

**TOWNSVILLE MULTICULTURAL  
SUPPORT GROUP Inc.**

**NEWSLETTER**



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**.....the First Australians, whose lands, winds and  
waters we all now share....**

*An excerpt from the new Preamble to the Constitution of Queensland  
[www.atsip.qld.gov.au](http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au)*

Queensland is home to more than 140,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal culture and Torres Strait Islander culture are the oldest living cultures in the world; going back more than 50,000 years.

This rich and diverse cultural heritage is a vital part of what makes our State great.

On 23 February 2010, a Bill to insert a Preamble to the Constitution of Queensland was passed by the Queensland Parliament.

The Preamble honours Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' peoples as the First Australians. Our Preamble is a measure of reconciliation, Recognition and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, of which all Queenslanders can be proud.



**Inaugural Townsville Expo Opens Dialogue**

The Townsville Multicultural Support Group Inc. (TMSG) Settlement Grants Program (SGP) held its inaugural Community Services Expo on 28 April 2010.

The aim of the Expo was to facilitate a dialogue that would enable government agencies based in Townsville and individuals/groups from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds to engage directly with one another, in order to improve understanding of the specific issues and needs of the various CALD groups and on how services can be delivered to best meet these needs.

The idea for the Expo originated from observing Multicultural events and forums held in Townsville, in which mainstream service providers had information booths, but these were usually on the periphery, and interaction between providers and attendees was at a minimum. The Expo was designed to focus on the stalls so associations and individuals from the various CALD groups share information and provide practical solutions to service delivery challenges. Ten State and Federal government agencies and two Ethnic Associations participated in the Expo, which attracted 100 visitors. Feedback from both the participants and service providers has been extremely positive with the hope that a similar event will occur next year.

*Extract SPIN page 7, June edition.*

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## TIME FOR A SMILE



Young Tracy thought it was time she phoned her grandparents and let them know what she had been up to. 'I've had a terrible time! First off I got tonsillitis, followed by appendicitis and pneumonia. After that, I got rheumatism and to top it off they gave me hypodermics and inoculations. I thought I would never get through that spelling bee!'

## RACE

### [United Nations Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice]

All human beings belong to a single species and share common origin. They are born equal in dignity and rights and all form an integral part of humanity. All peoples of the world possess equal faculties for attaining the highest level in intellectual, technical, social, economic, cultural and political development. The differences between the achievements of the different people are entirely attributable to geographical, historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors. Such differences can in no case serve as a pretext for any rank ordered classification of nations or peoples.

## *What Having a Home*

### *Means to Me*

Author: E.M. Rigby  
(3rd year social work student who completed a placement at TMSG, in June 2010)

*I have a safe haven,  
a refuge of my own  
I can think, share a  
meal, and a blanket or two  
All my children call this  
house their home  
It creates stability.  
My family have one place in  
this world  
that we can call our  
own  
I feel safe and secure  
The wind and rain no longer  
make me ill, my bones no  
longer ache  
I am well  
I have a bed to sleep upon  
I can cook and wash.  
Nevertheless, how can I enjoy  
these comforts when  
others suffer so?  
In this my heart cries out for  
my brothers and sisters who  
do not have a home, A  
place to call their own.*

*For they are refugees*

*Who seek only safety and a  
place to call their own  
Mothers, fathers, children,  
the aged and frail  
Just like you and me; lost in  
the sea of life,  
Blown back and forth, with  
no refuge of their own to  
secure them,  
When life ravages and  
threatens to stifle the very  
breath from them.  
What can we do to help, I  
ask myself?  
Be genuine, welcome; be a  
friend and extend a gentle  
hand,  
For we are all but brothers  
and sisters in this land,*



REFUGEE WEEK at TMSG was a wonderful occasion of exchange and education about Human Rights across all ages. Thank You to the Department of Immigration and Citizenship for a small grant that assisted to cover some costs and to our partners Aitkenvale State School, Townsville State High School, Amnesty International and North Queensland Domestic Violence Resource Service.



Refugee Week Events included: A workshop at Townsville State High School exploring the theme: Freedom from Fear. Groups took sections of Article 26 of the Declaration of Human Rights to determine as individuals if freedom can be achieved through education. Four bicultural workers assisted with a workshop at Aitkenvale Primary School where classes rotated around several activities focusing on escaping fear and having the freedom to dance and to paint. Students produced images of ***the most important thing a child needs***.

There was a breakfast and supper at TMSG office Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> June offering workshops around 4 different articles of the Declaration in partnership with Amnesty International, North Qld Domestic Violence Resource Service, volunteers and facilitators which received press coverage. The final event was on Friday at the Multicultural Women's Group with a guest speaker leading a sharing session on multifaith women. Some of the artwork from the school visits was used in a static display and a lunch was shared by the women and staff of TMSG.

The events hosted by TMSG were a clear reflection of the organisation's commitment to social justice and human rights which directly relates to the Refugee Week theme: 'Freedom from Fear'. The week was one of exuberance, healthy discussion and two way dialogue between refugees who have settled here, interested community members, workers from a range of government and non government services, and most importantly children and youth. The programs in the schools provided opportunities for children settled through the Humanitarian Program to share their experiences, for youth to consider the value of the right to education and to appreciate the importance of that right for those students who have not had access to education previously.

Feedback included:

New volunteer after morning workshop: "Thank you that was wonderful. Amazing".

Comments during preparatory discussion on the UNHCR Declaration at the Women's Group meeting: "Is that what it's all about?" "That's so important to know."

Comments from a primary school child: "Do refugees come from Tasmania?"

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## Activities for 2010

|                                    |  |                                       |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Sewing and Craft Classes</b>    | <b>10.00 am - 12.00 noon</b>                 | <b>1st, 2nd, 3rd &amp; 5th Friday</b> |
| <b>English Language Classes</b>    | <b>11.00 am - 12.00 noon</b>                 | <b>1st, 2nd, 3rd &amp; 5th Friday</b> |
| <b>Multicultural Women's Group</b> | <b>10.00 am - 12.00 noon<br/>27th August</b> | <b>4th Friday of every month</b>      |
| <b>Annual General Meeting</b>      | <b>See insert</b>                            | <b>18th September</b>                 |

**Everyone is welcomed to all activities**

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### TMSG's Committee 2009 - 10

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The contents, information, advice and opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of TMSG and not the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC)

# Townsville Multicultural Support Group Inc.



*The Management and Staff of TMSG  
invite you to attend its*

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

*4.00PM*

*Saturday 18th September 2010*

*Covered area, St. Joseph's Catholic School,  
Ross River Road, Mundingburra.*

*Welcoming Humanitarian Entrants to our  
Townsville Community as well  
as regular AGM Business.*

*Launch of:*

- ➔ 1,2,3, Home Safe Flipcharts*
- ➔ Centre for Refugee Research &  
TMSG Partnership Project:  
"Realising Refugee Rights  
in Regional Areas."*

*Please bring a plate of food to share with  
friends!*

## COMFORT ALL WHO FLEE FEAR

*Julian Burnside, July 6, 2010*

### **We do not need to be protected from asylum seekers: they need to be protected from their persecutors**

Julia Gillard wants an open debate about refugee policy. Good thing, but let the debate start with the facts. So far this year, just 3500 people seeking asylum have arrived by boat in Australia. That is a very small number. If it keeps up at this rate, it would take about 20 years to fill the MCG with boat arrivals. We receive about 240,000 migrants each year, so one year of asylum seekers arriving by boat is equivalent to about one week of new migrants. We aren't being flooded.

'Border protection' is a misleading term. We do not need to be protected from asylum seekers: they need to be protected from their persecutors.

Border control is a legitimate concern, but it is irrelevant to the discussion. About 4 million people arrive in Australia each year by orthodox means: they come for business, holidays, study and so on. If 5000 a year arrive without prior authority, it is absurd to suggest that we have "lost control" of our borders. Our borders are close to watertight.

Asylum seekers do not commit any offence by coming here. Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights every person has the right to seek asylum in any territory they can reach.

Recent arrivals are mostly Hazaras from Afghanistan and Tamils from Sri Lanka. They are fleeing persecution. The Tamils from Sri Lanka are fleeing genocide.

The Hazaras are an ethnic minority who have been persecuted in Afghanistan for several centuries. They are Shiite Muslims. The Taliban are Sunni Muslims. In the past few weeks, Hazaras have been summarily executed in the streets by members of the Taliban. The Karzai government is either unwilling or unable to control the Taliban: that is why our troops are there.

When she was voted leader of the government, Julia Gillard said that she could understand anxiety in the public about boat arrivals. Given the scaremongering Tony Abbott had been engaged in, she

made a fair point. Once the facts are recognised, it is less easy to understand anxiety.

Australia has signed the Refugees Convention. Indonesia has not. Asylum seekers who get to Indonesia live in perpetual fear of detection. In Indonesia, asylum seekers who are assessed as refugees may wait 10 to 15 years before they are offered a place in a third country. In the meantime they cannot get jobs and their children cannot go to school.

Not surprisingly, some of them— those with initiative and courage— place themselves in the hands of people smugglers and end up in Australia.

So the question is, what should Australia do with people who arrive here by boat seeking asylum? If we are to have an open debate on the matter, let people declare their positions. Recent responses range from shooting them out of the water as they approach, to welcoming them in with no questions asked.

I prefer a middle position. It is reasonable that they should be detained initially for identity, health and security checks. After that, they should be released into the community on condition that will ensure that they remain available for processing and (if necessary) removal. They should be brought to the mainland. As recent experience in Leonora shows, there are plenty of regional and rural towns that are willing to receive them and stand to benefit from their arrival.

This approach is decent, humane, and consistent with our obligations under the Refugees Convention.

There are suggestions that the Gillard government will return Afghan asylum seekers to Afghanistan, with promises from the Karzai government to protect them. It is clear that the Karzai government cannot control the Taliban, and neither can America. Sending Hazaras back to Afghanistan would be tantamount to murder.

It is easy to forget that the Fraser government received, about 25,000 Indochinese "boat people" each year, without a mur-

mur from the community. A generation on, I doubt that many Australians would doubt the wisdom and decency of that policy. The main difference is that Fraser had bipartisan support. Unfortunately, Tony Abbott is willing to play political games with the lives of desperate, terrified people who have had the courage to flee for safety.

A consistent line of attack from Abbott is that every boat arrival reflects a failure of policy. In Abbott's world view, a perfect policy would keep refugees out of Australia. But that is in conflict with the purpose of the convention, which is to share the burden of refugees among all countries, rather than leaving them as a problem for countries next door to the trouble spots.

Some people reading this will think: "Well, they should wait their turn." But what would you do?

If the roles were reversed, and you

and your family faced persecution at the hands of the Taliban, would you queue up in Kabul for a decade or so waiting for another country to offer protection?

Or would you run for your life, and do whatever it took to get to safety? I know I would run for safety. And if I got to a convention country, I would ask for protection.

Would you do any different? Can you blame others who run for their lives and ask for our help?

**Julian Burnside is a barrister and a human rights advocate.**

**Source: The Age**