

## **2010 REFUGEE WEEK LAUNCH, VICTORIA**

Nyadol Nyuon, former refugee

**Speech for Refugee Week launch, Victorian Parliament House, 21 June 2010**

It is quite hard to follow these great speakers. Before I speak, I want to say that I learned about Malcolm Fraser in my Political Science class. It is a great pleasure and honour to meet you, someone who has made it possible for someone like me to come to Australia. The assumption has always been that role models are people who look like you, but to me, you are a hero that has given me so much (even though I have never met you). So thank you so much.

As a person from refugee background, I think that today is a day of acknowledgement and also a day of celebration. I think that it is a day to acknowledge the plight of millions of people that are going through the refugee experience. But it is also a chance to celebrate the achievements and the life of those that have made it through the refugee experience. An experience that I have gone through myself.

I was born in a refugee camp in 1987 in Ethiopia. There was a war in Ethiopia in 1991, just four years after I was born, so my family had to move to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. I spent the rest of my life there until I got the chance to come to Australia through the humanitarian program. It took my family four years to actually get accepted to come to Australia. It was a very long struggle because my mum is a single mother who has six kids to look after on her own. Coming to Australia has helped me to achieve a lot of my dreams. When I was in the refugee camp in Kakuma, I thought that I would always be a refugee and nothing else. Australia has given me a chance to be more than just a title. To be more than just a statistic. To be more than just a person who received daily food from the UNHCR.

Since arriving in Australia, I have worked hard for myself and also to make opportunities for other young people like me. Young people who I know are struggling to not only find themselves and establish an identity but also to make it through these tough systems that sometimes can be very hard to understand. I've been able—within in the five years that I have been in Australia—to complete my Year 11 and Year 12 studies, to get to University, and last year, I finished my degree. What I am most proud of is not what I have achieved. What I am most proud of is that so many refugees are achieving this, and they are achieving it daily. I know so many young people who might have had a tougher background than I did, who might not have a mother like I did, but have come to Australia, work fulltime jobs and are still able to complete studies. This is the story of so many refugees, but it is often not recognized in the main media. It is the story of so many refugees and yet politicians are not willing to talk about this. We do not take coming to Australia lightly. It saved some of our lives. It made sure that we had opportunities that we did not have before. And it gave us a country when we were rejected by our own countries.

To me, I know that some people will never see me as an Australian. They will think that I am too tall, too dark or too “something” to be Australian. However, I do realise that this is a changing world, and I am not going to constrain myself to concrete definitions in this changing world. I am a Sudanese because I was born a Sudanese. I am Ethiopian because I was born in Ethiopia. I am Kenyan because I lived in Kenya. And I am Australian because I contribute to this society, as any other Australian does. It doesn't matter what my skin colour is. It doesn't matter whether I have differing political views than others. What matters is that I love this country as much as any Australian.

Thank you.