



## **BULLETIN FOR MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS 20 October 2015**

Welcome to the latest bulletin from the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA). It's been another bumpy few weeks with seismic shifts in Australian politics and Australia's approach to refugees, combined with depressing stories from refugees and asylum seekers caught in the midst of our brutal policies.

Last month, we hosted colleagues from the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), who spent two weeks in eastern Australia and New Zealand, explaining to politicians, policy makers, academics and the public the practical steps which could be taken to better assist some of the 3.9 million refugees across the Asia Pacific region. This was a ground-breaking event, being the first time a senior APRRN delegation has visited Australia to speak about refugee issues from the perspective of Asian NGOs.

We were also in Canberra advocating behind the scenes and considering the circumstances, were very pleased with the announcement to resettle 12,000 Syrians.

RCOA always encourages you to submit events, opportunities and your own policy suggestions to [admin@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:admin@refugeecouncil.org.au). *Thanks for your ongoing support.*

*Paul Power, CEO, Refugee Council of Australia*

### **NEWS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL**

#### **Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network leaders make first visit to Australia**

People in Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra heard senior Asian NGO leaders sharing practical steps Australia could take to respond to the pressing needs of refugees and asylum seekers in South East Asia and South Asia. From September 1- 8, leaders from the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) were in Australia as part of a visit co-hosted and supported by RCOA, Amnesty International Australia and Settlement Services International. Representing NGOs based in Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nepal and APRRN's Bangkok-based secretariat, the APRRN leaders shared the impact of Australian policies on conditions for refugees in Asia and highlighted constructive steps which can be taken immediately through government and civil society collaboration. This was the first visit to Australia by a senior APRRN delegation since the network's formation in 2008. Now representing more than 240 organisations and individuals across 26 countries, APRRN is the foremost voice on refugee rights in a region which now hosts 3.9 million refugees. Evening public events were held in [Melbourne \(Tuesday 1 September\)](#), [Sydney \(Thursday 3 September\)](#) and [Canberra \(Monday 7 September\)](#) The APRRN delegation also held meetings with NGO representatives, government officials and Parliamentarians, before heading to New Zealand, where their visit also corresponded with an increase in the refugee intake, the first increase in NZ's refugee intake for almost two decades.

#### **RCOA welcomes Syrian and Iraqi refugee intake increase**

RCOA welcomed the extension of the Australian refugee intake to an additional 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Working behind the scenes in Canberra in conjunction with the visit of APRRN, we met with Coalition MPs and Senators to advocate to extend the additional intake beyond the current projected figure of 13,750, to focus on need in line with the Refugee Convention, rather than on

religion or ethnicity, and to increase the aid contribution to countries offering immediate refuge to those fleeing Syria. Our CEO Paul Power and President Phil Glendenning, conducted over 70 interviews in this period including [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) and we also [issued this release following](#) the announcement

### **NEW RESEARCH: RCOA investigates citizenship delays**

Over the past six months, RCOA has been contacted by former refugees and member organisations expressing concern that some people from refugee backgrounds are experiencing significant delays in the process of applying for Australian citizenship. RCOA has been gathering information from former refugees, migration agents, lawyers and academics through consultations and an online survey. The evidence collected by RCOA suggests that these delays are disproportionately affecting those who arrived in Australia by boat and are having a significant negative impact on the people affected, in particular through preventing them from being able to reunite with their families. An [article](#) on the delays by RCOA Board member Abdul Hekmat was recently published in *The Saturday Paper* and a more detailed issues paper outlining our findings will be released next week. You can read the report compiled under the direction of RCOA's Asher Hirsch [Citizenship Delays for Permanent Refugees](#) and our media [release](#) too.

### **ExCom meeting highlights desperate need for global action on displacement**

The annual meeting of UNHCR's Executive Committee (ExCom) took place in Geneva from 5 to 9 October. The Australian Government delegation was led by David Wilden, First Assistant Secretary of the Immigration and Citizenship Policy Division at the Department of Immigration and Border Protection; and John Quinn, Australian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations. For the first time in 30 years, the Government delegation did not include an NGO representative. RCOA's Lucy Morgan attended as an NGO observer. The meeting again highlighted the desperate need for global action to ensure that people fleeing conflict and persecution receive adequate protection and assistance, prevent further displacement and achieve durable solutions for displaced people. A record 60 million people are now forcibly displaced across the world, yet UNHCR is expecting to receive just 47% of the funding it will need this year and millions of people continue to live in protracted refugee situations with little hope of a solution. This year's ExCom meeting also included a high-level discussion on the Afghan refugee situation, in an effort to refocus international attention on the world's largest protracted refugee situation and the need for sustained efforts to create conditions conducive to the safe and dignified return of Afghan refugees. This year's meeting was the last to be presided over by current High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres, whose ten-year term is coming to an end. You can read his opening statement to the ExCom [here](#) and his statement on the Afghan refugee situation [here](#). RCOA will be publishing a more detailed overview of the 2015 ExCom meeting in the coming weeks.

### **Australian NGOs raise concerns about deteriorating human rights standards**

The [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR) is a peer-review process of the UN Human Rights Council, under which the human rights records of all UN member states are reviewed every four years. Australia and Nauru are both up for review in November. On 9 October, a [coalition of Australian NGOs](#) along with the [Australian Human Rights Commission](#) delivered presentations at a UPR pre-session in Geneva, to highlight current human rights concerns in Australia and areas where protection of human rights has deteriorated since Australia was last reviewed in 2011. RCOA delivered a [presentation on refugee and asylum seeker issues](#) on behalf of the NGO coalition, as well as a [separate presentation on offshore processing](#) to feed into the UPR of Nauru. During the preceding week, members of the NGO Coalition had met representatives from numerous governments,

encouraging them to make recommendations for improving the human rights situation in Australia. Our treatment of refugees and asylum seekers was one of the biggest areas of concern during both these meetings and the pre-session, particularly in relation to offshore processing and immigration detention. The UPR of Australia will take place on 9 November, while Nauru will be reviewed on 3 November.

### **Concerns about plans to charge for refugee and humanitarian visas**

RCOA has expressed serious concerns about the Australian Government's plans to extend the Community Proposal Pilot and continue to charge large visa application charges to families wanting to bring refugee relatives to Australia. While acknowledging that the extension of the Community Proposal Pilot offers an alternative pathway for humanitarian resettlement at a time that global displacement is growing, RCOA outlined its concerns in [our submission](#) to the Immigration Department. The proposal threatens to decrease the number of places available for humanitarian resettlement for the most needy as any places are to come from within the current intake and the costs many tens of thousands of dollars are likely to place a substantial financial burden on potentially struggling families of refugee background. [This article](#), on the front page of the Age and Sydney Morning Herald, brought attention to some of our concerns.

### **RCOA publishes first report on statelessness in Australia**

RCOA has published a new report on the situation of stateless people in Australia, the first time the issue has been considered in this country. The *Stateless in Australia* report provides background information on statelessness worldwide and an overview of issues and challenges faced by stateless people in Australia. It also includes a series of recommendations for improving protection for stateless people in Australia and ensuring that our international obligations towards stateless people are effectively upheld. [The statelessness in Australia report can be downloaded here:](#)

## **POLICY SUBMISSIONS FROM THE REFUGEE COUNCIL**

### **Community Support Program (CSP)**

RCOA welcomes a private or community sponsorship program replacement, and the replacement of Community Proposal Pilot (CPP) with strict caveats, including that places provided through the program be additional to the current intake of 13,570 places. After consulting widely in refugee communities we found that the CPP did not provide a sufficiently accessible option for refugee community organisations and community groups wishing to become more closely involved in the resettlement process. In addition, a range of concerns have been raised regarding the insufficient focus of the CPP model on humanitarian needs. You can [read the full submission here](#) and our [media response here](#).

### **Australian Citizenship Amendment (Allegiance to Australia) Bill 2015.**

For refugee and humanitarian entrants (particularly those who are stateless), Australian citizenship often has special significance, representing the culmination of their journey and the end of displacement. RCOA is therefore concerned that the measures proposed in this Bill are likely to undermine the values and principles of citizenship. In particular, we are concerned that the Bill will allow citizenship and its associated rights to be revoked without due process, and may increase the risk of both refoulement and indefinite detention for people from refugee backgrounds. We therefore recommend that the Bill be rejected in its entirety, and that the Australian Government consider adopting measures to increase social. You can see the [full submission here](#).

## National Consultation on Australian Citizenship

For refugee and humanitarian entrants (particularly those who are stateless), the ability to acquire Australian citizenship often has a special significance, representing the culmination of their journey and the end of their displacement. We are therefore concerned that a number of measures proposed in the discussion paper informing this consultation may create significant barriers to citizenship for people from refugee backgrounds or allow citizenship and its associated privileges to be revoked without due process. We also believe there is a need for the Government to give greater consideration to measures for promoting the inclusion and participation of all citizens in Australian society. [Read our full submission here](#)

## BRIGHT IDEAS

### Footscray Community Legal Centre' Employment Law Project

RCOA celebrates good practice and innovative ideas from organisations in the refugee support sector through the "Bright Ideas" series. Our latest profile in this series is about a Footscray Community Legal Centre project which seeks to improve employment outcomes for newly arrived and refugee communities in Melbourne's western suburbs and builds on a recent consultation and features a pilot employment legal service, community education and a "train-the-trainer" program. The project is targeted at newly arrived and refugee communities in the western suburbs of Melbourne. The largest group of clients currently are refugees who arrived on humanitarian visas, while the second largest are international students. You can find out all about this exciting initiative [here](#).

## FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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 here](#) Our Twitter handle is @OzRefugeeCouncil

## COMING EVENTS

**Living Library: "People Just Like Us" Refugee Talk IV.** *October 21 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm Parramatta City Council Chambers, 1A Civic Place Parramatta*, In order to change the negative perception of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the inhumane policies, "People Just Like Us", partnering with Refugee Council of Australia, a series of talks in which we invite refugees /...[Find out more »](#)

**Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security October 22 ANU University House, 1 Balmain Crescent Acton, ACT.** Are you interested in Women, Peace and Security? October 2015 is the 15th anniversary of the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Mark the occasion with an in depth discussion on women's participation in conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution and... [Find out more »](#)

**History of immigration to Australia** *October 26 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm Melbourne Law School, Room 102, 185 Pelham Street Carlton, Vic.* The University of Melbourne invites asylum seekers in our community to attend a lecture series. During September and October we will host lectures on important issues in modern and historical Australia, including education, human rights, equality, health and Indigenous cultures. [Find out more »](#)

**Refugee Rights Action Network Perth October 26** 6:30 pm - 8:00 pm *the activist centre, 15/5 Aberdeen St Northbridge, WA.* Refugee Rights Action Network (RRAN) is a political activist group. We oppose mandatory detention and believe that asylum seekers should be welcomed into the community. Find out more »

**People Just Like Us Refugee Talk - Hazara & Iraqi October 27** 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm *Reginald Murphy Community Centre, 19 Greenknowe Avenue Potts Point ,* Hear the personal stories of former refugees' and asylum seekers' journeys to Australia. The talk series will also feature refugee rights organisations and individuals who will talk about their work to support them. Find out more »

**If You Come To Australia October 27** 7:00 pm - 11:00 pm *The Old 505 Theatre, Suite 505, 342 Elizabeth St Surry Hills, NSW 2010 Australia* If You Come to Australia is a new independent theatre production which sheds light on the experiences of asylum seekers. Written and directed by Katie Green, in collaboration with five asylum seekers currently living western Sydney. Find out more »

**Animation in Community Development – Not what you think? October 28 @** 9:00 am - 12:30 pm *Nagle Centre, Level One, 22 Iolanthe St, Campbelltown, NSW.* Animation is a unique approach to community development practised in Campbelltown and around the world. Based on Paolo Friere's education for the oppressed, it is an effective method of people power and community action. Find out more »

**"I Don't"- A forum addressing forced marriage in Victoria October 28** 10:00 am - 3:30 pm *Centre for Multicultural Youth, 304 Drummond Street Carlton,*The forum will provide participants with an insight into the emerging issue of forced marriage, an overview of the current laws and some practice responses for workers to better identify and respond to the issue. Hear from renowned international speaker and Honor...Find out more »

**Protest the Transfield AGM October 28** 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm *Sydney Mint, 10 Macquarie Street. Sydney ,NSW, Australia* Transfield, which is about to change its name to Broadspectrum Ltd, is about to sign a new five-year contract to run detention on Manus Island and Nauru. Find out more »

**RHYTHMS, REBELS AND RESISTANCE October 28** 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm *Sydney Law School, Law School Foyer, Eastern Avenue, Sydney Uni. Sydney, NSW.* A Continuing Spring Series: Omar Offendum on youth politics in the Middle East Co-presented with the Department of Arabic Language and Cultures, School of Languages and Cultures, the Religion State and Society Network and the US Studies. Find out more »

**If You Come to Australia October 28, 29, 30, 31,** 7:00 pm - 11:00 pm *The Old 505 Theatre, Suite 505, 342 Elizabeth St Surry Hills, NSW 2010* A new independent theatre production which sheds light on the experiences of asylum seekers. Written and directed by Katie Green, in collaboration with five asylum seekers currently living western Sydney, the show was devised...Find out more »

**Bring Your Bills Day November 6 ,** 10:00 am - 3:00 pm *Brunswick Uniting Church Hall, 214 Sydney Rd Brunswick, Vic.* Lentara UnitingCare Financial Counselling Services is hosting a Bring Your Bills Day on 6 November in Moorland to help people get on top of their utility bills. The event, also supported by a number of other community organisations, aims to... Find out more »

**Billibellary's Walk & Celebration November 9,** 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm *Melbourne Law School, G08, 185 Pelham Street Carlton, Vic.* The University of Melbourne invites asylum seekers in our community to attend a lecture series. During September and October we will host lectures on

important issues in modern and historical Australia, including education, human rights, equality, health and Indigenous cultures. Find out more »

**Researchers for Asylum Seekers (RAS) Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Conference**

*November 16, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm Gryphon Gallery* Conference Themes Seeking asylum is a human right, Child refugees and asylum seekers, attitude of host nations to asylum seekers and refugees. Abstract submissions are invited for the annual Researchers for Asylum Seekers (RAS) Conference to be held in the... Find out more »

**Living Library: "People Just Like Us" Talk V. Tamils from Sri Lanka & Syrians** *November 18, 6:00*

*pm - 9:00 pm Parramatta City Council Chambers, 1A Civic Place Parramatta,* In order to change this negative perception of asylum seekers and refugees, as well as the inhumane policies, "People Just Like Us", partnering with Refugee Council of Australia, will hold a series of talks in which we invite refugees to tell their stories. Find out more »

**NEW RESEARCH, STATEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS**

**Parenting in a New Culture early intervention and prevention program** Developed by Spectrum MRC provides culturally sensitive parenting education through facilitated workshops and downloadable family resources, supported by professional instruction materials. New resources have been developed to build the capacity of the community services sector in response to increasing demand for specialist family intervention and parenting support in refugee and migrant communities in metropolitan Melbourne and can be accessed at <http://www.parentinginanewculture.org.au>.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

***Click [here for employment opportunities](#), and [here for volunteering opportunities](#). With the Refugee Council of Australia***

**Dandenong Interfaith Network seeking volunteer tour guides** People of asylum seeker and refugee backgrounds are encouraged to apply for tour guide roles and learn about other religions, meet new people and visit wonderful spiritual sites. For more information contact Helen Heath [tour@interfaithnetwork.org.au](mailto:tour@interfaithnetwork.org.au) or 0418 571 483

**Multicultural NSW send in your achievement and celebrate success** Any organisation, private, public or non government can send highlights of their work, website showcases, key achievements and celebrations that showcase the many achievements, large and small, which contribute to multicultural harmony and cohesion in NSW. For more information click [here](#):

**Behind the Wire seeks your help** An oral history project, Behind the Wire documents stories of men, women and children who have experienced Australian mandatory detention over the past 22 years. Seeking to bring a new perspective to the public understandings of mandatory detention by sharing the reality of the people who have lived it, in depth interviews with current and ex-detainees capture narrators' histories, experiences of seeking protection in Australia and the detailed reality of mandatory detention. These interviews are then edited into first person narratives that take the form of literary short stories. The stories collected through Behind the Wire are published online and in print. If you, or someone you know, has experienced mandatory detention and would like to participate in Behind the Wire, please email [contact@behindthewire.org.au](mailto:contact@behindthewire.org.au) more information <http://behindthewire.org.au>

**Call for Chapter Proposals** *Educating Refugee-Background Students: Critical Issues and Dynamic Contexts* Proposal deadline: October 15th, 2015 This collection will offer an in-depth exploration of key issues in the education of adolescents and adults with refugee backgrounds who have been resettled in the main refugee receiving areas of North America, Australia, and Europe. Until recently, educational researchers have devoted little attention to refugee-background students, despite the high numbers of refugees living in these areas. This volume will address geographic and thematic gaps in existing educational research with a focus on particular on students' goals, voices, and experiences, and each contributors will address contextual factors (both macro and micro level) informing their analysis. . For more information, [see here](#) or contact [sshapiro@middlebury.edu](mailto:sshapiro@middlebury.edu)

**WANTED – DESKS** The Melbourne office of RCOA is looking for good quality office desks. We are looking for small to medium sized desks, with draws and/or storage options. A corner desk would very, very helpful. A small bookshelf would also be appreciated. If you have any suitable office desks please contact: Asher Hirsch - [settlement@refugeecouncil.org.au](mailto:settlement@refugeecouncil.org.au) or call (03) 9600 3002. We can arrange to pick up furniture within the Melbourne area.

## REFUGEE ISSUES IN THE MEDIA

A brief overview of the many issues facing refugees and asylum seekers covered in the media

### Australian News

[Australia has questions to answer over protection of Reza Berati murder witness](#) – ABC

[Asylum seeker sets himself on fire in Victoria while on video call to refugee advocates](#) - ABC

[Rape Refugee seeks new abortion location](#) The Australian

[Refugee rape victim says immigration minister is telling lies about abortion](#) SMH

[Asylum seeker rejected abortion: Dutton](#) – SBS

[Part of homework club for refugee kids loses funding battle](#) – The Age

[Asylum seeker's rape claims overshadow Australia's bid for UN rights body](#) Ch 10

[Housing a key challenge in resettling Syrian refugees](#) – Daily Telegraph

### Offshore processing

[First failure of Australia's \\$55 million Cambodia refugee plan](#) – SMH

[Alcohol, sex fuel Manus tensions over refugee processing](#) – SBS

[Refugees in Indonesia go on hunger strike to protest delays in resettlement](#) – SMH

[Transfield facing investor blowtorch over Manus, Nauru operations](#) – The Australian

[Menstrual cups mooted as Nauru's asylum seekers suffer sanitary product restrictions](#) – The Canberra Times

### International

[Europe migrant crisis: Merkel ready to back Turkey's EU accession process in return for asylum seeker assistance](#) – The ABC

[Americans sharply divided on taking in more refugees: poll](#) Washington Times

[Refugees Are Causing A Mini Economic Miracle In Greece](#) The Daily Caller

[Refugees will power our economic miracle](#) New Daily

[Germany attributes spike in mushroom poisonings to foraging refugees](#) - The Guardian

[NZ not doing its 'fair share on refugees](#) TVNZ

### **Refugees Contribute**

[Immigration essential to replace populations in critical decline](#) – The Saturday Paper

[Refugees contribute more than they take](#) – Cape Argus

### **UNHCR**

[More than one month after Cyclone Komen, some impacted people remain homeless](#)

[UNHCR demands investigation after Afghan refugee shot dead in Bulgaria](#) – The Guardian

[More support required for returning Somalis](#)

[UNHCR backs increased protection for people fleeing disaster and climate change](#)



*An independent national network of more than 200 organisational members and thousands of individual supporters, the Refugee Council of Australia promotes fair treatment of people fleeing persecution and celebrates the contributions of Australians who have been refugees. Our work is funded by people who share our vision. To support us, visit <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/get-involved/make-a-donation/>*

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