



# Refugee Council of Australia

## **BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS**

**10 June 2010**

Welcome to the latest bulletin from the Refugee Council of Australia. We welcome feedback, ideas or information worth sharing. Please contact us at [info@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto: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](mailto:unsubscribe@refugeecouncil.org.au)

## **NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL**

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### **Excitement building for Refugee Week 2010**

Refugee Week 2010 will take place from 20-26 June, with the theme *Freedom from Fear*. RCOA still has plenty of Refugee Week posters available for community groups, event organisers, schools and any other groups planning to celebrate Refugee Week 2010. If you would like some posters and do not have a poster dispatch point in your area (a list of dispatch points can be found here: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwposterdispatch.html](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwposterdispatch.html)), contact the Refugee Council's Sydney office on (02) 9211 9333 or [info@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:info@refugeecouncil.org.au) to place an order.

**Events calendar:** If you are holding an event as part of Refugee Week celebrations, don't forget to register it on our national events calendar. Details on registering your event can be found here: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwevents.html](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwevents.html)

**Resources:** A new "Myths and Facts" chapter has been added to our Refugee Week Resource Kit. The chapter highlights some of the common myths about refugees and asylum seekers and aims to correct the record for people seeking information about issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers. The Resource Kit can be downloaded from [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwresources.html](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwresources.html)

**Facebook:** A new Facebook page for Refugee Week is now available, so please join as friends and "like" us! For all the latest Refugee Week news and events, visit the Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=666220428#!/pages/Refugee-Week-Australia/109056669134085](http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=666220428#!/pages/Refugee-Week-Australia/109056669134085)

### **Join In celebrating Refugee Week at the Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide launches**

In **Sydney**, Refugee Week 2010 will be launched on Saturday 19 June at the Pitt Street Uniting Church, 264 Pitt Street, Sydney, from 2:00pm to 5:00pm. The Sydney launch will include the presentation of the 2010 Refugee Humanitarian Awards, a screening of the 2010 Refugee Film Festival, the Dario Palermo Refugee Art Exhibition and the NSW AMES Freedom from Fear photography exhibition. To attend the launch, please RSVP to (02) 9211 9333 or e-mail [info@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:info@refugeecouncil.org.au)

In **Melbourne**, Refugee Week 2010 will be launched at a press conference event on Monday 21 June at Victorian Parliament House, Spring Street, East Melbourne, from 10.30am to 11.30am. Speakers will include John Gibson, President of RCOA; Pino Migliorino, Chair of the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA); Malcolm Fraser, former Prime Minister of Australia; Michael Gawenda, former editor of The Age and former refugee; and Nyagol Nyuon, former refugee. FECCA Director Megan Layton will be MC at the event. If you wish to attend, please contact the RCOA Melbourne office on (03) 9600 3302 or [melbourne@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:melbourne@refugeecouncil.org.au)

In **Adelaide**, Refugee Week 2010 will be officially launched by the Hon Grace Portolesi MP, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, on Monday 21 June at 12:00pm, at the Kerry Packer Civic Gallery, UniSA City West campus, Hawke Building level 3, North Terrace. The event will include the launch of the MRC ARTS UnderXposed Youth Photographic Project by Mr Hieu Van Le, Lieutenant Governor of South Australia. The launch will also feature guest speakers and cultural performances by the Rwandan and Bhutanese communities. To attend, register through [www.hawkecentre.unisa.edu.au](http://www.hawkecentre.unisa.edu.au) or (08) 8302 0215, or contact Matti Spellacy on (08) 8217 9510 or [admin@mrcsa.com.au](mailto:admin@mrcsa.com.au)

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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

## **2010 Refugee Week Ambassadors**

This year RCOA has an impressive line-up of Refugee Week Ambassadors, some of whom are available for media comment or public appearances. Our 2010 Refugee Week Ambassadors are **Dennis Altman**, writer, academic and son of Jewish refugees; **Aduc Barec**, former refugee from Sudan; **Binneh Conteh**, former refugee from Sierra Leone; **Tim Costello**, CEO of World Vision Australia; **Eva Cox**, writer, academic, prominent feminist and former refugee from Austria; **Nicholas Cowdery**, NSW Director of Public Prosecutions; **Mary Crock**, Law Professor at Sydney University and author of *Seeking Asylum Alone*, a study of unaccompanied asylum seeking children; **John Dowd**, former NSW Attorney-General; **Kate Durham**, artist and founder of Spare Rooms for Refugees; **Malcolm Fraser**, former Prime Minister of Australia; **Alice Garner**, actor and co-founder of Actors for Refugees; **Michael Gawenda**, former editor of *The Age* and former refugee from Poland; **Dr Karl Kruszelnicki**, scientist and son of Polish refugees; **Tony Le-Nguyen**, actor, writer, director, producer and former refugee from Vietnam; **John Marsden**, author; **John Menadue**, former public servant, former CEO of Qantas and former Director of Telstra; **Henri Szeps**, actor and former refugee from Poland; and **Dinh Tran**, former refugee from Vietnam. You can find more information about our Refugee Week Ambassadors, including details on how to arrange an interview with an Ambassador, here: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwambassafors.html](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwambassafors.html) Refugee Week Ambassador John Marsden is promoting Refugee Week through his blog. You can read his blog entry about Refugee Week here: [www.johnmarsden.com.au/blog](http://www.johnmarsden.com.au/blog)

## **Federal Opposition proposes harmful, inhumane refugee policy**

The Federal Opposition is proposing a refugee policy which it knows will result in harm to vulnerable children, women and men fleeing persecution, torture and violence. The reintroduction of the worst of the previous Government's refugee policies would occur in full knowledge of the impacts of long-term detention, of families in crisis being indefinitely separated and of people living in constant fear of being returned to persecution. RCOA's media release responding to the Coalition's Border Protection Policy is at [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2010/100527\\_return\\_to\\_punishing\\_asylum\\_seekers.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2010/100527_return_to_punishing_asylum_seekers.pdf)

## **Coalition of NGOs sends joint letter on asylum policy**

RCOA has joined with a coalition of other organisations including Amnesty International, Uniting Justice, GetUp! and Liberty Victoria in writing to the ALP national caucus and to Coalition members of parliament about both major parties' recent changes in asylum policy. With the ALP caucus, we raised our organisations' concerns about the suspension of visa processing for Sri Lankan and Afghan asylum seekers, given that current reports show ongoing security concerns for both countries; and the reopening of Curtin detention centre which is an entirely inappropriate facility for housing asylum seekers due to its remote location and the consequent difficulty of providing appropriate care to traumatised people. The letter to Coalition politicians raised our objections to Temporary Protection Visas and any future attempts to turn boats back at sea. You can read the ALP letter here: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/100510\\_caucus\\_letter.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/100510_caucus_letter.pdf) and the Coalition letter here: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/100510\\_Coalition\\_letter.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/100510_Coalition_letter.pdf)

## **Trade unions express alarm over Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees**

Twenty trade unions and affiliated organisation leaders have endorsed a letter sent to the Prime Minister and all Members of Parliament, expressing concern at the growing stance of indifference towards asylum seekers by both sides of politics and calling for Australia to respect its obligations under international law. The letter, which also outlines the real security threats existing in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, is available at [www.apheda.org.au/news/1273414279\\_15694.html](http://www.apheda.org.au/news/1273414279_15694.html)

## **Federal Budget 2010-11 and its impact on refugees**

RCOA's analysis of the 2010-11 Federal Budget and its implications for refugees and those requiring humanitarian protection is now available at [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/reports/2010-11\\_Federal\\_Budget\\_brief\\_RCOA.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/resources/reports/2010-11_Federal_Budget_brief_RCOA.pdf)

## **People smuggling inquiry ignores advice**

RCOA has written to the Attorney-General Robert McClelland to express concerns with the findings of the Senate Committee inquiry into the *Anti-People Smuggling and Other Measures Bill 2010*. Despite the numerous flaws in the proposed legislation highlighted by a wide range of organisations, the Senate Committee (with the exception of Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young) recommended that it be passed with a single minor amendment. RCOA is concerned that the Bill is inconsistent with Australia's

international legal obligations, lacks sensitivity to the needs of torture and trauma survivors and could go so far as to criminalise humanitarian actions. RCOA letter to the Attorney-General can be read here: [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/RCOA letter to the Hon Robert McClelland.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/RCOA_letter_to_the_Hon_Robert_McClelland.pdf)

The Attorney-General's response can be read here:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/Letter AG response.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/Letter_AG_response.pdf)

Our media release on the Committee's findings can be downloaded from [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2010/100506 People Smuggling report.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2010/100506_People_Smuggling_report.pdf)

### **RCOA responds to criticism of Refugee Review Tribunal selection process**

*Herald Sun* columnist Andrew Bolt has criticised the Australian Government's appointment of RCOA President John Gibson as the community representative on the selection panel for Migration and Refugee Review Tribunal (MRT/RRT) members, claiming that Mr Gibson's involvement would undermine the impartiality of the panel. The Shadow Immigration Minister, Scott Morrison, echoed Mr Bolt's comments, questioning the legitimacy of the selection panel. Bolt quoted a former Liberal MP who was appointed to the MRT/RRT by the Howard Government but not reappointed in 2009. The criticisms are somewhat ironic, given the level of political involvement in past MRT/RRT selection processes and recent efforts to bring greater impartiality to the process. RCOA's response to these claims is at:

[www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2010/100514 HeraldSun Bolt.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/releases/2010/100514_HeraldSun_Bolt.pdf)

The Minister for Immigration also issued a response to Mr Morrison's comments, available at [www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2010/ce10039.htm](http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2010/ce10039.htm)

### **Australian advocates take refugee concerns to global UNHCR meetings**

Later this month, 24 Australians will take part in UNHCR's annual NGO Consultations in Geneva, raising the ideas and concerns of many organisations and communities about the protection and support of refugees. The delegation includes six former refugees, including three selected to represent concerns at meetings on refugee needs in Africa (Endalketchew Gage), Asia (Parsuram Sharma-Luitai) and the Middle East (Deena Yako). Also involved are eight interns from the University of NSW's Centre for Refugee Research, who are paying their own way to Geneva to assist in the formal documentation of the meetings. NGOs represented at the meetings include RCOA, Amnesty International, National Council of Churches, Australian National Committee on Refugee Women, Settlement Council of Australia, AMES, Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre and Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office. Seventeen members of the team will also attend UNHCR's Standing Committee meeting, when government representatives meet to discuss refugee protection issues. Four Australian delegates will remain in Geneva in early July for the annual meeting of UNHCR, governments and NGOs from countries involved in refugee resettlement. Many of the Australian delegates will be working together under the banner of the Australian Refugee Rights Alliance (ARRA). RCOA and ARRA recently sought submissions from community organisations in Australia on issues to raise with UNHCR. Twenty-seven submissions were received, covering issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers in Africa, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific. These will be taken up in the formal UNHCR meetings and in private meetings with UNHCR and government officials.

### **New citizenship course for disadvantaged and vulnerable applicants**

In response to the findings of the Australian Citizenship Test Review Committee and community concerns that the citizenship test presents a barrier to citizenship, particularly for individuals with low levels of English literacy, the Australian Government has announced that a new Australian citizenship course will be introduced from 31 May 2010 as an alternative citizenship test for particularly disadvantaged or vulnerable applicants. Entitled *Our Common Bond: A Course in Australian Citizenship*, the 20-hour course will be delivered through Adult Migrant English Program Service Providers. All course participants will be required to demonstrate that they have a basic knowledge of the English language and must complete a number of competency-based assessment tasks to demonstrate that they have an adequate knowledge of Australia and of the responsibilities and privileges of Australian citizenship. Entry to the course will be via referral from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship after application only and applicants will not be permitted to self-select to undertake the course instead of the computer-based test.

Additionally, new study resources will be made available to assist clients in preparing to sit the citizenship test, including an audio-visual DVD presentation and translations of the citizenship test resource book in 37 languages. For further information, visit [www.citizenship.gov.au](http://www.citizenship.gov.au)

## **Save Lives, Protect Refugees rallies draw large crowds of supporters**

The National Day of Action on Saturday May 8th, organised by Amnesty International Australia, brought together supporters in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Photos are available at [www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/23074/](http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/23074/)

## **COMING EVENTS**

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For a full list of **Refugee Week events**, please visit our online events calendar at [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwevents.html](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/newsevents/rwevents.html) and select your State or Territory.

### **Saturday 12 June – Brisbane**

#### **Brisbane Roar vs African Invitational XI fundraising match**

On Monday 5th April 2010, South's United's exciting Sudanese-born fullback George Wani (aged 19) was involved in a serious traffic accident, sustaining life-threatening head. Brisbane Roar heard about George's plight and immediately set about planning a way to help George on his way to a speedy recovery. And what better way then through the game George loved to play – football! Brisbane Roar will battle an African invitational side at Goodwin Park, Yeronga with all funds raised from the game helping to pay for George's medical costs. Meet Brisbane Roar players, win prizes, raffles and much more.

*Details:* 7:00pm; entry by gold coin donation; Brisbane Olympic FC, Goodwin Park, Cansdale Street, Yeronga QLD; for more information contact Jim Bellos at [bellos.dimitrios@police.qld.gov.au](mailto:bellos.dimitrios@police.qld.gov.au)

### **Saturday 12 June – Perth**

#### **Edmund Rice Centre Lions vs Eastern Hills Hawks**

The Edmund Rice Centre Lions is an Australian Rules Football team of newly arrived young people. The team was formed in March 2010 and have been training together since then. The team is coached and captained by the Sports Team of the Edmund Rice Centre Mirrabooka Youth Leadership Group and supported by the WA Football Commission and other sponsors. The Lions will be playing a "Big Match" against Eastern Hills Hawks Football Club and are hoping to build a supporter base to provide a huge home ground atmosphere! There will be activities for the kids, along with footy clinics, giveaways and a free sausage sizzle after the game.

*Details:* festivities begin at 9:00am with bounce-down at 11:20am; Des Penman Memorial Reserve, Carcoola Street, Nollamara; for more information contact Joe on (08) 9440 0625 or 0417 923 873 or email the Youth Leadership Group on [ercyouthleaders@gmail.com](mailto:ercyouthleaders@gmail.com)

### **Monday 14 June to Wednesday 16 June – Perth**

#### **Free 3-day workshop program for women from African backgrounds**

This free workshop aims to assist the women to access further education training and employment. Participants will also receive further one-on-one assistance from Extra Edge staff to achieve training and employment goals.

*Details:* 10:00am-2:00pm each day; The Gowrie, 275 Abernethy Road, Cloverdale WA; child care available; for more information contact Amorette Dyer, Program Coordinator, on (08) 9333 2000 or 0423 065 249 or [amorette@ees.org.au](mailto:amorette@ees.org.au)

### **Wednesday 16 June – Sydney**

#### **Crisis Briefing: Defend Human Rights in Burma**

Twenty years after the 1990 election when Aung San Suu Kyi's party won in a landslide there is another election being planned in Burma, but restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly for the people of Burma continue and are likely to increase as the election date draws near. Amnesty International is hosting a briefing to provide the latest cutting edge commentary on the human rights situation in the lead up to the elections in Burma and to take part in the discussion. Speakers will include Benjamin Zawacki, Amnesty International Researcher, South East Asia, and Dr Myint Cho, Burma Campaign Australia Spokesman. The briefing will be moderated by Eric Campbell, ABC's Foreign Correspondent Journalist.

*Details:* 6:00pm-7:30pm; Museum of Sydney, AGL Theatre, 37 Phillip Street, Sydney NSW; RSVP to [nswprojects@amnesty.org.au](mailto:nswprojects@amnesty.org.au)

### **Saturday 19 June – Melbourne**

#### **Fitzroy Learning Network Ball**

Please join the Fitzroy Learning Network for this year's Fitzroy Ball, with the theme Fitzroyalty, to benefit the Refugee Support Program. There will be a delicious 3 course meal from Original Foods, the sustainable catering company of Fitzroy, a selection of fine wines from Yarra Burns and beers from Little Creatures. Entertainment includes Beatrice & Supena with Tristan S. Pierce, performers from West Side Circus, the Congolese band and DJ Whisky Houston. An exciting loud and silent auction with great prizes will also be a part of the night.

*Details:* \$130 for 3-course meal; Fitzroy Town Hall, 201 Napier Street, Fitzroy; for more details, call (03) 9417 2897 or email [admin@fitzroylearningnetwork.org.au](mailto:admin@fitzroylearningnetwork.org.au)

### **Wednesday 23 June – Melbourne**

#### **Building on Diversity conference**

The Building on Diversity conference, hosted by Australian Polish Community Services, aims to bring together ethno-specific and multicultural organisations, relevant government departments and other stakeholders to showcase positive practices, strategies and collaborations in the provision of culturally and linguistically responsive services. The conference also aims to share practical tools, experiences and expertise that may help to enhance the development of other services, particularly for smaller and less resourced groups who are finding it difficult to meet the new and emerging needs of their communities. This Conference promises an interesting and diverse program, with great speakers and concurrent theme workshops from a wide group of presenters in the following areas, including Service Delivery, Capacity Building, Partnership & Collaboration and Leadership & Sustainability.

*Details:* Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre, Cnr Bell Street and Georges Road, Preston VIC 3072; fee structure is tailored to ability to pay; for more information contact Melissa Afentoulis on (03) 8371 2306 (Mon-Wed), email [melissa@apcs.org.au](mailto:melissa@apcs.org.au) or visit [www.apcs.org.au/buildingondiversityconference](http://www.apcs.org.au/buildingondiversityconference)

### **Wednesday 23 June 2010 – Melbourne**

#### **Leading the Way: Multicultural Service Excellence and Strength in Partnerships Conference**

The Leading the Way conference will be an opportunity to share practical tools, experiences and expertise that may help to enhance infrastructure and service development, particularly for smaller and less resourced groups who are finding it difficult to meet the new and emerging needs of their communities.

*Details:* at the Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre, Cnr Bell St and St. Georges Rd, Preston, Vic 3072; for more information, contact Melissa Afentoulis on (03) 8371 2306 (Mon-Wed) or by email at [melissa@apcs.org.au](mailto:melissa@apcs.org.au) or visit <http://www.apcs.org.au/leadingtheway>.

### **Thursday 8 July 2010 – Melbourne**

#### **Multiculturalism and Social Inclusion Conference**

The Australian Sociological Association and Deakin University's Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation present this free half-day event to bring together academics, policy makers and practitioners to advance dialogue on multiculturalism and social inclusion. It aims to foster networking in this key social policy area. Presenters will include Professor Andrew Jakubowicz, University of Technology and Chairperson of the Institute for Cultural Diversity; Mr George Lekakis, Chairperson of the Victorian Multicultural Commission; and Ms Jenny Semple, South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre and Settlement Council of Australia. Presentations will be followed by group discussions on key areas such as employment, education and new and emerging communities to develop recommendations.

*Details:* 9:30am-1:00pm; Multicultural Hub, 506 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne; RSVP to [tasa.migration@gmail.com](mailto:tasa.migration@gmail.com); places are limited so RSVP to reserve your seat.

### **Saturday 10 July – Sydney**

#### **Festival of Tibet**

The Tibetan Community of Australia (NSW) Inc, in association with Dalai Lama in Australia Limited and the Tibetan and Chinese Friendship Association, will host the Festival of Tibet event in honour of the 75th birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people. The event is an opportunity to share and enjoy famous Tibetan culture, song, dance and traditional Tibetan food.

Details: 11:30am-3:30pm; entry fee \$20 (or \$15 concession), which includes a Tibetan meal at lunchtime; Allambie Heights School Community Centre, Allambie Heights NSW; for more information, e-mail [jigmedatsa@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jigmedatsa@yahoo.com.au) or call 0414 739 462

## **NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS**

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### **Catholic Bishops call for compassion towards refugees and asylum seekers**

In response to recent policy developments, the Catholic Bishops of Australia have appealed to both the Australian Government and the Opposition to show compassion towards refugees and asylum seekers. In two media releases issued by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Bishops called on the government to lift the suspension of processing for Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum seekers and expressed concern about the ethical implications of the Opposition's proposed refugee and asylum seeker policy. Bishop Joe Grech, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference spokesperson for refugee and asylum seeker issues, stated that "vulnerable and traumatised human beings cannot simply be used as deterrents to others seeking asylum in this country." The statements, dated 10 May and 28 May respectively, can be downloaded at [www.catholic.org.au/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=355](http://www.catholic.org.au/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=355)

### **Australian Multicultural Advisory Council cultural diversity policy**

On Friday 30 April 2010, the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) submitted its cultural diversity policy advice, entitled *The People of Australia*, to the Australian Government. The statement contains a historical overview of cultural diversity in Australia, profiles of Australians from refugee and migrant backgrounds and policy recommendations to Government. The document can be viewed at [www.immi.gov.au/about/stakeholder-engagement/pdf/people-of-australia.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/about/stakeholder-engagement/pdf/people-of-australia.pdf)

### **Lecture by Dr Eileen Pittaway: Innocent victims, illegal migrants or political pawns?**

Dr Eileen Pittaway is the Director of the Centre for Refugee Research at the University of New South Wales. In this lecture, she discusses the conditions which force refugees to flee and dispels many of the common myths about refugees and asylum seekers. The lecture is available as a podcast at [www.arts.unsw.edu.au/so-what/lecture-11](http://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/so-what/lecture-11)

### **Opinion piece by RCOA's Vice-President**

An opinion piece by RCOA's Vice President, Professor William Maley, was published in the Canberra Times on June 9. The piece highlights the harmful aspects of the Coalition's new border protection policy and calls for a more humane and compassionate approach to asylum seekers. The article can be read at [www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/100609\\_Maley\\_op.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/current/100609_Maley_op.pdf)

### **New research published on the consequences of long-term detention of asylum seekers**

*The meaning and mental health consequences of long-term immigration detention for people seeking asylum* by Maria Tucci, Guy J. Coffey, Ida Kaplan and Robyn C. Sampson was recently published in the Social Science & Medicine journal. This article reports the findings of a Foundation House research project examining the experience of extended periods of immigration detention from the perspective of previously detained asylum seekers and to identify the consequences of these experiences for life after release. All participants were struggling to rebuild their lives in the years following release from immigration detention, and for the majority the difficulties experienced were pervasive.

The article is available at [www.sciencedirect.com/science?\\_ob=ArticleURL&\\_udi=B6VBF-4YN5PMJ-3&\\_user=10&\\_coverDate=06%2F30%2F2010&\\_rdoc=1&\\_fmt=high&\\_orig=search&\\_sort=d&\\_docanchor=&view=c&\\_acct=C000050221&\\_version=1&\\_urlVersion=0&\\_userid=10&md5=a0805345d0c22f77dc1c16ca4fc981ae](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6VBF-4YN5PMJ-3&_user=10&_coverDate=06%2F30%2F2010&_rdoc=1&_fmt=high&_orig=search&_sort=d&_docanchor=&view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=a0805345d0c22f77dc1c16ca4fc981ae) (please note the restricted access to this article as per the Science Direct website)

### **Evaluation of AUSCO 2009 now available online**

The evaluation of Australia's Cultural Orientation Program for Humanitarian Entrants (AUSCO) is now available. The evaluation reviewed the results of the program, including detailed feedback from participants and key stakeholders. The evaluation includes a number of recommendation to improve services and promote greater coordination between offshore and onshore cultural orientation services. The report is at [www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/ausco-evaluation-2009.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/ausco-evaluation-2009.pdf)

### **Migration Review Tribunal and the Refugee Review Tribunal (MRT/RRT) release gender guidelines**

The MRT/RRT has released its new Gender Guidelines, available at [www.mrt-rt.gov.au/News/News/default.aspx](http://www.mrt-rt.gov.au/News/News/default.aspx)

### **New resource: Giving Communities a Sporting Chance**

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) has a new resource, *Giving Communities a Sporting Chance*, which offers sport/recreation providers with practical strategies and resources to encourage greater participation in activities. The resource aims to broaden sporting organisations' ability to diversify, and acknowledge the benefits to both providers and the community. Copies are available at [www.cmy.net.au/Assets/1397/3/GivingCommunitiesaSportingChance.pdf](http://www.cmy.net.au/Assets/1397/3/GivingCommunitiesaSportingChance.pdf)

### **Free information booklet for newly arrived young people**

A free information booklet for newly arrived young people is now available from the Western Young People's Independent Network (WYPIN). The guide is also available in Karen language. To order free copies, contact Anna Hutchens on (03) 9680 8265 or visit the WYPIN website ([www.wypin.org.au](http://www.wypin.org.au)) or the YouthCentral website:

[www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/News+%26+Features/New+Arrival+Survival+Guide](http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/News+%26+Features/New+Arrival+Survival+Guide)

### **Sexual and reproductive health website**

This webpage has been developed as a means of facilitating information sharing amongst health professionals working in the area of sexual and reproductive health for young people from refugee backgrounds. This page aims to increase awareness of the range of existing programs that are active in this area, enabling the growth of support and communication channels to enhance service delivery. A number of resources are available on the site at

[www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/projects-and-programs/SexualReproductiveHealth](http://www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/projects-and-programs/SexualReproductiveHealth)

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **Australian Human Rights Register**

The Human Rights Register is an advocacy tool that seeks to further the advancement of human rights in Australia. The Register provides a quick and easy opportunity for NGOs to record human rights developments. This database will be a useful tool in human rights advocacy and documentation. The data collected from the Register will be used for the purpose of advocacy in documentation and submissions for change, public speaking and communication with key decision-makers including the United Nations bodies responsible for advancing human rights, media and lobbying for improved outcomes and human rights. To access the register and make a submission, visit [www.hrlrc.org.au/australian-human-rights-register](http://www.hrlrc.org.au/australian-human-rights-register). Entries will be accepted from May until 31 October 2010. Questions can be directed to [HumanRightsRegister@hrlrc.org.au](mailto:HumanRightsRegister@hrlrc.org.au)

### **Expression of Interest sought for two artists**

Auburn City Council is seeking EOIs from artists to create a community mural art project in celebration of Refugee Week. For further information, contact Patrick Baffoun, Auburn City Council, PO Box 118, Auburn NSW 1835, ph: (02) 9735 1288, e-mail: [patrick.baffoun@auburn.nsw.gov.au](mailto:patrick.baffoun@auburn.nsw.gov.au).

### **Connect Australia Foundation Scholarship Program**

This scholarship is offered for one male and one female student of Social Work or the Humanities who is from a refugee background and is subject to financial hardship (TAFE students included). The deadline for applications has been extended to 21 June 2010. EOIs can be found at the following link on the Connect Australia Foundation website:

[www.connectaustralia.org.au/pdf/2010\\_CAF\\_Scholarship\\_Program\\_EOI.pdf](http://www.connectaustralia.org.au/pdf/2010_CAF_Scholarship_Program_EOI.pdf)

### **Applications invited for UNHCR small grants program**

UNHCR's Policy Development and Evaluation Service (PDES) invites applications to a new small grants program for original research and writing projects related to forced displacement, humanitarian action and international migration. The grants will not normally be in excess of \$7,500 and must be used to produce a paper (in English, French or Spanish) that will be published by PDES and posted on the

UNHCR website. Applicants should send a CV, a writing sample, a project outline (maximum one page) and an indicative budget to [HQP000@unhcr.org](mailto:HQP000@unhcr.org), with Small Grant in the subject line.

### **Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) Call for Papers**

FRSA is holding its Third National Conference entitled *DIVERSITY: Everyone Benefits* from 3-5 November 2010. They are calling for paper and interactive workshop proposals in response to a number of themes, including diversity in stages of life, integration and collaboration and models and good partnerships. The conference will attract delegates from family relationship services, the broader family support and family law sectors, peak bodies, government representatives, policy makers, academics and experts in children, parenting, family and relationship practice. The closing date for submissions of abstracts is 18 June 2010. For more information visit [frsa.org.au/site/Call%20for%20Papers.php](http://frsa.org.au/site/Call%20for%20Papers.php)

### **AusAID Human Rights Grants**

The Australian Government's 2010-11 Human Rights Grants Scheme (HRGS) is now open to receive Expressions of Interest for funding to conduct human rights activities in developing countries. The Scheme supports non-government organisations and human rights institutions to conduct human rights projects with direct and tangible benefits for at-risk populations. Human rights-focused organisations based or working in all ODA-eligible countries in Asia, the Pacific, Middle East, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean are invited to apply for funding under the Scheme. For more information, visit [www.ausaid.gov.au/hottopics/topic.cfm?ID=7000\\_9755\\_9166\\_9415\\_2659](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/hottopics/topic.cfm?ID=7000_9755_9166_9415_2659)

### **African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) Call for Papers**

AFSAAP's 33rd conference will be hosted by Victoria University at their Melbourne city campus and will be held from December 2 to 4 2010. The conference web page is located at [www.afsaap.org.au/Conferences/2010/2010.htm](http://www.afsaap.org.au/Conferences/2010/2010.htm). All enquiries should be directed via email to Gael Andrews, the Conference Organiser, [info@afsaap.org.au](mailto:info@afsaap.org.au). Please note the deadline of July 15 2010 for submissions of abstracts and panel proposals.

### **Free Pathways to Work Courses at ACL**

ACL will be starting a new round of courses on 19 July 2010. These courses are free for AMEP eligible clients. The courses are full time so they are approved by Centrelink and will focus on helping clients to get a job (e.g. employment preparation skills, industry research, networking, Australian workplace culture, resume and cover letter writing, interview and presentation skills) and students can complete recognised modules towards nationally recognised certificates. All courses include 40-60 hours work experience with the potential of employment. For more information, contact ACL Employment Pathways Unit on (02) 9633 1121

### **Employment and Volunteering opportunities**

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

## **REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA**

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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)

### **Challenge to asylum system**

Offshore processing of boat arrival asylum seekers has been challenged as unconstitutional in the High Court by the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre. Documents lodged on behalf of 10 Sri Lankan asylum seekers facing return assert they were denied the chance to establish they are refugees and deserving of protection under Australia's international obligations. Those challenging their assessments were among 89 single men transferred to Sydney's Villawood detention centre late last month after being deemed not deserving of protection. ([The Age](#), May 01)

### **The asylum freeze and international law: Savitri Taylor**

The question I wish to consider here is whether the government's new policy is *internationally* lawful. This is quite distinct from the question of domestic lawfulness because it is a principle of customary international law that a state cannot defend a claim that it has breached its international legal obligations by saying that its conduct was permitted or even mandated under its domestic law. And in

order to assess international lawfulness we need to drill down into the details of the policy and its justification. ([Inside Story](#), May 04)

### **Dramatic drop in Sri Lankan boat people**

Australian authorities have recorded no new boat arrivals of Sri Lankans since March. Sri Lankans have accounted for about 20 per cent of boatpeople to arrive in the recent surge, with Afghans comprising the single largest group of asylum-seekers. Figures issued by the Immigration Department showed mainland detention centres are straining under the weight of boat arrivals from other countries. Some centres have been forced to move into surge capacity, and the number of people housed in alternative detention such as motels or serviced apartments has increased. ([The Australian](#), May 05)

### **Refugee Council joins others to criticise visa suspension**

In a joint statement released on Wednesday, 45 non-government organisations from 16 countries have condemned the Rudd government's decision to suspend the processing of asylum claims by Sri Lankan and Afghan nationals, saying the government had sent a clear message that it did not respect the binding nature of its international human rights obligations. The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) said the statement was an important international critique of the government's decision. "The Australian government decision has damaged efforts to improve regional co-operation on refugee protection and undermined the efforts of civil society organisations which are working actively with governments to improve conditions for people fleeing persecution," RCOA chief Paul Power said. ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), May 05)

### **Authorities knew of stricken vessel last month**

Australian authorities knew about a boatload of asylum seekers eight days before they were rescued on Saturday and discovered that five people were feared drowned while trying to get help for their stricken vessel. On April 30 Border Protection Command were notified that there was a potential vessel requiring assistance about 125 nautical miles north of Cocos Islands. A nearby merchant was called in to help. It transferred supplies but there was no additional request for help. Border Protection was aware the boat was heading to Christmas Island. Last Wednesday, when the boat hadn't arrived, border protection contacted the Australian Maritime Safety Authority "to conduct another search". This led to Saturday's rescue and the transfer of the passengers to the Cocos Islands. ([Adelaide Now](#), May 10)

### **Pre-poll splurge on border protection**

The Rudd government will outlay \$1.2 billion over the next four years on border protection measures - an investment of \$759.4 million over four years to continue policing at Australia's airports, \$69.4 million to introduce biometric checks of airline passengers at overseas posts before they depart for Australia, \$163 million to combat illegal fishing and \$33 million to better manage the issue of people smuggling with Indonesia. The spending includes the purchase of eight new coastal patrol vessels, extra police and increased use of surveillance and identification technologies. (Australian Financial Review, May 12)

### **Refugees saved from sinking boat**

The Oceanic Viking customs boat rescued 48 asylum seekers from a sinking boat off Australia's west coast on Tuesday afternoon after they called for help. Passengers were transferred to the Oceanic Viking and are being taken to Christmas Island where they will undergo identity, security and health checks. (Daily Telegraph, May 13)

### **Longest serving elderly detainee desperate**

Australia's longest-serving immigration detainee is a Chinese grandmother who is becoming more withdrawn each day her nine-year detention drags on. Ms Bao has been living in community detention after serving 6½ years in Villawood. Yesterday, the Commonwealth Ombudsman recommended Immigration Minister Chris Evans give Ms Bao (not her real name) a visa. It is the second time he has made such a demand but so far, action has been delayed. The Immigration Department provided the Ombudsman with no explanation backing its belief that Ms Bao's case would be resolved soon. ([The Age](#), May 13)

### **New Darwin refugees now put up in hotels**

It is believed that 60 asylum seekers who arrived in Darwin on Saturday are being housed in hotels. They have been health and security cleared and will stay in detention under 24-hour supervision until their refugee applications have been processed. The immigration department said "These are vulnerable people, including families with children, and their transfer allows them to be accommodated in a place that fits best their particular needs and provides appropriate supervision." ([Northern Territory News](#), May 17)

### **Asylum plea for Sri Lanka war crimes witnesses**

The International Crisis Group has called on Australia to support an inquiry into alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka after releasing a report that says there are reasonable grounds to believe both the Sri Lankan security forces and the Tamil Tigers committed war crimes last year. The Crisis Group has urged Australia to grant asylum or protected status to potential witnesses. Earlier this year the Australian Government froze applications for asylum from Tamils, citing reports that conditions in Sri Lanka were improving. Immigration Minister Chris Evans says the report does not necessarily reflect what is happening now. ([ABC news online](#), May 18)

### **Returned asylum seekers killed, jailed: advocate**

Phil Glendenning, the director of the Edmund Rice Centre and board member of the Refugee Council, has recently returned from Sri Lanka and says the country is in danger of becoming a police state. His research found that at least nine asylum seekers returned to Sri Lanka by the Howard government were killed and found that of the 11 people removed to Sri Lanka over the course of the last year or so, that all of them had been arrested at the airport. He says while the Federal Government is wise to urge caution in returning asylum seekers connected to the Tamil Tigers, in the eyes of the Sri Lankan government all those who fled are branded the same way. Australia has suspended its processing of Sri Lankan asylum seekers pending a review of conditions in Sri Lanka. ([ABC News Online](#), May 19)

### **Liberals split over push to move boat people**

The federal government has asked churches to suggest convents, monasteries and other privately-owned properties to house children and families overflowing from Christmas Island. Yesterday, the Liberal MP Petro Georgiou said the plan was "eminently sensible and humane". Earlier, the party's immigration spokesman, Scott Morrison, said all refugee claims should be processed offshore. Though children have not been held behind razor wire since 2005, they are detained in lower grade facilities on Christmas Island, described by the Human Rights Commission in its last report as "a concerning regression" to that time. (Sydney Morning Herald, May 20)

### **Government rejecting more refugee claims**

Senator Chris Evans on Thursday said several people from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka had been returned home in recent months. Many boat arrivals off Australia's west coast come from Sri Lanka but the Australian government has imposed a three-month freeze on processing asylum claims from people fleeing the country. With Sri Lanka's long-running civil war now over, Senator Evans said many asylum applications by Tamils who arrived in Australia prior to the freeze have been denied. He said cabinet would make a decision in June on whether to extend the freeze. ([AAP](#), May 20)

### **Asylum-seeker clamp breaches treaties: lawyers**

The federal government has breached three international treaties and may have broken its own domestic laws by suspending the processing of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, according to an opinion prepared for the Human Rights Law Resource Centre by three Melbourne lawyers. It says the dramatic toughening of border protection policy discriminates on the basis of race and country of origin, in contravention of Australia's international obligations. The Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, is considering a challenge to the legality of the suspensions after launching a High Court challenge to the government's offshore processing regime this month. ([The Age](#), May 22)

### **Mentally ill refugees 'can seek payouts'**

Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre co-ordinator David Manne said there would be a case for people to seek redress under Australian law if they could show their mental health had been damaged by time in immigration detention. A spokesman for Immigration Minister Chris Evans denied this was the case saying people in immigration detention are provided with appropriate services, including support and

counselling services, while detained. Psychologist Paula Farrugia conducted assessments of refugees at Sydney's Villawood Immigration Detention Centre from 2003 to 2008 and said that pre-existing conditions are intensified by indefinite detention. ([The Age](#), May 23)

### **Governments knew asylum boat was in danger**

The Australian and Indonesian governments knew a boat filled with asylum seekers was in peril, but failed to help the stricken vessel. The boat left Indonesia on October 2. Australian authorities learnt a vessel was in distress the following day but the Home Affairs Minister, Brendan O'Connor, said "subsequent credible information" showed its difficulties had been resolved. The Australian government shared information with the Indonesian government, believing the boat to be in that country's search and rescue zone. Surveillance by Border Protection Command, and actions by Indonesian authorities, on October 3 failed to turn up a vessel in distress. ([Sydney Morning Herald](#), May 25)

### **Asylum vetting strains ASIO**

ASIO has admitted it has been forced to cut the number of security checks it performs on foreign nationals to meet a 14-fold increase in demand for the vetting of asylum seekers. Speaking to a Senate estimates committee late last night, ASIO director-general David Irvine said ASIO had to perform about 2028 security checks for boatpeople in the six months to March 31. That compared with just 21 checks in 2007-08. However, he emphasised the reordering of resources had had "no derogatory" impact on national security. Each assessment takes about 35 days. ([The Australian](#), May 25)

### **Coalition wants refugees to work for welfare**

The Federal Opposition will today announce the next phase of the immigration policy it will take to the federal election. Temporary protection visas will be back, and visa holders will not have family reunion rights, but they will be able to work and have access to Medicare. They will have to attend English language classes after a year and they will have access to limited income support, but will have to work for welfare. A Coalition government would also reintroduce the 45-day rule that was abolished by the Rudd Government. It means asylum seekers who take more than 45 days to lodge a refugee claim will not be allowed to work or access Medicare. ([ABC News Online](#), May 27)

### **Coalition asylum policy under attack**

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott announced this morning that asylum seekers could again face processing in overseas countries under a Coalition government. The announcement has been attacked by refugee advocates as well as Australian of the Year Patrick McGorry. Refugee Council of Australia chief executive Paul Power says the Coalition's announcement does not attempt to provide protection to asylum seekers. "We are deeply concerned the Coalition's approach is based on punishing victims and offers no constructive response to the pressing needs of people seeking protection," he said. "It is hard to see this new Coalition policy as anything other than a shameful attempt to use vulnerable people to score cheap political points." ([ABC news Online](#), May 27)

### **Refugee Council speaks out against Coalition refugee policy**

The Coalition's revival of the "Pacific Solution" on asylum seekers has infuriated moderate Liberals. Mr Abbott said yesterday a future Coalition government would send asylum seekers to third countries for processing, as the Howard government did with Nauru and Manus Island. But the measures, which also reinstate temporary protection visas and the controversial "45-day rule", were condemned by refugee groups and some members of his own party. Refugee Council of Australia chief executive Paul Power said the Coalition was willing to consciously damage people who had fled violence and torture. "We've just gone back nine years," he said. "Past policymakers were perhaps not fully aware of the short-term and long-term impacts of the policies they were implementing. This time around, there is no excuse." ([The Age](#), May 28)

### **Labor gets a 'fail' on refugee policy**

The annual Lowy Institute's Australia and the World poll asking people to rate the government's performance found more Australians (52 per cent) were "very concerned" about "unauthorised asylum seekers coming to Australia by boat" than last year (43 per cent). Concern about asylum seekers increased with age, with only a third of those aged 18 to 29 being "very concerned" but two-thirds of people 60 and older. ([The Age](#), May 31)