



Refugee Council
of Australia

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NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS REFUGEES’ STRUGGLE TO FIND PROTECTION

Refugees in South-East Asia and the Middle East are living in constant fear of arrest and deportation and regularly experience harassment and exploitation, a study released today by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has found.

Based on interviews with refugees originally from Burma and Iraq who have recently resettled in Australia, the study found that refugee registration with UNHCR often provided little additional protection.

Speaking at the launch of Refugee Week, RCOA president John Gibson said the report, “The Search for Protection”, highlighted the impacts of discrimination, exploitation and corruption on refugees living in countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, India, Syria and Jordan.

“Refugees spoke about having to work illegally to survive and fearing arrest and imprisonment because of the denial of work and residency rights,” Mr Gibson said. “Conditions varied from country to country, with refugees who lived in Malaysia telling of being arrested, detained and mistreated and then being forced to pay large bribes to secure their release.

“Finding enough money to ensure basic survival, to pay for food, medical care and education, is a constant worry for refugees in many countries of asylum. All too often refugees have to leave serious medical conditions untreated because they have no funds for even basic health care.

“Some refugees who were in Thailand spoke about problems with the supply of food in refugee camps and the necessity for many to seek work illegally outside the camps in order to survive. Others told of the fear of arrest and the harassment women faced when outside of the camps.

“Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan told how they had little option but to watch their meagre savings dwindle while they kept a low profile to avoid arrest and deportation. Refugees in the Middle East and India spoke of being paid well below the minimum wages paid to nationals and having no option but to accept whatever they were given.”

“The Search for Protection” report, written and researched by Lia Kent and Dr Jamileh Abu-Duhou, was based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with 50 people now living in Melbourne who had arrived in Australia as refugees within the past two years.

“The report highlights that many refugees who are in countries where they have sought protection from persecution face problems nearly as great as those experienced before they fled,” Mr Gibson said.

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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

“It puts into sharp focus the various ‘push factors’ which contribute to refugees moving on from where they have originally sought asylum.

“Much of the public debate in Australia about the recent increase in asylum seekers arriving by boat has occurred without an adequate understanding of the conditions faced by refugees in many parts of Asia and the Middle East. The reality is far from the orderly queue imagined by some Australian commentators.

“The theme of Refugee Week 2009 is Freedom from Fear. This report highlights the need for Australia to continue to work nationally and internationally to increase genuine protection for the most vulnerable refugees, to enable them to live free from fear.”

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