

Freedom from Fear has been the theme of Refugee Week 2010. This newsletter looks at the experiences of those seeking refugee status from the reports on Asylum Seekers, People Smugglers, Refugees and Migrants' stories.

“Irregular Migration – The Global Challenge”

“While there is poverty, famine, wars, weak and corrupt governments, chronic unemployment, environmental degradation, natural disasters and racial, religious and political persecution, we will see people on the move. And Australia, as a wealthy developed country, where there is stable Government, an abundance of opportunity, and most importantly – where [all] can be safe – will always be an attractive destination. We need to accept that irregular migration will be with us for the foreseeable future, and design our policy responses with that reality in mind.”

Read the speech delivered by Minister Evans at the Sydney Institute at:
<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/speeches/2010/ce100324.htm>

Asylum Seekers

Conflict, insecurity and displacement are key to asylum applications

The Australian Government has welcomed the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' 2009 report on *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries*.

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, said the report was a timely reminder that push factors such as conflict and human insecurity are the key reasons why people flee their homes to seek protection in industrialised countries like Australia.

The UNHCR report makes clear that asylum applications in Australia in 2009 are still half what they were in 2000 and 2001 under the Howard Government. It is also a reminder that Australia's recent experience of boat arrivals is part of the global challenge of irregular migration.

Significantly, given that Afghans represent the largest cohort of Australia's boat arrivals since late 2008, asylum claims by Afghans worldwide increased by some 45 per cent in 2009.

<http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/media-releases/2010/ce10025.htm>

The journey of an asylum seeker

Would-be asylum seekers face an array of questions and checks before they are granted refugee status. After being picked up in Australian waters, they are first taken to the Christmas Island detention centre to the northwest of Western Australia.

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After an initial assessment by the Department of Immigration, they are first given a health check in which medical professionals look for communicable diseases such as tuberculosis. An identity check follows, with officials employing the latest biometric tests in an attempt to confirm their bona fides. They then face an ASIO check to try to identify if they pose a security risk. ASIO will not detail just how it assesses that risk.

From here, a process called a "refugee status assessment" is made, with asylum seekers interviewed about why they have a "well founded fear of persecution" in their country of origin. The criteria for this is based on the UN's Refugee Convention and judges persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular persecuted social group.

Following that, a decision is made as to whether to grant asylum. Rejected applicants on Christmas Island can then apply to have an independent assessor review their claim. If the independent assessor rejects their claim, they are then sent back to their country of origin, usually via detention centres in Perth or Sydney. Successful applicants are transferred to the mainland. However, depending on capacity, asylum seekers can be transferred once initial checks have been completed. Successful applicants are given permanent residency. This includes access to benefits, assistance in finding work and accommodation and, in most instances, English classes.

The Daily Telegraph, 29 March 2010.

Suspension of processing asylum seekers raises serious concerns

The Australian Human Rights Commission has expressed serious concerns at the announcement that the processing of new Sri Lankan and Afghani asylum seekers will be suspended, effective immediately.

Commission President Cathy Branson QC, said she was concerned that the suspension of processing could lead to the indefinite detention of asylum seekers.

"The Commission recognises that there is community concern about the recent arrival of asylum seekers by boat," Ms Branson said. "However, it is important to keep this in perspective: Australia receives a comparatively low number of asylum seekers."

"The focus should be on ensuring that if people do arrive and seek asylum in Australia, we treat those people fairly, humanely and in line with Australia's international obligations."

http://humanrights.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2010/29_10.html

Long history of hardline rules to stem asylum boats

In historical terms the Rudd government's clampdown on Sri Lankan and Afghan asylum seekers is a reversion to the usual political response to unauthorised boat arrivals.

In **1978** the Fraser government approached regional governments to hold vessels in transit so claims could be processed while asylum seekers were in refugee camps.

In **1982** the Liberal Party's moderate immigration minister, Ian Macphee, introduced individual determination of asylum claims to ensure only "genuine" refugees were admitted.

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In **1983** the newly elected Hawke government endorsed a plan by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for "durable solutions" to the Indochinese refugee problem which made resettlement in countries such as Australia a last resort.

In **1992** the immigration minister, Gerry Hand, from the Victorian ALP's Socialist Left, introduced mandatory detention for all non-citizens in Australia without a valid visa.

From **1999** the Howard government tightened policy by introducing temporary protection visas for asylum seekers found to be refugees after arriving unlawfully.

After the **2001** Tampa incident, the Howard government adopted the Pacific solution - sending unauthorised arrivals to Nauru and Papua New Guinea while their asylum claims were processed.

In February **2008** the Rudd government ended the Pacific solution, announcing that all future unauthorised arrivals would be processed on Christmas Island.

In May **2008** it scrapped temporary protection visas, giving permanent visas to people found to be refugees regardless of whether they arrived lawfully or unlawfully.

www.smh.com.au/national/long-history-of-hardline-rules-to-stem-asylum-boats-20100409-ryu5.html

Iraqi shopkeeper fears his \$12,000 escape was all in vain

The CD shop of Hussein al-Hakak was burnt down in the Iraqi village he fled, embarking on a well-organised journey from airports to safe houses and finally a wooden boat to Ashmore Reef. Four months and \$12,000 later, he faces being sent home.

Mr Hakak flew from Basra to Malaysia on December 2. He said a man was waiting for him at Kuala Lumpur airport and took him to a house where he stayed for 10 days with others preparing to travel to Australia.

He paid \$2000 to be taken to a house in Jakarta, and then \$10,000 for the next leg: a flight to Surabaya, where smugglers collected the desperate group in a car and then waited five days before setting off with 58 others by boat to Ashmore Reef.

"I was very worried that it was not safe in this ship ... We thought when we arrived we had found protection. We were shocked when they rejected us," Mr Hakak said.

The Minister for Immigration, Chris Evans, said: "I have no doubt that [people smugglers] will continue to peddle lies in order to profit from people's misery."

www.smh.com.au/national/iraqi-shopkeeper-fears-his-12000-escape-was-all-in-vain-20100412-s443.html

Seekers say they are undeterred by freeze

When Abdullatif Ali, a teenage Afghan asylum seeker surviving on charity and his wits in Jakarta, speaks of Australia, it becomes apparent why the government's six-month freeze on processing asylum seekers from his country is unlikely to deter boat people.

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"I have many friends who have arrived in Australia," says Ali, who has made two failed attempts to reach Australia during his 18 months in Indonesia. "They are now refugees. They are happy, they are working. When they ring me on the phone and we are chatting, they are always laughing. When they are laughing, there is tears in my eyes. I want this life, too. I cannot go back to Afghanistan ... my family depends on me to get to Australia."

Ali needs another \$US500 (\$537) to pay a people smuggler, or agent, as he calls him. If he finds that money, he will be on a boat in a flash.

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/seekers-say-they-are-undeterred-by-freeze-20100409-ryuf.html>

Indonesia briefed, and backs freeze

The Indonesian government has welcomed the Rudd government's freeze on processing of Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum seekers, saying it hoped it will stem the flow of irregular immigrants passing through its territory on their way to Australia.

"If it stops people coming from their countries, it will have good repercussions," said Teuku Faizasyah, the spokesman for Indonesia's Department of Foreign Affairs. "But it will take a lot of effort, including working closely with Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, to get this message across to those people ... a lot of work needs to be done" [before people stop engaging human trafficking syndicates to take them to Australia].

"We fully understand," he said. "It is trying to address a 'pull factor' and if it stops people transiting through Indonesia again and again, then it will be a good thing."

<http://m.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/indonesia-briefed-and-backs-freeze-20100411-s0wi.html>

Amnesty International takes Australia to task on human rights abuses

Australia is facing fresh calls to end its freeze on processing refugee claims by Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum seekers.

Amnesty International issued the pleas in its latest annual report on human rights abuses in 159 countries, released in London recently. The report highlighted the treatment of Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum seekers and the need for a human rights act as key issues for Australia.

With thousands of refugees fleeing war-torn Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, South Pacific nations such as Australia had a responsibility to help, it said.

The federal government earlier this year imposed a three-month freeze on processing asylum claims from Sri Lankans and Afghans.

Amnesty Australia national director Claire Mallinson accused the federal government of placing political self interest above the need to uphold its international human rights responsibilities to asylum seekers.

www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/amnesty-international-takes-australia-to-task-on-human-rights-abuses/story-e6frg6nf-1225871861587

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89 asylum seekers sent to Villawood

Eighty-nine asylum seekers have been transferred from Christmas Island to a Sydney detention centre after their claims for protection were denied, the federal government said.

The Iraqis, Sri Lankans, Afghans and Iranians, who arrived by boat last year, left the island on a commercial charter flight and were taken to the high-security Villawood Immigration Detention Centre.

Immigration and Citizenship Minister Chris Evans said each of the detainees had failed to meet the criteria for refugee status.

www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/89-asylum-seekers-sent-to-villawood-20100327-r4cf.html

Curtin detention centre reopened

The Federal Government has reopened a controversial detention centre at Curtin Airbase in Western Australia.

Ninety-four Afghan asylum seekers have been transferred from Christmas Island to Curtin and within a few weeks 189 people will be housed in the facility. The centre, in the remote West Kimberley region of Western Australia, was closed in 2002 following a series of riots and incidents of self-harm by detainees.

Immigration Minister Chris Evans said the people currently being transferred are mainly single men who are a part of the Government's current processing suspension of claims for people from Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. He said the Curtin facility will be upgraded over the coming months and could house up to 600 people who would be held separately from other asylum seekers.

"It makes sense for the government to manage this group of asylum seekers in one secure location," Senator Evans said. "We [are using] Curtin because we want to keep the caseloads separate." The Government has been criticised for approaching small country towns to house asylum seekers since the Christmas Island detention centre reached capacity.

The decision to reopen the Curtin detention centre was criticised by refugee advocacy groups and the opposition. The chief executive of the Refugee Council of Australia, Paul Power, said it was one of the most remote places in Australia and had been notorious in the past for being one of the worst onshore detention centres. "This population of asylum seekers will include torture and trauma survivors and services for them will be nigh on impossible to deliver," Mr Power said.

Senator Evans said he had instructed his department to ensure that appropriate support services were available.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/06/12/2925566.htm?section=justin> and www.smh.com.au/national/former-detention-centre-comes-back-into-service-20100418-smnk.html

New arrivals taste outback

Kids will be kids, wherever they are.

So squeals of delight rang out loudly yesterday as the 46 children among 86 asylum seekers taken to Leonora quickly settled into their first day in Western Australia.

Games of soccer sprang up, sticks became make-believe swords, a small tree stump was an irresistible place for a toddler to perch, and an older child cradled a footy. Children carrying soccer balls slipped down under the green screen stretched across temporary cyclone fencing about five metres inside one of the perimeter fences, calling out "hello, hello" and responding to shouted questions.

And if their smiles and the bursts of laughter were anything to go by, their parents seemed just as happy. Family groups gathered to chat in the morning sun; others looked with interest through the windows of their accommodation.

The Immigration Department said yesterday the focus on their first day was on settling into their accommodation. They were using the laundry facilities, playing table tennis, pool and board games in the recreation room and using the TV and internet. The manager of Leonora Recreation and Aquatic Centre, Lee Jeavons, said he would work with the Immigration Department to keep asylum seekers active with basketball, indoor soccer and "kindie gyms" for young children. The Immigration Minister, Chris Evans, said children could attend the local school. They were also provided with "culturally appropriate meals".

The family groups also contain 17 men and 23 women. There are 40 asylum seekers from Sri Lanka, 34 from Afghanistan, eight from Iran, and four of other nationalities. On this evidence, they are a group of happy campers.

www.theage.com.au/national/happy-campers-abound-as-new-arrivals-taste-outback-20100608-xtp4.html and <http://www.smh.com.au/text/articles/2010/06/07/1275762514818.html>

Abbott's new Pacific Solution

The Pacific Solution is set for a return under an Abbott government. Under this policy, asylum seekers during the term of the Howard government were temporarily detained in a third country, thus preventing the 'processing' of asylum seeker claims on mainland Australia. But the geography is not quite accurate because the Coalition has refused to identify to which country it will try to send asylum seekers, insisting that it cannot name the target country until it is in government.

Asylum seekers will also again be given temporary protection visas if they arrive illegally, which could be as short as six months. The TPV will have the same punitive restrictions as in the Howard era, including no right to family reunions. The return to TPVs was announced by Malcolm Turnbull in 2009.

TPVs were a notable and well-identified failure under the Howard government. They led to a 50% surge in asylum seekers coming by boat after TPVs were introduced in 1999, as the families of asylum seekers tried to reach Australia to join partners who had already reached Australia but who were not permitted to reunite with their families. TPVs were the reason so many women and children were aboard SIEV X, which sank in October 2001 trying to reach Australia, killing 288 women and children along with 65 men.

The Coalition today argued "offshore processing" deprives people smugglers of a "product to sell", ignoring that 90% of TPV holders under the Howard government were eventually given permanent visas.

Abbott also committed to "turn back the boats"; "where circumstances permit and vessels can be safely secured".

<http://www.crikey.com.au/2010/05/27/abbotts-new-pacific-solution-cruel-treatment-for-asylum-seekers/>

Tanner rejects 'cruel' Pacific Solution

Opposition Leader Tony Abbott's border protection policies are doomed to fail, Labor frontbench MP Lindsay Tanner says. Mr Abbott on Thursday flagged a revival of Howard-era strategies such as establishing a detention facility for asylum seekers in another country. He also vowed to bring back temporary protection visas (TPVs), which would limit a refugee's stay in Australia to three years.

Mr Tanner accused Mr Abbott of reaching for a "cheap populist fix" to solve the contentious issue. "The arrangements that John Howard put in place didn't really have much of an impact about where asylum seekers ultimately ended up," said Mr Tanner. "The vast bulk of them ended up in Australia anyway. It damaged Australia's reputation internationally, it cost a lot of money and no outcome."

Mr Tanner said the "cruel" TPVs didn't stem the flow of asylum seekers but forced them to live in uncertainty about their futures.

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1267612/Tanner-rejects-cruel-Pacific-Solution>

Take politics out of border protection

Former Liberal party leader and Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser says the current debate demeans Australia and diminishes every one of us. "Once race or religion emerge as political issues it is very hard to get back to a saner and quieter debate. The only way out of this dilemma for Australia is for border protection to be taken off the political agenda, for the political parties quietly and sensibly to establish a bipartisan, legal and humane policy that both major parties are prepared to support - otherwise Australia will move backwards into a darker age." (*The Age*, April 15)

Boat people won't get permanent residency under Coalition

Current Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott has vowed asylum seekers arriving in Australian waters by boat will be barred from becoming permanent residents, if he is elected. "You will not get permanent residency if you turn up this way, no ifs, no buts, you just won't get permanent residency, full stop, end of story," he told Macquarie Radio Network. (*Daily Telegraph*, April 15)

Quiet search for housing for asylum seekers

The federal government is asking church groups for access to private properties to house asylum seekers spilling over from Christmas Island.

Immigration officials have spent recent weeks quietly phoning churches, asking them to nominate convents, monasteries and boarding houses where at least 100 children and families might stay. Any extra accommodation is intended to supplement hotels and motels. It is understood officials were making the calls, seeking places for families and unaccompanied minors, who sailed to Australia without parents.

More than 90 per cent of boat arrivals to Australia in 2009 were eventually found to be refugees. However, prolonged detention in faraway places hampered their ability to settle into the community because of increased stress and exacerbated trauma. According to the Immigration Department, efforts to quietly find more accommodation were part of "prudent" planning. A spokesman reiterated the government policy pledging to keep children and families out of high-security detention centres.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/quiet-search-for-housing-for-asylum-seekers-20100518-vca6.html>

Disorder not enough for asylum

Immigration Minister Chris Evans has indicated the Rudd government is poised to issue further rejections for Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum-seekers who arrived before the government's April 9 suspension of claims from the two countries.

"I think the important point to make is that because a country is subject to civil disorder and great difficulty doesn't mean that everyone from that country is a refugee," he said during a visit to Christmas Island. "I think people comment on the situation in Afghanistan and say it is still fairly unsafe in certain regions, but that is not a convention-related reason for someone to be found a refugee."

The Rudd government earlier this month froze asylum applications from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, citing improved conditions in the two countries. While the freeze is in force, the government will review changes in the two nations to determine which applicants should be sent home.

"We're waiting on the UNHCR review of country information as one source of information to use but already using the country information that we are getting, we are seeing a greater number of rejections based on other bits of information, saying things are safer for them."

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/politics/disorder-not-enough-for-asylum/story-e6frgczf-1225857648718>

People Smugglers

People smuggler Captain Bram finally pays up

A notorious Indonesian people smuggler has avoided jail by paying a fine just in time. Abraham Louhenapessy, better known as Captain Bram, was fined 25 million rupiah (\$3000) in March for breaching sailing laws.

The Serang District Court ordered Bram to pay the fine within two months or face five months' jail. Bram finally paid up, the prosecutor, Fransiscus Pakpahan, said.

The court in March also placed Bram on 18 months' probation. It found him guilty of hiring crew members who did not have proper documents to man the boat he used in a failed attempt to bring 254 Sri Lankan asylum seekers into Australia last year.

The boat was apprehended by the Indonesian Navy, with Bram still on board, following a request from the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, to the Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/people-smuggler-captain-bram-finally-pays-up-20100524-w82b.html>

Anti-People Smuggling Bill

On 4 May, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee released its report of the Inquiry into the proposed Anti-People Smuggling Bill. Despite the numerous concerns raised by a wide range of organisations about the proposed legislation, the Committee recommended that the Bill be passed with a single minor amendment. Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young released a dissenting report criticising the Committee's findings and recommending that the Bill should not proceed without significant amendments. Both reports can be downloaded from:

http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/legcon_ctte/antipeoplesmuggling/index.htm

New law would jail a modern Oskar Schindler

A modern-day Oskar Schindler would be jailed for up to 10 years under the Rudd government's proposed crackdown on people smuggling, lawyers say.

In largely unscrutinised changes, backed by the opposition, the government is introducing new criminal charges for supporting people smugglers, even unwittingly.

"It's mind-blowing legislation. I've never seen anything like it," the University of Sydney professor of public law, Mary Crock, said. "These laws capture innocent people who may be operating under perfectly good humanitarian reasons."

Currently, the law defines people smugglers as those who are acting for profit when bringing five or more people to Australia. Proposed laws make criminals of anyone sending money to asylum seekers overseas, who later use it to pay a people smuggler.

The anti-people smuggling and other measures bill also criminalises ship captains who rescue people on the high seas and bring them to Australia and pilots who unknowingly fly foreigners into Australia on false documents.

The changes planned for Australia go beyond comparable laws in the US, Canada, Britain and New Zealand.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/new-law-would-jail-a-modern-oskar-schindler-20100427-tq1g.html>

People smuggler's role like 'helping Jews escape'

The District Court in Perth has been told the actions of an alleged high-ranking people smuggler can be likened to those of people who helped Jews escape from Nazi Germany.

The comparison was made by the lawyer for Iraqi-Iranian citizen Hadi Ahmadi, 34, who is on trial accused of smuggling more than 900 asylum seekers into Australia. The asylum seekers were mainly from Iraq and Iran and were on four boats that arrived at Christmas Island in 2001.

Prosecutors say Ahmadi collected payments of up to \$US8,000 (\$9,600) from them and helped organise accommodation and travel arrangements in Indonesia.

Two witnesses who were involved in people smuggling activities would give evidence about Ahmadi's alleged involvement, the court heard.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/06/01/2915420.htm>

Boat people control follows the money

Home Affairs Minister Brendan O'Connor will hold talks with remittance dealers over a plan to deregister institutions found to have facilitated money transfers to people smugglers.

Mr O'Connor made the announcement as part of a broader government border protection package unveiled which also included a temporary freeze on asylum seeker applications from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

Under the changes affecting remittance dealers, the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (Austrac) will be given new powers to deregister remittance dealers who facilitate access to funds for people smugglers. The new regime of tighter regulations will also include an application process for registration as a dealer which requires dealers to declare they have no criminal record as well as establish a new offence for providing false or misleading information.

Austrac will also get powers to publish a list of registered remitters and remitters whose registration has been cancelled or surrendered.

All remittance dealers are required by law to register with Austrac before providing money transfer services and face up to two years' jail and a \$55,000 fine for non-compliance under existing law.

The Australian Financial Review, Monday 12 April 2010

Refugees

Bangladesh: Rohingya rejected again

Bangladesh has rejected a U.N. proposal that it grant refugee status to tens of thousands of ethnic minority Muslims from Burma who fled in hope of asylum and a better life, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mohamed Mijarul Quayes has said. "They must go back to their land," Quayes told reporters Saturday in the Bangladesh capital, Dhaka, according to news reports.

Some 200,000 Rohingya, ethnic Muslims who live in fear of arrest and deportation and lack access to the services provided at international refugee camps, have fled to Bangladesh from Burma, whose authorities don't recognize them as citizens.

Bangladesh does recognize as refugees some 28,000 Rohingya who live in two official camps run by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Bangladesh government.

Quayes said Bangladesh won't extend that recognition to any more asylum-seekers. Authorities in Bangladesh fear recognizing them would encourage a flood of new migrants.

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c05091526.html>

Bangladesh: landless numbers on the rise

When Roton Mia could no longer make ends meet working for US\$2 a day, he sold his land in central Kishoreganj District to feed his wife and two children. With no choice but to move to a slum in Dhaka, the capital city, Mia and his family are now among millions of Bangladesh's landless.

"When you need to feed your family and you do not have enough income, selling your land is the only way to survive," the 35-year-old said. "There are many problems in the slum, like a water crisis, a lack of space - but I have no option to go anywhere."

Landless families often end up in the slums of Dhaka, while luckier ones live on government-owned land in rural areas.

Millions of Bangladeshi households have lost their property, either through poverty, natural disasters or land-grabbing by corrupt elites.

Of Bangladesh's more than 160 million inhabitants, close to 4.5 million are completely landless, mostly in rural areas, according to a 2008 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey.

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4c11f36dc.html>

Charges likely after SIEV findings

The Northern Territory Coroner is expected to recommend criminal charges be laid against three asylum seekers when he hands down his findings into the SIEV 36 explosion. The three Afghani men have been accused of deliberately setting fire to the boat they were aboard, resulting in the death of five men. A further 40 asylum seekers who were on board the boat suffered serious burns. A coronial inquest into the incident began on January 25 this year. Most of the people injured in the explosion have since been granted visas in Australia. It is understood any asylum seeker found to have committed a crime will have their visa revoked. (AAP in Daily Telegraph, 16 March)

A fair go for refugees is a fair go for all Australians – RCOA opinion piece

The debate on refugee issues has two sides. On one you have a genuine attempt to resolve the complex protection needs of vulnerable people who have fled human rights abuses. On the other is a rush for short-term fixes that create more problems than they solve and are usually based on false assumptions about asylum seekers. (Daily Telegraph, 18 March)

Asylum claims: perspective needed – Age Editorial

Sometimes it is all too easy to jump to conclusions rather than take a longer, more considered route. How else to explain some of the reactions to the United Nations report on international asylum levels? ...Some commentators who prefer to reposition the asylum-seeker argument on more inflammatory lines, playing down this country's moral and legal responsibilities. Given that the majority of asylum seekers to Australia do not, in fact, come by sea but air, it would make more sense to publish a

photograph of a passenger jet: but the popular reaction would not, of course, be the same. (The Age, March 25)

Craig Emerson MP responds to asylum seeker hype - ABC TV's Q&A

"Now I had a look at the number of who have come to Australia seeking asylum by boat. The number is 22,000. Now that seems like a fairly large number but that's not this year or last year, that's in the last thirty five years. 22,000 people have sought asylum in Australia over thirty five years! And there's this hysteria with the Liberals saying 'ooh' – it's as if we're being overrun by asylum seekers... Let's keep a bit of perspective about this." (Q&A ABC TV March 29)

The above four news items were taken from the Refugee Council of Australia Bulletin for 1 April 2010. See: <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/>

Migrant Experiences

Long tough road to citizenship

Farid Ahmad Abdullah arrived in Australia in the most controversial of circumstances; he was one of 438 asylum seekers rescued at sea by the MV Tampa. Farid Ahmad Abdullah not only survived detention, he completed an extraordinary journey from unwanted asylum seeker to Australian citizen.

When he first arrived the then Howard government refused to allow him and his fellow asylum seekers on board the MV Tampa into Australian waters. They were eventually settled in a detention camp on Nauru - signalling the beginning of the so called Pacific Solution.

The young man who fled the Taliban and paid people smugglers more than US\$4000 to travel across Asia says his time on Nauru was physically and mentally painful. In a recent interview he said, "Two years go on and every day I was asking people, 'What is our future like? Are you sending us back? Are you keeping us forever? Are we prisoners? Are we something different?'"

Farid Abdullah not only survived detention, he completed an extraordinary journey from unwanted asylum seeker to Australian citizen. And that journey will take a new turn with the birth of his first child, later this year.

<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2010/s2917775.htm>

Refugee children removed

Children are being removed from refugee families and placed in foster care because their parents are not adopting Australian child-rearing practices fast enough, community workers have told the Herald.

A 25-year-old mother from Sudan had seven of her children removed within two years of arriving in Sydney because she was deemed to be neglectful.

"I kept them safe through bullets and mines but I lost them in Australia," she told Rahat Chowdhury of Relationships Australia, who runs a program for refugees and humanitarian entrants.

The NSW Chief Justice, Jim Spigelman, last week drew attention to the challenges courts face in dealing with the sexist cultural traditions of some immigrant groups, especially in relation to violence against women. Researchers said child-rearing practices were also a source of cultural misunderstandings that could lead to over-reporting to Community Services.

Eileen Pittaway, director of the UNSW Centre for Refugee Research, said there was widespread fear in refugee communities across Australia. "Certain differences in child-rearing practices can be respected but if they amount to putting children in danger, that cannot happen here," she said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/refugee-children-removed-20100418-smn6.html>

Refugee jackaroo

A small group of refugees and migrants are blazing a trail in rural Australia. Over the past few months they've been tractor-driving, hay-baling, fencing, working with farm animals and learning to ride horses and motorbikes. It's all part of a specialist jackaroo and jillaroo course run by the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE.

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/breakfast/stories/2010/2926873.htm>

Tastes out of Africa

A group of resourceful African refugees is growing and selling the produce of their homeland in Australia. The produce, including garden eggs, fever leaf, okra and cassava, is already proving popular at markets around western Sydney and the Hawkesbury. The introduction of such exotic products proves that immigration has been good to the Australian palate.

The African farming project is a work of the Sisters of Mercy and is based at Mamre Homestead, the historic property of the colonial parson, Samuel Marsden.

A group of refugee families from countries including Liberia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo lease small plots on the property and, after undertaking horticulture studies, they are now harvesting and selling their crops.

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/restaurants-and-bars/tastes-out-of-africa-20100518-vaxv.html>

Small towns, big hearts

For more than 60 years migrants have flocked to Australia's big cities, but if they can be persuaded to go to the country instead most will find jobs, a warm welcome and happiness. A study of almost 1000 migrants who settled in regional and rural towns found almost four out of five intended to stay there and 80 per cent would recommend the town to family or friends.

"The notion that the bush is anti-immigrant and that for migrants it will be a lonely and culturally bankrupt experience is not true," said Jock Collins, professor of economics at the University of Technology, Sydney, and co-author of the study with Dr Branka Krivokapic-Skoko of Charles Sturt University.

The government-funded research is the first sizeable study of immigrants in country areas. It found the migrants - almost half from English-speaking countries - felt they had been made welcome in their town, and cited the friendliness of the people as one of the main reasons they liked the place. In addition, most found jobs quickly, two-thirds had partners who also were working, and most were "overwhelmingly positive about their jobs".

<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/small-towns-big-hearts-say-migrants-20100430-tzat.html>

Speeches

"Irregular Migration – The Global Challenge"

The Sydney Institute
24 March 2010

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