



Refugee Council of Australia

22 November 2011

Public forum to celebrate Refugee Council of Australia's 30th

The Refugee Council of Australia will tomorrow celebrate its 30th birthday as the national umbrella body for refugees and the organisations and individuals that support them.

As part of its celebrations, RCOA is holding a public forum comparing Australia's refugee and asylum seeker policies in 1981 with today's approaches.

The public forum on *Australia's Refugee Policy 1981 and 2011* will be held between 1.30pm-2.45pm, on Wednesday 23 November, 2011, at Friends House (Upper Floor), 119 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills, Sydney.

The forum, will draw on the perspectives of three key participants in refugee policy in 1981. They are:

- Former Fraser Government Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Minister Ian Macphee;
- Former Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Secretary John Menadue; and
- Dr Tien Nguyen, a former Vietnamese Community Association President who arrived in Australia during 1980-81 after living in a refugee camp in South-East Asia.

RCOA was founded in Sydney on 19 November, 1981 at a meeting called by Austcare President Major-General Paul Cullen.

One week later, a delegation of four members of RCOA met the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Ian Macphee.

This was the first of many meetings between RCOA and government ministers to discuss the community sector's ideas and concerns about Australia's approach to supporting refugees.

RCOA, a not-for-profit organisation, remains true to the principles behind its establishment in 1981 – promoting the development of humane, lawful and constructive policies towards refugees and asylum seekers by Australian and other governments and their communities.

Today, RCOA represents more than 150 organisations and 500 individual members.

RCOA CEO Paul Power paid tribute to its members for supporting the organisation over the past 30 years.

“Through its advocacy, national leadership, research and community education, RCOA continues to work hard to empower refugee communities and organisations and to increase public awareness of refugee and asylum seeker issues.

“This has proven to be a challenge, particularly over the last decade, as refugees and asylum seekers have been demonised for political gain during election campaigns.

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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

“RCOA will continue to focus its efforts on assisting refugees, asylum seekers and organisations in the sector.

“In the absence of strong political will to honestly engage the public on all the facts about refugee policy, RCOA will also continue increasing public awareness and sensitivity to refugees and asylum seekers,” Mr Power said.

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