



Refugee Council of Australia

BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

1 April 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

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NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL

2009 UNHCR asylum statistics put Australia's role into perspective

RCOA's response to UNHCR's 2009 statistics on asylum applications in industrialised countries emphasised that Australia's share of global asylum applications remains very small. In 2009, Australia received 6170 asylum applications, just 1.6% of the 377,160 applications received across 44 industrialised nations. Of the 44 nations, Australia was ranked 16th overall and was 21st on a per capita basis. RCOA emphasised that the applications received in Australia must be viewed in light of the 286,680 applications received in Europe and the 82,270 applications received in North America. The UNHCR data shows that the industrialised countries with the largest number of asylum applications in 2009 were the United States (49,020), France (41,980), Canada (33,250), United Kingdom (29,840), Germany (27,650) and Sweden (24,190). Our media release on the statistics is at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/media.html>. RCOA was very active in the media on this topic, with coverage including an opinion piece in the Daily Telegraph at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/opinion/a-fair-go-for-refugees-is-a-fair-go-for-all-australians/story-e6frezz0-1225842035844> and a letter in The Australian at <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/opinion/counting-heads/comments-fn558imw-1225844959872>.

RCOA calls for change to handling of visa applications for people with disabilities

RCOA has called for the Australian Government to change its approach to handling offshore refugee and humanitarian visa applications for people with disabilities. In a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration, RCOA argued for the Refugee and Humanitarian Program to be excluded from the government's migration health requirement, given the high numbers of refusals for refugees with disabilities and the vulnerability of those involved. In 2008-09, 116 offshore Refugee and Humanitarian visas were refused on health grounds while only 69 applicants were granted a health waiver. See http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/submissions/1003_JSCM_disability_submission.pdf. CEO Paul Power presented evidence to a hearing of the Parliamentary committee on March 10.

Busy time for RCOA advocacy

The past month has been a busy time for RCOA in advocating for our policy positions within a variety of fora. After the merger of A Just Australia (AJA) into RCOA, AJA continues to organise the annual lobby trip to Canberra for refugee and asylum seeker advocacy organisations. This year RCOA attended along with Amnesty International, Uniting Justice, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, Hotham Mission and the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre. The group met with over 20 key politicians and their advisers, including the Minister for Home Affairs, Parliamentary Secretaries, Shadow Ministers, Senators, MPs and ministerial advisers. The trip had a strong focus on meeting with key Coalition members to provide input on the current direction of Coalition policy.

RCOA was also represented in recent weeks at meetings of the Onshore Protection Consultative Group, Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council, the bi-annual DIAC-NGO Dialogue on Humanitarian Issues and the Department of Foreign Affairs NGO Consultations. Through these meetings, RCOA took up many

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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

issues raised by members and supporters through our various policy networks and our annual community consultations on the Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

Call for refugee advocates to participate in UNHCR's global consultations

The Australian Refugee Rights Alliance is a coalition of NGOs, academics and advocacy based organisations who are committed to advocating for the rights of refugees at an international level through annual participation at the key policy meetings of UNHCR Geneva. Key members of the alliance include RCOA, the Centre for Refugee Research at the University of NSW, Amnesty International, Act for Peace (NCCA) and Settlement Council of Australia. The ARRA team is committed to fundraising for and actively supporting the participation on advocates from refugee backgrounds at these meetings. This year, ARRA is seeking funding to support the participation of three delegates from refugee backgrounds. Given the international focus of the UNHCR meetings, we are keen to ensure broad regional representation. Having already confirmed the attendance of a delegate from the Middle East region, we are currently seeking one representative from the Africa region and one from Asia to report on the key issues affecting refugees and asylum seekers across those regions. For selection criteria and information on how to apply, visit <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/unhcr.html> Applications close on Monday 19 April.

RCOA welcomes new board members

RCOA is very pleased to welcome Dr Judyth Watson and Dr Phil Glendenning to the organisation's board. For 11 years to 1997, Dr Watson was a Member of the WA Legislative Assembly serving from 1991 to 1993 as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs, Seniors and Women's Interests. She has been an active member of many community-based organisations serving on the boards of the Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees (CARAD), CASE for Refugees (a community legal centre in Perth) and A Just Australia and with the Social Responsibilities Commission of the Anglican Province of WA. Dr Watson's participation on the board will strengthen RCOA's national reach, bringing a vital WA perspective to our policy work.

Dr Phil Glendenning is the director of the Edmund Rice Centre. He is also the National President of Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR), past Deputy Chair of A Just Australia and has just completed a two-year term on the board of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS). With a background in education, development and political science, today he is primarily involved in peace and reconciliation work, especially with youth, in Australia, Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine and Rwanda. He was the catalyst behind the Deported to Danger report, which alerted the Australian and worldwide community to the plight of refugees removed from Australia. In 2007, he was awarded both an Honorary Doctorate by Australian Catholic University and ACFID's Sir Ron Wilson Human Rights Award for his work in human rights.

RCOA CEO speaks at Racism Revisited Conference

CEO Paul Power recently spoke at the Racism Revisited conference at Murdoch University, Perth on March 19-20. His presentation was on "Australian Attitudes to the Acceptance of Refugees". The talk outlined that while Australia has received more than 750,000 refugee and humanitarian entrants since Federation, Australians' awareness of, and support for, the nation's role in receiving and resettling refugees has been undermined by 15 years of political and public division on aspects of refugee policy. A summary of the speech can be found at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/resources/speeches.html>

Red Cross appointed as Immigration detention monitor

Australian Red Cross has signed an agreement with the Australian Government to assess and monitor the conditions of people in detention. The Memorandum of Understanding formalises arrangements for Red Cross to visit all immigration detention facilities and provides a framework for communication between Red Cross and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC).

Tenders released for Humanitarian Settlement Services and Cultural Orientation program

During March, DIAC released its requests for tenders for two of its key refugee support programs – the new Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) tender for post-arrival support and the pre-arrival Australian Cultural Orientation (AUSCO) program conducted for refugees prior to departure to Australia. The HSS tender closes on 26 May while the AUSCO tender closes on 16 April. Announcing the HSS tender, Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson, said the Government was seeking a new flexible, client-centred approach for Australian settlement services.

His statement is at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/parlsec/media/media-releases/2010/lf10016.htm>. Detailed information on both tenders can be found at <https://www.tenders.gov.au/?event=public.ATM.list>

UNHCR revising advice on Sri Lanka and Afghanistan

UNHCR is currently reviewing the protection guidelines for Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, last updated in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Regional representative Rick Towle has said of Sri Lanka that “there's a long way to go in terms of a rehabilitation and dealing with humanitarian issues around demining. But it's certainly moving in the right direction and we think any review of the guidelines needs to reflect these positive changes”. Organisations with information which they believe should be considered by UNHCR in the revision of the protection guidelines are urged to pass on information through UNHCR's Canberra regional office.

Government introduces new people smuggling legislation

The Australian Government has introduced new legislation to “strengthen the Commonwealth's anti-people smuggling legislative framework”. The Anti People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2010 will, among other things, establish a new offence of providing material support or resources towards a people smuggling venture and introduce tougher penalties for multiple offences and for actions which involve “exploitation or danger of death or serious harm”. The bill has been referred to committee for an inquiry. The deadline for submissions is April 16. RCOA encourages all organisations and concerned individuals to make a submission, which can be as simple as a letter expressing your views. For details, see http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/legcon_ctte/antipeoplesmuggling/index.htm

Launceston Council declared a Refugee Welcome Zone

On March 21, Launceston City Council became the second local government area in Tasmania to be declared a Refugee Welcome Zone. Mayor of Launceston, Albert van Zetten, signed the declaration at a Music in the Park event held as part of Harmony Day celebrations. Launceston's declaration brings the total number of Refugee Welcome Zones in Australia to 73.

NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

Minister Evans speech at Sydney Institute “Irregular Migration – The Global Challenge”

“While there is poverty, famine, wars, weak and corrupt governments, chronic unemployment, environmental degradation, natural disasters and racial, religious and political persecution, we will see people on the move. And Australia, as a wealthy developed country, where there is stable Government, an abundance of opportunity, and most importantly – where you can be safe – will always be an attractive destination. We need to accept that irregular migration will be with us for the foreseeable future, and design our policy responses with that reality in mind.” Read the at the Minister's website at <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/speeches/2010/ce100324.htm>

UNHCR annual asylum trends statistical report

UNHCR's 2009 statistical overview of asylum applications lodged in industrialised countries is available for download at <http://www.unhcr.org.au/pdfs/AsylumReport2009.pdf>

UNHCR Discussion paper: Settlement services a vital part of refugee protection

A discussion paper prepared by UNHCR on Australian and New Zealand settlement issues can be viewed here: <http://www.unhcr.org.au/pdfs/UNHCRdiscussionpaper2010.pdf>

COMING EVENTS

Tuesday 6 April – Sydney

Stakeholder meeting: skilled workers for the not-for-profit sector project

The Break Thru RTO in partnership with Strength to Strength Western Sydney (STS) project of Relationships Australia is exploring a unique partnership model to train clients with special needs to provide skilled workers for the Not For Profit (NFP) sector. The aim of the model is to increase the supply of skilled staff for the not-for-profit sector, improve the access of job seekers with special needs to meaningful work and pilot the effectiveness of a unique training model combining theory with concurrent work experience. A stakeholder meeting is being held to discuss this proposal further, get

your feedback on the envisaged model and gauge your interest in offering the work experience placement for students. This project will put a special focus on providing training and work experience for clients from a refugee and humanitarian background.

Details: 3:00pm-4:00pm; CS Training Room, Break Thru People Solutions, Level 1, 125 Main St, Blacktown, NSW; light refreshments will be provided. Please RSVP to mreetg@googlegroups.com by 31st March for catering purposes.

Tuesday 6 April to Friday 16 April – Perth

Free school holiday sport clinics

The City of Stirling is holding a series of free sport clinics for multicultural youth aged 6–12 years during the school holidays. Sports will include soccer (6 April and 13 April), basketball (8 April), tennis (9 April and 16 April), ultimate frisbee (12 April) and AFL (15 April).

Details: 11:00am-2:00pm; Herb Graham Recreation Centre, 27 Chesterfield Road, Mirrabooka WA; to register, contact Natalie on (08) 9440 6062. Bring a hat, sneakers and a drink bottle.

Wednesday 7 April and Thursday 8 April – Sydney

Chinese Cultural Day

This free event is being held as part of the City of Sydney's Living in Harmony festival.

Details: 10:30am-4:30pm each day; Chinese Garden of Friendship, Darling Harbour South End (adjacent to Entertainment Centre); for more information or to book contact Susana Ng on or email livinginharmony@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Thursday 8 April – Shepparton

FECCA National Access and Equity Consultation

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is conducting a national consultation on Commonwealth Government services and wants to hear your views. The consultation will allow FECCA to gain an understanding about how well government agencies work with people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in areas such as health, housing, employment, learning English and interpreting services. This information will then be used to make recommendations about how government agencies can improve the way they work. The consultation will be hosted by the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District.

Details: 2:00pm-5:00pm; RSVP by calling (03) 5831 2395.

Thursday 8 April – Sydney

Road Safety and Access Information Session

Auburn Diversity Services Inc (ADSi) is holding an information session on road safety. Milan Letunica from Auburn Council will tell us how we can be safe with information on the following topics: pedestrian safety, child restraints, seat belts, the significance of the school zones, license procedures and processes, road signs, the significance of penalties (demerit and double demerit points) and information in different languages.

Details: 2:00pm-4:00pm; Auburn Diversity Services Inc, 17 Macquarie Road, Auburn NSW; for more information contact Niv, Beatrice, Aynalem, Justin, Isaam, Ahmad or Ahlam on (02) 9649 6955.

Saturday 10 April – Sydney

2010 Celebration of African Cultures

Auburn will come alive once again on Saturday 10th April 2010 with colourful stalls, workshops, community information, music and performances to celebrate African Cultures. There will be lots of children's activities including face painting, drumming, jumping castles, sports and henna painting. The festival being is organised by the Somali Welfare and Culture Association, the African Women's Group and Auburn Council and is generously supported by Lebara Mobile, Shell, Auburn RSL, the Community Relations Commission, ACL, Anglicare, STARTTS, Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta MRC, AFG, Wan Word Women's Group and the Dinka Literary Association.

Details: 11:00am-4:00pm; corner of Hutchinson and Macquarie Roads, Auburn NSW; if you are interested in having a stall, performing, volunteering or becoming our sponsor please call Fatma Isir on 0407 904 526 or email on africultures@hotmail.com

Saturday 10 April – Sydney

The Flavour of Karen

The Karen Youth Organisation Australia invites you to attend this free lunchtime event, at which traditional Karen food will be served. A thesis by Peter Saw Htoo, entitled *Karen Indigenous Music and Dance Learning in an Australian Non-formal Context: A Case Study in Maintenance and Transmission*, will be launched at the event.

Details: 10:00am-1:00pm; Chester Hill Community Centre, Chester Hill Road NSW (opposite the library); admission and food are both free but donations of any amount are welcomed. For more information contact Saw Peter Htoo 0421 652 596, Saw Victor 0431 748 374, or Saw Hser Nay Gaw 0421 108 778.

Sunday 11 April – Brisbane

Ladies and Gentlemen's Afternoon Tea Fundraiser

The Romero Centre cordially invites you to their first annual Afternoon Tea Fundraiser. Funds raised at the event will be used to support Brisbane's refugees and asylum seekers.

Details: 2:30pm-4:00pm; tickets \$25.00 in advance, \$35.00 at the door; East Brisbane Community Centre, 538 Vulture Street, East Brisbane QLD; dressy casual attire; for tickets or further information contact Kathi or Jeniece on (07) 3846 3250.

Tuesday 13 April – Sydney

Cross-Cultural Workshop: A day in the life of a refugee

This free event is being held as part of the City of Sydney's Living in Harmony festival.

Details: 12:00pm-1:00pm; Level 3, Redfern Community Centre, 29-53 Hugo Street, Redfern; for more information or to book contact Michelle Thomas on (02) 9246 7878 or email livinginharmony@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Thursday 15 April - Sydney

The New Wave of Tibetan Activism Political Awakening and Cultural Renaissance in Post-2008 Tibet

This panel discussion will include speeches from Tenzin Dorjee (Tendor), Executive Director of Students for a Free Tibet (SFT); Tibetan musician Tenzin Choegyal; and Dr Simon Bradshaw, Campaign Coordinator for the Australia Tibet Council.

Details: 7:00pm-9:00pm; Biomed Theatre A, University of New South Wales; for more information contact Tamding Tsering on 0413 971 330 or tamtsering@gmail.com

Friday 16 April - Sydney

Film screening: Sun Behind the Clouds

Students for a Free Tibet (SFT) is hosting a special community screening of the film *Sun Behind the Clouds*. The screening will include a talk by special guest Tenzin Dorjee, Director of SFT in New York.

Details: 7:00pm-9:00pm; tickets \$20; Manly Cinemas, 25/43-45 East Esplanade, Manly NSW; for more information contact Tamdin on 0413 971 330 or Tenpa at iluftibet@gmail.com

Saturday 17 April - Sydney

Indonesian Cultural Day (ICD'10)

This free event is being held as part of the City of Sydney's Living in Harmony festival.

Details: 10:30am-3:00pm; Redfern Town Hall, 73 Pitt Street, Redfern; for more information or to book contact Michelle Thomas on (02) 9246 7878 or Mimi Mardijuwanti (NSW Adult Migrant English Service) on (02) 9289 9146 on Mondays, or email livinginharmony@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Saturday 17 April - Brisbane

Iraqi Festival Day

The Romero Centre is again working with the Iraqi Community to hold the Iraqi Festival Day. The day will include music, art, food, poetry and children's activities. All are welcome.

Details: 10:00am-3:30pm; Marymac Hall, 616 Ipswich Road, Annerley QLD; for more information, contact the Romero Centre on (07) 3846 3250 or email admin@romerocentre.org.au

Sunday 18 April - Melbourne

Ethiopian Festival

Celebrate the rich culture of the Ethiopian community in Victoria at this one day festival. Come along and experience Ethiopian music, dance performances, special talks and film screenings. Enjoy a cooking demonstration and fashion show, taste Ethiopian cuisine and take part in an Ethiopian coffee ceremony.

Details: 11:00am–4:00pm; Immigration Museum, 400 Flinders Street, Melbourne, for more information call 13 11 02 or visit

museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum

Saturday 24 April – Sydney

Living in Harmony Glebe Community Mural Launch

This free event is being held as part of the City of Sydney's Living in Harmony festival.

Details: 1:00pm–3:00pm, Peter Forsyth Auditorium, Francis Street (corner of Franklyn Street, Glebe); for more information or to book contact Nicholas Costaras on (02) 9246 7319 or email

livinginharmony@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Tuesday 27 April – Sydney

Cross-cultural tours

This free event is being held as part of the City of Sydney's Living in Harmony festival.

Details: 1:00pm-3:00pm; Auburn Gallipoli Mosque, Auburn; for more information or to book contact Maria Chan on (02) 9246 7312 or Nicholas Costaras on (02) 9246 7319 or e-mail

livinginharmony@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au

Sunday 23 May 2010 – Melbourne

RISE Festival

Refugee Survivors and Ex-detainees festival featuring Westridaz hip hop, Gulus Kogoyo Capoeira dance, the Social Studio fashion show, Pataphysics, the Liberian Choir and lots more. Hosted by comedians Amer Rahman and Nazeem Hussain of Fear of a Brown Planet.

Details: 3pm - 6pm; BMW Edge Building, Federation Square; for details, visit www.risefugee.org.

OPPORTUNITIES

Visit to a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border

Are you interested in going to the Thai-Burma border and visiting the Mae La refugee camp?

Andrew Flint from the Australian Karen Foundation is visiting the English and computer school funded by AFK. There is an opportunity to visit the refugee camp and experience life there while learning more about the refugee situation. For more information, visit www.australiankarenfoundation.org.au or contact Andrew Flint on aflint@qap.com.au or on 0419 313 047. Applications close 20 April 2010.

The Volunteer Grants 2010 Call for Applications

Volunteer Grants 2010 has been extended to help organisations meet the costs of training and undertaking police and working with children checks for community volunteers. Contact the Volunteer Grants Team on the toll-free hotline 1800 183 374 (Mon - Fri 9am to 5pm AEST) or email vg2010@fahcsia.gov.au. Applications close Friday 16 April 2010 at 2.00pm AEST.

Leadership Training for Young Muslims

Latrobe University in partnership with Islamic Council of Victoria is offering a fully subsidised part-time course (June-July 2010) aiming to empower young Muslim men and women to reach their full potential as citizens and future leaders. The course includes meetings with decision makers in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. For an application form, contact Heba Ibrahim at the Islamic Council of Victoria or email admin@icv.org.au.

Improving connections between young people and their families

StrongBonds, developed by the Jesuit Social Services, is a website with resources for parents and carers of young people, and for workers who are supporting young people in a family context. Help sheets are available in English, Arabic and Vietnamese on topics ranging from the role of child

protection services and the justice system to dealing with health and wellbeing issues. Fact sheets are available at <http://www.strongbonds.jss.org.au/>.

Muslim Women's Leadership Training Program

A short training course for Muslim women between 17 and 35 years old living, working or studying in the City of Brimbank. The course is fully subsidised. For any enquiries, contact Mete Temurcin, Brimbank City Council on Metet@brimbank.vic.gov.au or phone (03) 9249 4437.

Young African Men's project

The Centre for Multicultural Youth is looking for participants to take part in a youth-led project for young African men who want to make positive work and life changes. The program is targeted at young men with an African background, aged between 16 and 25, who: have been in Australia for 1-7 years; have had contact with police; are disengaged or at risk of becoming disengaged from education, training and employment. For more information, call (03) 9091 8232 or email gseid@cmymy.net.au.

Anger Management Program

Kenneth Nathan, currently based at Anglicare Sydney in the Reconnect-NAYS program, has developed an anger management program for young people from CALD backgrounds. Visit <http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/> and search for 'Breaking Point Breaking Through' for more information.

Seeking talent for Australia's first hip hop choir

Calling all MCs, dancers, beatmakers and singers! Sessions are held on Thursdays from 5:30 to 7:30, Level 1, 233 Barkly Street, Footscray. For more information call Mary Q on 0415 690 507 or email changeactnow@gmail.com.

Videos sought for the Second Youth Video Festival on Migration

Building on last year's successful launch of PLURAL+, a youth video festival on migration, diversity and social inclusion, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) again invite the world's youth to submit dynamic and forward-thinking videos focusing on these issues. Participants in the 2010 competition should submit their videos between now and 30 June 2010. Further information including guidelines, rules and regulations, and the entry form can be found at the PLURAL+ website at www.unaoc.org/pluralplus.

PACE Training Program for Refugee and Immigrant Women

The Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) is calling for expressions of interest for the PACE Training Program. The program aims to increase immigrant and refugee women's capacity to participate in the community and to support other women as resource persons, mentors or leaders. The program will cover topics such as communication/English skills, managing change, decision making, the Australian political structure, effective citizenship, and enhancing learning through leadership. The program will run from 17 May - 9 August, is free for participants and will have childcare facilities for children 5 years and under. For further details, contact Regina Quiazon, PACE Project Officer, on (03) 9418 0919 or on regina@mcwh.com.au. Closing date for expressions of interest: Friday 30 April 2010.

Council to Homeless Persons call for articles on the issue of 'Invisible' youth homelessness

Parity, the magazine of the Council to Homeless Persons, is seeking contributions on the issue of 'invisible' youth homelessness. Contributions are usually between 900 and 1800 words and need to be submitted by Friday 23 April 2010 to parity@chp.org.au. For more information, call Noel Murray, Editor, on (03) 9419 8699.

L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program

An exciting new opportunity for community volunteers who have an interest in helping disadvantaged young people. Volunteers undertake a comprehensive training package to become Driving Mentors. The program is FREE to all participants, and all costs and insurances are covered by Brimbank Council. For further details about the program, or to request an Information Kit, please contact the Transport Safety Officer on (03) 9249 4942 or email l2p@brimbank.vic.gov.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.

ASSET Cleaning Services

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre's Asylum Seeker Service for Employment and Training (ASSET) Cleaning Link matches you with the right person to get the house cleaning, window washing, lawn mowing and weeding jobs done. Contact Brian at bmcmamus99@yahoo.com.au or call 0432 270 786.

Youth off the Streets 2010 scholarships program

Nominations are now open for 2010 Youth Off The Streets Scholarships. Scholarships are awarded to young people, 14-21 years, who face barriers to accessing education and training and require financial and personal assistance to achieve their education and training goals. Youth Off The Streets offers \$5000 Scholarships for education and training available to young people around the country. For nomination criteria and information on how to apply go to http://www.youthoffthestreets.com.au/scholarship/scholarship_nominations_2010.html or contact the Youth Off The Streets Scholarship Program on (02) 9330 3500. Nominations close 7 May 2010.

Employment and volunteering opportunities

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

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)

18th Boat arrival, visa granted, Uniting Church calls for release of children

The Home Affairs Minister, Brendan O'Connor, said a boat carrying 47 people had been detected late on Wednesday, about 30 kilometres north-west of Ashmore Reef. President of the Uniting church, the Reverend Alistair Macrae, recently visited Christmas Island and called for the immediate release of all families and unaccompanied children. ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), 5 March)

Asylum seekers to be discussed with Indonesian President

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has touched down in Canberra for a three-day visit, his first visit to Australia since 2005. At least nine ministers arrived with him, including the ministers for foreign affairs, defence and the environment. During his visit, Dr Yudhoyono is expected to approve a deal that would make people smuggling a criminal offence in Indonesia. ([The Age](#), 9 March)

RCOA calls for caution on removals

Yesterday the government was poised to deport five Tamil asylum seekers on Christmas Island after they failed claims for protection with that decision supported by a merits review last week. The removals are a signal Australia considered it safe to return ethnic minority Tamils to certain parts of Sri Lanka, despite the recently ended civil war. A group including Sinhalese, Tamil, Iraqi, Afghan and Iranian asylum seekers currently under merits review would be the next to face removal from the island. RCOA urged caution. The Sri Lankan government had to demonstrate "durable peace" before it was safe to deport Tamils to the country, its president, John Gibson, said. ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), 9 March)

Immigration Minister Chris Evans interview on Radio National

Chris Evans, Immigration Minister says that there is no deal with Indonesia regarding asylum seekers. He says that the Indonesians do not have a specific law that criminalises people smuggling and that has been an issue. Evans says that with the improving situation in Sri Lanka, Australia's capacity to return people to Sri Lanka will improve. Evans says that they are open at looking at new policy options but they will not go back to the situation of having thousands of people locked up in detention camps with no hope of any resolution of their case. (ABC Radio National, 9 March) [Listen to interview](#)

Intelligence seals boat people Indonesia deal

In an agreement reached by Kevin Rudd and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono yesterday, in return for greater cooperation in stopping asylum seeker boats Indonesia will get access to intelligence gleaned by ASIO. Australia will increase maritime surveillance across the archipelago and help Indonesia process and resettle the thousands of asylum seekers already in the country. (West Australian, 11 March)

Evidence on detention centre riot in doubt

Prosecutors are unsure whether they have sufficient evidence against 11 asylum-seekers charged over a riot inside the Immigration Detention Centre on Christmas Island in November. The nine Sri Lankan men and two Afghans pleaded not guilty to charges of taking part in a riot and wielding weapons, including a chair. The Australian understands CCTV footage of some crucial parts of the rioting either does not exist or is of poor quality. ([The Australian](#), 12 March)

Tamil asylum seekers sent back

The Federal government has begun returning Tamil asylum seekers to Sri Lanka, amid signs that the threat to minority groups there and in Afghanistan is easing. Last night immigration officials were preparing to deport three Tamils from Christmas Island to Sri Lanka. Three have already gone and more are expected to follow, with 35 others from a range of countries with cases now before a merits review. UNHCR has said it is reconsidering its international safety guidelines for Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, the source of most asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat. UN guidelines underpin the decisions of governments when they consider refugee claims. Immigration Minister Chris Evans yesterday told ABC radio that conditions for Hazaras living in Afghanistan had also improved. ([The Age](#), 13 March)

Charges likely after SIEV findings

The Northern Territory Coroner is expected to recommend criminal charges be laid against three asylum seekers when he hands down his findings into the SIEV 36 explosion. The three Afghani men have been accused of deliberately setting fire to the boat they were aboard, resulting in the death of five men. A further 40 asylum seekers who were on board the boat suffered serious burns. A coronial inquest into the incident began on January 25 this year. Most of the people injured in the explosion have since been granted visas in Australia. It is understood any asylum seeker found to have committed a crime will have their visa revoked. (AAP in [Daily Telegraph](#), 16 March)

Would you trust them with your life?

With notes that she took during an interview between an immigration official and an asylum seeker in 2002, Rimi Khan exposes our Immigration Department as unqualified to be making life and death decisions (Rimi Khan [New Matilda](#), 18 March)

A fair go for refugees is a fair go for all Australians – RCOA opinion piece

The debate on refugee issues has two sides. On one you have a genuine attempt to resolve the complex protection needs of vulnerable people who have fled human rights abuses. On the other is a rush for short-term fixes that create more problems than they solve and are usually based on false assumptions about asylum seekers. ([Daily Telegraph](#), 18 March)

Asylum-seekers moved to mainland

The Department of Immigration and Citizenship yesterday confirmed that more than a dozen family groups, unaccompanied minors and single women have been resettled from the Christmas Island to a low security government-run immigration transit centres in Brisbane and Melbourne since October. Christmas Island, with a capacity of 2042, is now holding 1977 immigration detainees. Those regarded as vulnerable, or in the final stages of immigration processing, are being fast-tracked off the island. ([The Australian](#), 18 March)

Inquest: Navy's warning sparked fatal fire on asylum boat

A navy warning notice issued to the master of asylum-seeker vessel SIEV 36 was "clearly inappropriate" and sparked a series of events that led to the deaths of five Afghan asylum-seekers in an explosion off the northwest coast last April, the Northern Territory Coroner has found. In handing down his findings into the deaths, Greg Cavanagh said the fire had been deliberately lit and most of the 47 asylum-

seekers on board had known of a plan to sabotage the boat. The three men may face criminal charges. ([The Australian](#), 18 March)

Coalition suggests asylum seekers to be held in 'flotels' as another boat arrives

Coalition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison has raised the possibility of using floating, temporary accommodation to ease the housing crunch at Christmas Island, which has been brought on by a spike in the arrival of refugee boats. The suggestion came as Border Protection Command announced it had intercepted a boat carrying 18 passengers and four crew on Sunday night. The boat – the 26th this year – was intercepted 11 nautical miles north of Browse Island. The Immigration Department says there are now 2008 detainees being held at the Christmas Island centre. ([The Australian](#), March 23)

RCOA says UN report shows Aussie Asylum numbers very low

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees 2009 report, Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialised Countries, was released on Tuesday. The report shows the number of arrivals to Australia is low by world standards, with the nation receiving less than two per cent of all asylum applications in 2009. RCOA CEO Paul Power said the figures should put to rest claims Australia was being "flooded" by asylum seekers. "The only flood we are seeing is of self-serving political rhetoric," Mr Power said in a statement. "It is clear that refugees continue to seek protection in stable democracies which respect international law and human rights. Even though Australia's share of asylum-seekers is small, Australia should still be proud to be included among those receiving countries." ([SBS](#), March 24)

Asylum seekers not flooding Australia: RCOA

RCOA says the debate on asylum seekers is out of proportion to the numbers of asylum applications received. A United Nations report has revealed Australia received 6,170 applications in 2009 – 30 per cent more than in the previous year. That is 1.6 per cent of the total around the world – with 50,000 applications made to the United States and 42,000 to France. RCOA CEO Paul Power says Australia's share of asylum claims is very small. "The political debate in Australia would suggest that somehow the country is being flooded with asylum seekers and that's clearly not the case," he said. ([ABC News Online](#), March 24)

Govt says no asylum seeker spill to Darwin

The Federal Government says even with the latest boat arrivals, Darwin's detention centre will not be used to house asylum seekers for the first time. Two boats carrying about 80 people were detected in Australian waters yesterday morning and will be taken to Christmas Island for processing. A spokeswoman for the Immigration minister Chris Evans says there are already 2,008 detainees on the island, which has a capacity to house 2,040. She says there will be enough room for them because a number of detainees are being granted visas this week and some are being transferred to the mainland for other reasons. ([ABC News Online](#), March 24)

RCOA says Australian asylum numbers small in comparison

The Federal Opposition has seized on new figures on asylum seekers to criticise the Federal Government's border protection policies. The UN report reveals a 30% increase in the number of people seeking refuge in Australia last year. The Immigration Minister has told the Sydney Institute tonight that ongoing conflicts, rather than Labor policy is to blame for the increase in arrivals. Shadow Immigration Minister Scott Morrison said 'the figures released today prove the lie of Labor's spin when it comes to their border protection failures'.

Paul Power from RCOA said they've received 6000 applications in Australia over the last year, while there have been 280,000 applications in Europe and around 80,000 applications in North America. Immigration Minister Chris Evans said it's partly about the region which we live. Labor says asylum claims were about half those recorded in 2000 and 2001 under the Howard Government. (SBS TV World News, March 25)

Asylum claims: perspective needed – Age Editorial

Sometimes it is all too easy to jump to conclusions rather than take a longer, more considered route. How else to explain some of the reactions to the United Nations report on international asylum levels? ...Some commentators who prefer to reposition the asylum-seeker argument on more inflammatory lines, playing down this country's moral and legal responsibilities. Given that the majority of asylum seekers to Australia do not, in fact, come by sea but air, it would make more sense to publish a

photograph of a passenger jet: but the popular reaction would not, of course, be the same. ([The Age](#), March 25)

RCOA CEO and Immigration Minister on Radio Australia

The CEO of RCOA, Paul Power, agrees asylum seekers would be deterred if they thought Australia would reject their refugee claims. But he says the fuel behind refugee movements lies elsewhere: "What's actually fuelling the increase in numbers of people seeking protection are the situations in countries such as Afghanistan and Sri Lanka and also that people are finding it really hard to find effective protection in countries within South and South East Asia."

([Radio Australia](#), March 25)

Asylum-seekers fly to mainland

Authorities will today fly up to 100 asylum-seekers to the Australian mainland as Border Protection Command prepares to take a new boatload of 97 people to overcrowded Christmas Island for processing. The Federal Opposition accused Kevin Rudd of spilling asylum-seekers to the mainland by stealth, with new figures showing more than 200 boatpeople have been transferred from Christmas Island before being granted visas. ([The Australian](#) March 26)

Escapes prompt Australian detention questions

The office of Immigration Minister, Chris Evans says four people have escaped from the detention centre in the last month, although it understands they've been recaptured and security tightened. Eighty-nine asylum seekers were moved to Villawood detention centre last night to remain there before being flown home. Opposition Immigration spokesman, Scott Morrison says the recent escape of detainees casts doubt on the Government's ability to handle immigration issues. ([Radio Australia](#) March 29)

Craig Emerson MP responds to asylum seeker hype - ABC TV's Q&A

"Now I had a look at the number of who have come to Australia seeking asylum by boat. The number is 22,000. Now that seems like a fairly large number but that's not this year or last year, that's in the last thirty five years. 22,000 people have sought asylum in Australia over thirty five years! And there's this hysteria with the Liberals saying 'ooh' - it's as if we're being overrun by asylum seekers. It's just absurd, and I think in many respects, inhumane, to treat people who go to do a bit of shopping with their kids as 'they're here!'... Let's keep a bit of perspective about this." ([Q&A ABC TV](#) March 29)

Opinion piece - Asylum seekers are not "illegal"

Given the hysterical and narrow-minded xenophobia displayed in the past couple of days by many bloggers it is time for a few basic facts. ([The Courier Mail](#) March 30)

Refugee boats hit 100 under Labor - Sydney Morning Herald

Confirmation yesterday that two more boats had been intercepted in the Indian Ocean takes the number of boats arriving in Australian waters this month to 15. It makes a total 100 boats since the election of the Rudd government in December 2007. The news capped a bad day for the government on border protection policy with three Chinese detainees escaping from the Villawood detention centre. ([SMH](#) March 30)