible until the passengers agree to leave the boat. (*The Australian, 23 December*)

30 unaccompanied minors moved from Christmas Island to Melbourne

Overcrowding at Christmas Island has forced the Rudd Government to move 30 Afghan youths to the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation centre to speed up processing of their claims for asylum. Despite the shift to the mainland, the 30 unaccompanied minors remain in legal limbo. The youths – all believed to be boys – will be held at the centre until immigration officers decide whether they are to be granted protection. An earlier group of 10 Afghan boys sent to the same facility in September has since been granted visas to stay. (*The Age, 23 December*)

Asylum seeker dies on Merak boat

One of almost 250 Sri Lankan asylum seekers who have spent the past 11 weeks refusing to leave their boat in Indonesia has died after allegedly being denied medical help. The 29-year-old Tamil died late last night after falling ill several days ago. The Tamils, intercepted by the Indonesian Navy en route to Australia in October, do not want to come ashore because they fear they will be sent to an Indonesian detention centre and forced to wait years for resettlement. Refugee advocates have called on the Australian government to intervene and bring the asylum seekers to Australia. (*AAP in Sydney Morning Herald, 24 December*)

Opposition Leader pledges to turn asylum boats back

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott says he will turn asylum-seeker boats back out to sea if the Coalition wins the next election. Mr Abbott attacked the Prime Minister over his lack of "steel" in handling the issue. "If the circumstances permit it, you've got to be prepared to turn boats around," Mr Abbott told *The Australian* yesterday. (*The Australian*, 31 December)

62nd boat arrival for 2009 – passenger taken to hospital

A boat carrying 58 asylum seekers and four crew has been intercepted by the Australian navy 40km north of Ashmore Islands on New Year's Eve, the 62nd boat intercepted during 2009. A male passenger was treated on board by a navy medical officer, who assessed him as being in need of immediate medical attention, and he was transferred to Darwin Hospital. (*AAP in Brisbane Times*, 1 January)

Abbott plan to tow back boats rejected

Church leaders, refugee groups and former prime minister Malcolm Fraser have criticised Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's announced policy of towing seaworthy asylum boats back out to sea. Mr Fraser said Mr Abbott's policy pledge was "out of the past, appropriate to the 1930s" when Australia was "a narrow, inward-looking country" and the product of "grossly exaggerated claims about border protection". (*The Australian*, 1 January)

Refugee Council condemns Abbott plan

The Refugee Council of Australia says Tony Abbott's plan to turn back seaworthy asylum seeker boats is "irrational", "inflammatory" and contradictory to Australia's international obligations. "Our obligation as a country is to consider claims of people who arrive spontaneously at our borders, and 150 countries have ratified a convention, that's their obligation," RCOA president John Gibson said. The majority of Australians did not want to return to past divisive and destructive policies, he said. (*ABC Online*, 1 January)

Ex-DIAC official speaks out against Cornelia Rau payout

The \$2.6 million compensation paid to unlawfully detained psychiatric patient Cornelia Rau has been challenged by Vince McMahon, who until 2007 was the Immigration Department's head of border protection. Comparing it with the "pittance" awarded to victims of the Stolen Generations, Mr McMahon wrote: "If somebody can get more in compensation for one day of unlawful detention than other citizens get for a lifetime of work from which they are denied payment at all, it is clearly unjust." (*The Australian*, 2 January)

Indonesians arrest 12 boat people

Indonesia has arrested eight Afghans and four Vietnamese migrants who were trying to reach Australia. They were stranded on Kodingareng island a small island near Makassar, the provincial capital of South Sulawesi province after their boat suffered an engine problem. They had offered to pay local residents to repair the boat's engine but they reported them to the police instead. (*Sunday Territorian*, 3 January)

First asylum boat arrival for 2010

A BOAT carrying 76 asylum seekers and four crew has been intercepted in Australian waters three nautical miles (5.5km) north of Christmas Island – the first arrival of 2010. They've been taken to the island for health and identity checks. (*AAP in Herald Sun*, 3 January)

Christmas Island on brink of overflow

Detention facilities on Christmas Island are once more on the brink of overflowing following the arrival of two asylum boats carrying a total of more than 100 asylum-seekers in less than 24 hours. According to the Immigration Department, there were 1413 asylum-seekers on Christmas Island before the latest arrivals. The centre, which was designed to accommodate 400 people, has been radically reconfigured to manage the surge with the use of tents to house detainees, although the department has said it could transfer asylum-seekers to detention centres on the mainland if it had to. (*The Australian*, 5 January)

Tamils on Christmas Island protest processing delays

Sri Lankan asylum seekers on Christmas Island have staged a brief boycott of the gym, library, canteen and the island's computers to protest against the length of their detainment. Of 196 Tamils that arrived in June last year: 112 have received visas while, six months later, 78 are still waiting. People from

another boat of 78, which arrived in August, are also still waiting to be processed. (*AAP in Sydney Morning Herald, 5 January*)

Australian deals to stop asylum boats criticised by Human Rights Watch

Human Rights Watch has criticised recent moves across Asia to prevent the resettlement of refugees, which they say began with the agreement in October between Australia and Indonesia to prevent a boatload of Sri Lankan asylum seekers from entering Australian waters. "The willingness to flout international refugee law and to ignore the entreaties of refugees not to be sent back to their home countries has become the mark of chummy bilateral relations between Asian states." (*Sydney Morning Herald, 6 January*)

Tamils on Merak boat not receiving medical help

An Australian doctor says he has had to resort to giving medical advice over the phone to asylum seekers on a boat at an Indonesian port. The Tamils have been refusing to go into detention for processing for almost three months. But a refugee advocate and doctor says authorities are not responding to requests for medical help. (*ABC Online, 6 January*)

Lessons of 1979 point to correct course on boat people: Sydney Morning Herald editorial

Our leaders appear to lack the moral courage to stand up for refugees... The Opposition now accuses the Rudd Government of softening immigration laws, via amendments that the Coalition supported in a Senate committee and parliamentary votes. Yet its "solutions", turning back boats and reintroducing temporary visas, are neither principled nor practical... Ideally, Mr Rudd should be able to count on Mr Abbott's support to uphold Australia's legal and humanitarian obligations and, one might add, be true to Christian teaching. If only these leaders had the moral courage and conviction of their predecessors 30 years ago. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 7 January*)

Tamil refugees in Indonesia questioned by Sri Lankan officials

An Australian refugee advocate has claimed that Sri Lankan embassy officials and naval officers have been allowed to question Tamil asylum seekers held in an Indonesian detention centre, including eight asylum seekers who had agreed to leave the boat moored in Merak. Saradha Nathan said the Sri Lankan navy officers were attempting to negotiate for the eight detainees to return to Sri Lanka, and had threatened to deport all those on the boat at Merak to Boosa jail in Sri Lanka. (*The Age, 9 January*)

ASIO security warning on Tamil refugees

Five Sri Lankans who ASIO says pose a risk to national security are now being detained on Christmas Island. The Government says the one woman and her two children will not be held behind the razor wire. Immigration Minister Chris Evans said all were ineligible to live in Australia. However, as the United Nations has found them to be genuine refugees in fear of persecution, they cannot be deported to possible harm in Sri Lanka. Australian Tamil supporters and refugee lawyers yesterday called on ASIO to release the grounds for the group's rejection. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 13 January*)

ASIO checks unreliable: former Immigration officer

ASIO's security checks are open to political interference and should not form the basis of rejecting refugees from Australia, says Frederika Steen, who worked for the Immigration Department for 17 years. Few people know about ASIO's checking process. One of the last two men detained on Nauru had his adverse assessment dropped after contesting it in court. The other was resettled in Sweden. Ms Steen said the five Tamils were now facing a similar limbo. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 14 January*)

Immigration warns Government to start processing on mainland

The Immigration Department has given high-level advice to start processing asylum-seekers on the mainland or risk further riots and disturbances at Christmas Island's detention centre, Island accommodation is approaching 95% capacity. The Government is being urged to open spill-over facilities at Darwin. (*Herald Sun, 14 January*)

Abbott panders to xenophobia: Canberra Times editorial

Any pretence that there was anything other than political expediency involved in the Opposition's policies on refugees must have been entirely dispelled by the nonsense coming from Opposition spokesmen, starting with Tony Abbott himself, about Australia's national security being "compromised" by the fact that some of the Sri Lankan refugees were deemed by ASIO to be an unacceptable security risk. (*Canberra Times, 14 January*)

Research shows detention harms asylum seekers

Study has found the longer an asylum seeker remains in an immigration detention centre the greater their risk of developing a mental illness. There is a good case to be made on health grounds that immigration detention should be used in very limited ways for asylum seekers, and never for children. *(Sydney Morning Herald, 20 January)*

New Zealand changes mind, as final Oceanic Viking refugees leave Indonesia

New Zealand has changed its mind after a top level appeal from Australia and agreed to take 13 of the 78 Sri Lankan refugees from the Oceanic Viking after "discussions at a prime ministerial level". Australia has already taken 12 of the refugees. The US is taking 28, Canada 13 and Norway three, with these 44 now in a UNHCR processing facility in Romania. Sixteen still in Indonesia were expected to fly today to a UNHCR facility in Manila where 13 will be processed for final acceptance by New Zealand and three more for Australia. Four Sri Lankans, three men and a woman, who were assessed as security risks are on Christmas Island with the woman's two children. *(The Australian, 20 January)*

Asylum seekers charged over detention centre riot

Australian Federal Police have charged 11 asylum seekers following a brawl at a detention centre on Christmas Island that left 40 people injured. Police say the men, aged between 21 and 36, face a total of 23 charges including riot, assault and possessing weapons. The charges relate to a fight at the North West Point Immigration Detention Centre on November 21 last year. *(ABC News Online, 20 January)*

Sri Lanka demands access to asylum seekers

Sri Lanka wants access to asylum seekers who leave Sri Lanka for countries such as Australia because they "may have been involved in serious crimes including terrorism". They are also urging UNHCR to delay processing of Sri Lankan asylum seekers. RCOA president John Gibson said the proposal was absurd. "It is totally contrary to the spirit and principles underlying the Refugee Convention to grant access to officials from a would-be persecuting state," he said. "The UNHCR has clearly stated this fundamental position." *(The Age, 22 January)*

Asylum boat evidence to stay secret

The Northern Territory coroner has allowed the Australian navy to keep some evidence confidential in the inquest into last year's fatal explosion on an asylum seeker boat off the northwest coast. The inquest will also examine secret footage, which claims to show Australian Defence Force personnel kicking asylum seekers and preventing them from clinging to an inflatable rescue boat after they were thrown into the ocean by the blast. *(The Australian 22 January)*

Indonesia seeks Australian help on Merak boat

Indonesia's foreign minister has called on Australia to help resolve a long-running asylum seeker stand-off at a Javanese port. More than 240 Sri Lankan asylum seekers have spent more than three months holed up on their rickety cargo boat at the port of Merak, in Java's west. The Rudd government has sought to distance itself from the stand-off, insisting it is up to Indonesia to resolve it. *(AAP in Sydney Morning Herald 24 January)*

Inquest into fatal boat blast begins

Australian Navy personnel will be among the first to give evidence in an inquest into the deaths of five asylum seekers that begins in Darwin today. The coronial inquest is set down for four weeks. The five asylum seekers died when their boat, known as the SIEV 36, caught fire as it was being towed by the Australian Navy. Mr Cavanagh says the inquest will bring "all the issues" flowing from the incident out into the "public domain". *(ABC Online, 25 January)*

Abbott taken to task over 'divisive' citizenship message

An immigration speech by the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, has been criticised as divisive, hurtful and deliberately crafted to push buttons and play the race card before Australia Day. Human rights advocates and politicians have criticised the speech Mr Abbott delivered to the Australia Day Council in Melbourne, in which he suggested there was an anxiety among Australians "that the great prize of Australian citizenship is insufficiently appreciated and given away too lightly". RCOA president John Gibson said Mr Abbott was trying to reinvigorate the border protection debate without proper appreciation of all the contributing factors. Mr Gibson said the Opposition was not prepared to

acknowledge the need to treat people humanely when they arrived and find long-term regional solutions. "This is the language of Tampa," he said. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 25 January*)

Government rejects call to free asylum seekers from Australian of the Year

The Federal Government has rejected Australian of the Year Patrick McGorry's call to free asylum seekers from detention, citing security and health concerns. Professor McGorry, a mental health expert, labelled detention centres "factories for producing mental illness" within hours of receiving his award on Monday. He said asylum seekers should have their claims processed while they live in the community, not in detention facilities on Christmas Island. Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard rejected the call to free asylum seekers. "The government will continue to have a mandatory detention policy," (*AAP in Sydney Morning Herald 26 January*)

Inquest - Navy errors blamed for fire on SIEV 36

Desperate asylum-seekers intercepted at sea by the navy were allowed to keep cigarette lighters and matches, even though one man was seen to make a "throat-slashing gesture" in the chaos before their boat exploded, killing five and injuring many more. The inquest was told "a level of confusion . . . and lack of control" allowed the boat to be sabotaged and set ablaze by either its Indonesian crew or the 47 predominantly Afghan asylum-seekers packed on board. (*The Australian, 26 January*)

Two Aussies detained for visiting asylum seeker boat

Three refugee advocates – Australian Tamil Congress head Saradha Nathan, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's Pamela Curr and Canadian Humanitarian Appeal for Relief of Tamils' Jessica Chandrashekar – have been detained by Indonesian police for visiting a group of Tamil asylum seekers locked in a stand-off with the Indonesian government. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 27 January*)

Authorities intercept eighth asylum boat this year

A boat carrying 48 asylum seekers was intercepted by HMAS Launceston near Ashmore Reef, the eighth boat intercepted in 2010. The asylum-seekers had been transferred to a Customs ship and would be taken to Christmas Island for "security, identity and health checks". (*The Australian, 28 January*)

Mobile phones banned at Christmas Island detention centre

As the Government moved 115 mostly Afghan refugees off the island to start their lives on the mainland yesterday, detention staff braced for the arrival of another 77 asylum seekers intercepted on two boats this week. Cramped conditions on the island have deteriorated and refugee advocates say the recent confiscation of mobile phones in the main detention centre was an effort to suppress bad news. (*Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January*)

Inquest - Seaman 'kicked asylum seeker off rescue boat'

A Navy seaman kicked away two asylum seekers clinging to the side of an inflatable rescue boat as he pulled a colleague aboard, a coroner heard yesterday. Earlier Stephen Walsh, QC, counsel assisting the coroner, said it was the policy of the Australian Defence Force that personnel be saved before civilians. He said it was possible that some asylum seekers had died because of the policy. (*The Age, 28 January*)

Asylum seekers end hunger strike

Sri Lankan asylum seekers on Christmas Island have ended a hunger strike over the length of time it takes immigration officials to process their applications. A group of more than 100 Tamils at the Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre started a hunger strike on Friday. (*Sunday Canberra Times, 31 January*)