



# Refugee Council of Australia

## **BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS**

**24 March 2015**

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

*Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia*

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## **NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL**

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### **Moss Review finds urgent need to protect asylum seekers on Nauru**

The review conducted by Philip Moss into the allegations relating to sexual and physical abuse of both children and adults at the Offshore Processing Centre in Nauru revealed a disturbing lack of protection for asylum seekers held in detention there. It uncovered multiple allegations of physical and sexual assault against asylum seekers (including children); noted that many asylum seekers detained on in Nauru were concerned about their personal safety and privacy; and found that there is underreporting of assaults against asylum seekers due to “family or cultural reasons”, fears that reporting assaults could negatively affect asylum claims or loss of confidence that anything would be done about their complaints. The Review also found that there was no evidence to substantiate the allegations of misconduct against the 10 Save the Children staff members who were removed from Nauru last year. In a statement, RCOA called on the Australian Government to act urgently to identify the relevant authorities and support the immediate and thorough investigation of sexual abuse and physical assault allegations on Nauru. RCOA President Phil Glendenning said that “it is not good enough for the Government to have one set of rules for how Australian institutions respond to child sexual abuse here and another set of rules for Australian-funded institutions on Nauru. A child is a child, and they deserve our greatest protection and care.” Read the full statement at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/?p=3220>

### **Vale Malcolm Fraser: A great Australian Prime Minister and refugee advocate**

RCOA mourned the passing of former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser as a great loss for Australia and the world. Mr Fraser was an individual member of the RCOA and a patron of the Australian Refugee Foundation. He was a positive and constructive supporter of the RCOA and many of the organisations in our networks. During his time as Prime Minister, he led Australia’s response to the refugee crisis that saw hundreds of thousands of people flee Southeast Asia seeking safety. Under his leadership Australia developed an annual organised Refugee and Humanitarian Program that provided sanctuary and opportunity for a new life for thousands of refugees, and this program continues today. In a statement issued by RCOA to acknowledge Mr Fraser’s legacy, RCOA President Phil Glendenning noted that the former Prime Minister “will be remembered as a champion of multiculturalism, a courageous advocate for refugees, a committed humanitarian and an unwavering advocate for human rights.” Read our full statement at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/?p=3170>

### **Australia cannot dismiss credible UN report on torture**

A recent report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Méndez has found that Australia has breached the UN Convention Against Torture in its treatment of asylum seekers. The report found that Australia has violated the Convention through holding asylum seekers (including children) in indefinite detention, failing to provide adequate conditions of detention and protect asylum seekers from violence in offshore detention centres, holding Sri Lankan asylum seekers in incommunicado detention at sea and introducing legislation which allows arbitrary detention at sea and tightens restrictions on access to visas. In response to comments by the Prime Minister that Australians are “sick of being lectured to by the United Nations”, RCOA issued a statement asserting that the Government cannot yet again ignore a credible human rights report by attacking its author. “The role of experts like Mr Méndez

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is not to 'lecture' governments but to draw attention to serious human rights violations and advocate for people at risk of mistreatment," Paul Power, CEO of RCOA, said. "His advice should not be dismissed as a 'lecture' any more than the Australian Government's appeals for clemency for Australians on death row in Indonesia." Read the full statement at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/?p=2936>

### **Attacks on Human Rights Commission distract attention from protecting children**

In response responding to baseless attacks on the Australian Human Rights Commission and its President, Professor Gillian Triggs, following the release of the *Forgotten Children* report last month, RCOA issued a statement calling on the Government to focus its attention on protecting on protecting children. "Rather than attacking the Australian Human Rights Commission for doing its job, the Government should be getting on with its own job: protecting the vulnerable children under its care," Paul Power, CEO of RCOA, said. "It should immediately introduce legislation to prevent the detention of children and ensure that this shameful policy is never repeated." Read the full statement at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/?p=2939>

### **Bringing the experiences of refugees to life in the classroom**

Speakers share their experiences of life as a refugee as part of an innovative schools program being offered by RCOA in the Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan areas and Wollongong region. The Face to Face program provides students, teachers and other interested groups the opportunity to hear refugees' personal stories and to learn more about the contributions of former refugees to Australian society. Presented by a representative from RCOA and a speaker of refugee background, the presentations are linked to the school curriculum and cover who refugees are and where they come from, facts about refugees worldwide and in Australia, conditions faced by refugees overseas and Australia's refugee policies. The program operates without any government or philanthropic funding and, as a matter of justice, RCOA ensures that refugee speakers are paid appropriately for their presentations. Incursions can be delivered as one-hour interactive presentations or two-hour workshops incorporating small group activities. The presentation package includes a comprehensive Resource Guide for teachers that contain links to lesson plans, follow-up activities and further reading. Find out more at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/?p=1532>

### **Call for submissions on issues to raise at 2015 UNHCR-NGO Consultations**

Each year, representatives of RCOA, refugee communities and Australian NGOs participate in the annual consultations in Geneva between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and NGOs from around the world. RCOA is seeking feedback from individuals and refugee community groups on current issues of concern for people living in refugee situations overseas, which the Australian team should consider raising with UNHCR at the consultations. We are particularly interested in feedback on issues affecting refugee populations in the Asia- Pacific, Middle East and Africa regions; however, submissions on issues of concern to refugee populations in other regions of the world are also welcome. Submissions should focus on current situations overseas, rather than issues in Australia, as most of the UNHCR personnel the Australian team will be meeting do not work on Australian issues. For further information, download an information sheet at <http://www.arra.org.au/uploads/2015-ARRA-Invitation-for-Submissions.docx>

### **Report of UNHCR's 2014 ExCom meeting**

The 2014 meeting of UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom) took place from 29 September to 3 October in Geneva, Switzerland. RCOA's President Phil Glendenning attended as an NGO representative on the Australian Government delegation and our Information and Policy Coordinator, Lucy Morgan, attended as an NGO observer. RCOA's report of the ExCom meeting provides a summary of key statements made by UN personnel (including Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon), government delegations and NGOs. The report can be downloaded at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2014-ExCom.pdf>

### **Latest Bright Ideas program focuses on driving program for Afghan women**

The Afghan Women's Driving Program provides driving lessons and supervision to Afghan women in Melbourne's southeast, in order to assist women developing skills and confidence needed to gain a driving licence. The program is run by the Association of Hazaras in Victoria, a refugee community organisation based in Dandenong. Read the full profile at [http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Bright\\_Ideas19\\_AHVDiving.pdf](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Bright_Ideas19_AHVDiving.pdf)

### **RCOA's President and CEO Jump up and down for kids**

RCOA continues to support the Jump Up and Down 4 Kids campaign to promote the release of all children in Australia and Nauru from immigration detention. RCOA President Phil Glendenning has recorded a message of support for the campaign ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBSRFLu2Sg0&feature=em-share\\_video\\_user](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBSRFLu2Sg0&feature=em-share_video_user)) and our CEO Paul Power was jumping up and down last week to call for legislative change to end the detention of children ([pic.twitter.com/YWubg1VuBP](http://pic.twitter.com/YWubg1VuBP)). For more information about the campaign, go to <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Jump-UpDown-4-Kids/1504561866496496>

### **RCOA submission to traditional rights and freedoms inquiry**

RCOA has made a submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission's inquiry into traditional rights and freedoms, focusing on laws and policies which unreasonably restrict freedom of movement, retrospectively change legal rights, change the burden of proof and deny procedural fairness to people seeking asylum in Australia. The submission can be read at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/1502-Freedoms.pdf>

### **Follow us on Facebook and Twitter**

The best way to keep up with RCOA is through Facebook and Twitter. We regularly publish links to new RCOA statements and research and to interesting articles in the media on refugee issues. Our Facebook page is at [www.facebook.com/pages/Refugee-Council-of-Australia-RCOA/157472830949702](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Refugee-Council-of-Australia-RCOA/157472830949702). Our Twitter handle is @OzRefugeeCounc

## **COMING EVENTS**

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RCOA has a brand new online events calendar which allows you to browse refugee-related events taking place across Australia each month. Events in coming weeks include plays and films on refugee themes, seminars, community events and the Palm Sunday walks around Australia. View the calendar at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/events>

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

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### **Research on the use of detention in the East and Horn of Africa**

A new report by the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat titled 'Behind bars: the detention of migrants in and from the East and Horn of Africa' highlights the use of immigration detention by countries in the East and Horn of Africa. Instead of being a measure of last resort, detention (often on an arbitrary basis) is habitually a first response by regional state authorities. Read the report at [http://www.regionalmms.org/fileadmin/content/rmms\\_publications/Detention\\_Study\\_February\\_2015.pdf](http://www.regionalmms.org/fileadmin/content/rmms_publications/Detention_Study_February_2015.pdf)

### **Multilingual brochures for the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman**

The Telecommunication Industry Ombudsman (TIO) has made multi-lingual brochures and factsheets available in 31 languages. The TIO helps people who have not been able to resolve a complaint with their telephone or internet service providers. For a list of the languages represented in the multi-lingual brochure and to view the factsheets, visit [www.tio.com.au/publications/translations](http://www.tio.com.au/publications/translations)

### **Report on adolescent girls in emergencies**

The Women's Refugee Commission has published a report entitled 'I'm Here: Adolescent Girls in Emergencies', which is primarily a resource for emergency response staff. It outlines an operational approach and recommendations that can help humanitarian sectors be more accountable to adolescent girls from the start of an emergency. The full report, as well as an executive summary and field-tested tools, are available on the Commission's website at <http://womensrefugeecommission.org/resources/document/1078-i-m-here-report-final-pdf>

### **Training package on how to engage respectfully with young people**

MYAN Australia, Navitas English, Margaret Piper and Associates, MDA Ltd and AMES have worked together to develop a suite of training materials for working with young people from refugee backgrounds. The training materials are based on the unit of competency in the Community Services Training Package CHCYTH001: Engage respectfully with young people. They have been customised to focus on young

people from refugee backgrounds. The package consists of a Trainers Guide, Participants Handbook and Assessment Guide. To view the training materials visit [www.myan.org.au/national-training-package](http://www.myan.org.au/national-training-package)

### **Free access to Journal on refugee law and international criminal justice**

The Journal of International Criminal Justice (JICJ) has released a special issue on The Interaction Between Refugee Law and International Criminal Justice. All content is available for free at <http://jicj.oxfordjournals.org/content/12/5.toc>

### **Policy brief on Syrian refugees in Jordan**

The Migration Policy Centre has released a new policy brief on Syrian refugees in Jordan. It shows that the protracted nature of the Syrian crisis has been dramatic: both the Syrian refugees themselves and the host communities in Jordan are paying a high price. Worrying changes in the Jordanian Government's attitude towards Syrian refugees show that the situation is becoming unsustainable. The brief can be viewed at <http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/34904>

### **Paper on road safety issues and humanitarian entrants**

This paper details the results of a small-scale study conducted in Perth which aimed to investigate the challenges and barriers that humanitarian migrants encounter in obtaining their driver's license and complying with safe road practices as part of their resettlement process in Australia. Download the paper at <http://bit.ly/1BOxPrB>

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

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*For employment opportunities, go to <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/get-involved/employment>. For volunteering opportunities, go to <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/get-involved/volunteering>.*

### **Feedback on access and equity sought**

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is running a survey to learn about the experiences of migrants, refugees and international students in accessing and using government programs and services. Feedback through this survey will help to understand what areas of service delivery need to be improved, and what recommendations can be given to government to make this happen. To complete the FECCA 2015 Access and Equity Survey, please visit: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/FECCA2015survey>

### **Pronunciation classes for new migrants**

Camberwell Salvation Army's 'Bridges to Employment' project provides English pronunciation classes to help new migrants break down barriers to finding work. Classes are held each Friday, 10am – 12pm, at Camberwell Salvation Army, 7 Bowen Street, Camberwell. \$5 Donations per session. Email [norman.gale@aus.salvationarmy.org](mailto:norman.gale@aus.salvationarmy.org), phone (03) 9889 2468 or visit <http://salvocam.org>

## **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)

### **Australia slammed for human rights failings**

The Australian Government's treatment of asylum seekers has seen it slammed by an international watchdog for its "failure to respect international standards" when it comes to human rights. (Pro Bono News, 1 February)

<http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2015/01/australia-slammed-human-rights-failings>

### **Manus Island: PNG grants 30 more refugee status while increasing powers to jail asylum seekers**

Papua New Guinea has granted refugee status to a further 30 men on Manus Island but has also amended laws to allow asylum seekers to be jailed for "misbehaving". (ABC News, 3 February)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-03/more-refugees-new-powers-to-detain-on-manus-island/6064582?section=world>

### **Refugee advocate Julian Burnside QC to represent 'desperate' asylum seeker on hunger strike**

Human rights lawyer Julian Burnside QC will represent an asylum seeker on a hunger strike in a Darwin detention centre, describing the man as "desperate". (ABC News, 5 February)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-05/julian-burnside-represents-asylum-seeker-on-hunger-strike-darwin/6073242>

### **Government spends \$1.2 billion on offshore processing centres in one year**

The Abbott government has spent more than \$1.2 billion to run detention centres on Manus Island, Nauru and Christmas Island in one year, newly released Senate Estimate documents show. (Sydney Morning Herald, 5 February)

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/government-spends-12-billion-on-offshore-processing-centres-in-one-year-20150205-13708n.html>

### **Refugee students stay on top of school work with SCARF volunteer program**

After school on Tuesdays and Thursdays in a not-so-quiet room in Wollongong city library, retired teachers and other volunteers are helping students with their homework, but these high school students have very different needs to most kids their age. (ABC News, 6 February)

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2015/02/06/4175166.htm>

### **Degrading treatment of asylum system reflects poorly on Australia**

Indefinite detention cruel and inhumane, write David Isaacs and Alanna Maycock. (Sydney Morning Herald, 8 February)

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/degrading-treatment-of-asylum-system-reflects-poorly-on-australia-20150208-136jpn.html>

### **Child detention report to unveil harrowing findings after months of delay and sniping**

Human rights chief Gillian Triggs says writing her report has been a 'life changing experience' – but has attracted heavy fire from the critics. (The Guardian, 9 February)

<http://www.theguardian.com/law/2015/feb/09/gillian-triggs-report-children-in-detention-centres>

### **Manus asylum seekers write letter to Russell Brand thanking him for support**

Letter sent by men from Foxtrot compound thanks comedian for publicity given to their plight and condemns conditions at the detention centre. (The Guardian, 10 February)

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/10/manus-asylum-seekers-write-letter-to-russell-brand-thanking-him-for-support>

### **Ricky Muir raises concerns about children in detention after Senate deal**

Crossbench senator Ricky Muir, whose vote was critical in passing a controversial asylum bill late last year, has told Guardian Australia he has concerns about the process of key measures of the legislation. (The Guardian, 11 February)

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/11/ricky-muir-raises-concerns-about-children-in-detention-after-senate-deal>

### **Children in detention report: expert says governments failed duty of protection**

Successive governments were well aware of widespread abuse and deprivation in 'inherently toxic' system, but did not act, the former head of mental health services for asylum seekers says. (The Guardian, 23 February)

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/23/children-in-detention-report-expert-says-governments-failed-duty-of-protection>

### **Greiner criticises Abbott, wants children freed from detention**

Liberal Party elder Nick Greiner has launched a withering attack on the Abbott government's "abhorrent" practice of locking up children in immigration detention, saying Australia should join the rest of the civilised world and scrap the policy. (Sydney Morning Herald, 16 February)

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/greiner-criticises-abbott-wants-children-freed-from-detention-20150216-13f2oy.html>

### **How will history judge us for our detention policies?**

Unlike the Stolen Generations and the abuse of children by priests, when historians look back on our treatment of asylum seekers they won't be able to say, "most people didn't know what was going on", writes Hugh Mackay. (ABC News, 19 February)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-19/mackay-how-will-history-judge-our-detention-policies/6137758>

### **Meet Rangan Srikhanta, the former refugee who wants to change the world one laptop at a time**

Rangan Srikhanta wants to ensure every child has a free, modular computer to last throughout primary school, in the process teaching them self-reliance and allowing Australia to contribute to changing the world. (Sydney Morning Herald, 22 February)

<http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/computers/meet-rangan-srikhanta-the-former-refugee-who-wants-to-change-the-world-one-laptop-at-a-time-20150221-13107r.html>

### **When the benefit of the doubt is in order**

The Prime Minister recently announced that Australia would no longer “let bad people play us for mugs”. With issues including border protection, welfare and bail conditions, Mr Abbott suggested that Australia is overly credulous. “For too long,” he said, “we have given those who might be a threat to our country the benefit of the doubt.” (Canberra Times, 22 February)

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/when-the-benefit-of-the-doubt-is-in-order-20150222-13hfpv.html>

### **Most children in immigration detention in Australia to be released ‘in weeks’**

Secretary of immigration department says 19 ‘difficult cases’, where one or more parents have been flagged as a security concern, ‘may take months or longer’. (The Guardian, 23 February)

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/23/most-children-in-immigration-detention-in-australia-to-be-released-in-weeks>

### **Australia secured asylum deal by staying ‘silent’ on rights abuses: Sri Lanka PM**

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe says former president agreed to help stop boats carrying asylum seekers if Australian government kept quiet. (The Guardian, 25 February)

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/23/australia-secured-asylum-deal-by-staying-silent-on-rights-abuses-sri-lanka-pm>

### **Migrant and refugee youths use soccer tournament to send message of unity in wake of Sydney siege**

More than 100 young migrants and refugees have taken part in a soccer tournament at Fairfield in Sydney's west to send a message of unity in the wake of the Sydney siege. (ABC News, 25 February)

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-24/sydney-migrant-and-refugee-youth-send-message-of-unity/6252920>