Conference Report
University of Melbourne
on 11-13 April 2007

African Think Tank Inc.

AFRICAN RESETTLEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

The way forward...

EXIT

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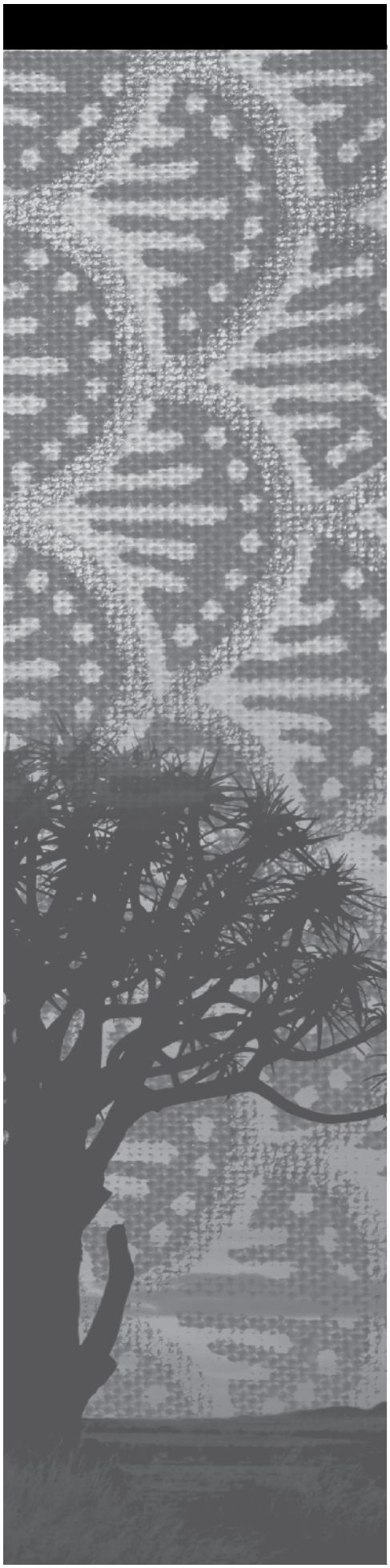

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Acknowledgements

The *African Resettlement in Australia* Conference Organising Committee gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the following sponsors and supporters:

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- Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture
- Moonee Valley Council
- City of Whitehorse
- Melton Shire Council
- Community Languages Australia

We also acknowledge the valued contributions of all the plenary and concurrent session presenters, and all the conference delegates from around Australia, from whose combined efforts this report has been drawn. Many dedicated volunteers have worked tirelessly and generously to contribute to all facets of the conference, including this report. To those volunteers, we extend our special thanks. We also acknowledge with thanks the organisational support provided by *Melbourne Conference Management* at the University of Melbourne. Also, especial thanks goes to Multicultural Arts Victoria, all the talented African cultural and artistic performers and the Muslmah Multicultural Catering group for the variety of food.

A fuller record of the conference proceedings is available on the conference website at <http://www.union.unimelb.edu.au/conferences/att/>.

Dr Berhan Ahmed
Chairperson
African Think Tank

July 2007

Centrelink

Forward

Professor David de Kretser AC, Governor of Victoria

I would like to congratulate the African Think Tank for organising such an important conference and in particular the local African communities and organisations for their involvement in and support of this conference.

There are a range of challenges facing Africans who come to Victoria and indeed other parts of Australia as migrants or refugees. I have been told that many Africans can feel disconnected, dislocated and alienated from Australian society when arriving in a new and strange country where there are huge cultural differences. It can be difficult for them to adapt to mainstream Australian values and norms. Even when they display a keen desire to learn about Australian society and culture, there are often few opportunities to do so. What they do need is support to successfully integrate into the broader Australian society.

Cultural differences can increase pressures on families and communities, and have serious implications for refugees' on-going physical and psychological wellbeing. I was interested to note in your workshop report that some of the priority health issues included a better understanding of mental health issues and the development of programs that specifically meet the needs of people who have suffered trauma and torture. Many of you would be aware of the wonderful support that is offered by Foundation House to those who are the victims of torture and trauma. If not, I would encourage you to find out more about them.

Education can also be difficult for many people as refugees are often put into classes dependent on their age and not their abilities. For many these classes are too difficult for them. There is a lack of realization that for some refugees schooling has been disrupted or was largely non-existent due to war, poverty or sickness. Many young people from refugee backgrounds do not have family members or friends who can support or help them with their homework or educational decisions. This is an area where substantial effort is required as education is a key to employment and future opportunities. Failure to deal with this critical issue will create a disadvantaged group in our society.

It is unfortunate that many African refugees have difficulties obtaining employment when they first get here. This can be due to lack of education, lack of recognition of academic qualifications by the Australian Government as well as language barriers. This in turn can lead to financial pressures for individuals. Although employment opportunities are sometimes limited, there is often a social expectation to assist those left behind. One of the ways in which employment opportunities may be improved for African refugees is if the time taken to assess and recognize overseas qualifications can be reduced.

We must try and remember that the story of migrants and refugees is not always a sad one. It is essential for all of us to keep in mind the enormous contribution that migrants and refugees have made to the Victorian community in areas such as business, politics, education, research, sports, the arts and of course cuisine. Victoria has been enriched by the significant cultural contribution that refugees and migrants have made and continue to make to our society.

It is important to remember that substantial immigration from Africa is relatively new and as with anything new, it always takes some time for its acceptance and for people to feel at ease with the new immigrants. As a person who has experienced being a migrant, although an English-speaking one, I feel that there always needs to be a balance between living in a comfort zone and interacting with your own community and reaching out and integrating with the society in which you hope to make your future home. So it is important to seek opportunities to reach out to the society in which you live and to enhance your integration while not losing your cultural inheritance.

I would encourage the African Think Tank to present the outcomes from your conference to the Commonwealth, State and Local Governments. I would also like to ask those of you who are here from a range of Government and non-government areas to support the African Think Tank in their endeavours to implement the conference outcomes. I am sure this conference will go a long way to achieving your vision of a self-reliant, sustainable and flourishing African community in Australia.

Professor David de Kretser, AC
Governor of Victoria

Introduction

Dr Berhan Ahmed, Chairperson, *African Think Tank*

Since arriving in Australia, Africans have taken to heart the people, values, freedom and way of life that make Australia such a wonderful country. We very much appreciate the welcome extended to us in our hour of need by the traditional Aboriginal owners and all the people of Australia, the Australian Government and the State and Local Governments. We will honour the welcome, kindness and generosity we have received with heartfelt commitment to our new homeland, Australia.

African-Australian communities are encouraged by the strength of interest and participation in the inaugural *African Resettlement Conference 2007*. This exceeded all expectations, and the conference was over-subscribed in a tangible manifestation of support and goodwill from every section of our Australian community. We thank you, one and all, for your valued contribution and support.

The conference was a resounding success in testimony to the volunteer spirit across a vast span of Australian society. Many women and men from all walks of life contributed according to their capacity, yielding from their extraordinary commitment, energy and enthusiasm an experience and quality of outcome that was unique and priceless. Within the framework of the generous corporate sponsorship of many organizations and providers, this was a conference hallmarked by sincerity of purpose, and faith in the ideals of a better future for all in our Australian society. From it, we have taken strides, walking together at the same speed.

The Conference was premised on a conviction that people from all corners of Africa, the most genetically diverse continent on earth, bring significant assets and are capable of making a very positive contribution to Australia, given the chance.

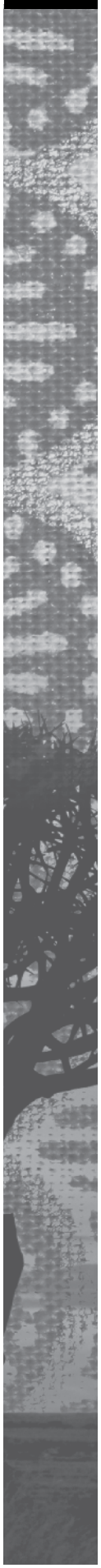
Notwithstanding the almost infinite diversity of African cultures and languages, a common set of values includes a reverence for education and a strong work ethic, together with commitment to place, family, community and religious beliefs; the essential building blocks of dignified, dynamic, harmonious and caring societies.

Past and present leaders have featured numerous people of African descent: from Nelson Mandela to US Presidential Candidate Barack Obama; from Oprah Winfrey to Kenyan Professor Wangari Maathai, who won the Nobel Prize in 2004 for a lifetime's devotion to environmentalism, including co-ordinating the planting of over 30 million trees.

Closer to home, in suburbs such as Footscray, African bakeries, retailers, internet cafes, restaurants and other small businesses are flourishing. African doctors, nurses and lawyers are already in practice here, and an African presence is increasingly marked in academia. Across Australia, Africans have demonstrated a willingness to work in any field, including those which are notoriously difficult to staff, such as taxi driving, abattoirs and cleaning. Characteristically highly motivated and hard working, African refugees have shown a solid work ethic and willingness to have a go.

The humanitarian tragedy which brought African refugees to the shores of Australia is the legacy of powerful forces. Words cannot describe the pain refugees feel with the loss of place, family, community and country; the trauma and tragedy when people lose not only their home, part or all of their family, sometimes their entire town, and therefore their local history, and even their country, leaving them stateless. It is why we cherish Australian Citizenship. Every refugee's journey is unique; all have travelled a tough path which many did not survive. We honour and hold dear the memory of those fallen.

This backdrop is an integral, indivisible part of the fabric of African migration, and is not always well understood in the wider community. Unfortunately, due to the media focus on sensationalism, Africa is inaccurately portrayed as a monotonic continent of unrelenting grief, famine and suffering. That eclipses the soul and spirit of our beloved Africa, the vivid, rich, dynamic energy of an ancient land steeped in evolved, inclusive, deeply humanistic social traditions where every person has a place as a valued brother or sister; a human landscape where interconnectedness, music and eternal qualities such as dignity, love, humour and



kindness have enabled human beings to endure unspeakable cruelty and stark material deprivation. We encourage our Australian friends to look for the beauty of the real Africa, to learn of it first hand from the Africans settling here.

Throughout even the bleakest times, African refugees have sustained motivation, hope and dreams of a better future. To find peace and the opportunity for education and work to support their families are the most cherished dreams of all.

Desire for education is an extremely strong African value, so it is of concern if African immigrants are not progressing, or are feeling discouraged or excluded from educational opportunity. This is a litmus test indicator of something seriously out of kilter.

The impetus for the conference derived from feedback over time from members of African communities, particularly relative to education and employment, but more generally across the domains of health, women's issues, family issues, housing, youth, and media misrepresentation of African migrants to Australia.

Leaders of African communities, who are all volunteers, have been fielding a stream of concerns. These have included feedback from worried jobseekers, especially breadwinners, who were keen to work, but felt frustrated by a perception that *Job Network* agencies were only interested in helping the long-term unemployed.

Other recurrent issues concerned child and adult education. A pattern emerged of children in schools having serious but unnecessary problems, particularly from placement in classes according to their age without regard to their lack of curriculum readiness, resulting in children becoming discouraged and school-avoidant.

Unfortunately, the sudden upsurge in media hostility to African immigration in late 2006 has taken a heavy toll on all African refugees, especially the children. A corresponding sharp increase in racism and teasing sparked by the media campaign has left many African children ashamed of their skin colour, parents and heritage, and with shattered self-esteem. This has impacted deleteriously on family well-being and feelings of security.

Adults in education reported ongoing concerns. These included receiving certificates despite learning little or nothing from attending English classes for 510+ hours. The lack of learning progress was attributed to factors such as the lack of a coherent curriculum and text book; unsuitable teaching methodologies; and placement of students in classes already underway. The communities voiced concern that teachers in Africa could induce so much learning with so few resources but, in Australia, with so many resources, commensurate learning was not being produced.

The leaders of African communities have worked hard trying to solve the problems brought to them, using their own recreational and family time, and other resources. This vast voluntary contribution has enabled funded providers to conserve considerable resources of time, money and personnel. Simultaneously, funding has continued to flow to those service providers which have seemed unaware or incapable of addressing the problems flowing from their domain to the African communities.

African refugees appreciate the financial commitment made by the Australian government and, thus, the Australian people. However, we saw clearly that these resources could only create optimum settlement outcomes of mutual benefit, realising the full potential of the African refugees, if a consultative moratorium were called to enable honest and open two-way communication to reconfigure a better way forward.

It is understood and appreciated that many providers have tried their best. However, and equally, it was considered that, if the same strategic directions continued to be pursued without consultation, fine-tuning and correction, outcomes would continue to fall well short of the optimum, such that, over time, there would be unnecessarily diminished outcomes for the African communities, and the Australian society as a whole.

The African communities need a direct voice to Government at Federal, State and Local level, to the mainstream society, and to service providers. This is imperative if fairness is to prevail and resources are to be well-used. As equal partners, walking together, Africans need to be able to speak directly to those who, to date, have funded and/or made decisions on our behalf. The *African Think Tank* was developed to prove the capability of African communities to thoroughly research, plan, manage and carry out large-scale projects on behalf of their communities, with integrity and impeccable accountability for finances and high quality of end-product. We look forward to engaging as partners and providers of settlement services for the African communities.

We are heartened that so many Conference delegates have told us of the enhanced vision and understanding they have gained, as an inspirational springboard to a revitalized service agenda. We are proud that the African-Australian communities have proven their capability and self-reliance in articulating their vision, needs and concerns, together with methods for improving the way forward. Most of all, we are proud to be Australians and to have the opportunity to speak openly, and to be heard by those we respect. It is our privilege to honour the people, land and spirit of this nation.

Executive Summary

More than two thirds of entrants who settle in Victoria under Australia's Humanitarian Program currently come from African nations. Although Africans have been coming to Australia across several decades, the African focus of the Humanitarian Program is a relatively new phenomenon.

Members of the new and emerging African communities have had extraordinary life experiences largely unimaginable to people born into the circumstances of the modern Western countries. They have demonstrated resilience, courage and sustained levels of faith and motivation amongst other outstanding qualities, bringing immense potential assets to settlement countries such as Australia. Particularly marked amongst those valuable assets are a strong work ethic, a positive attitude to education, high levels of motivation, and a culturally strong commitment to family and community. Under conditions of extraordinary hardship and suffering, they have held tenaciously to dreams of a better future, fully honouring the value of life.

The transition to Australian society and culture cannot accurately be viewed without due regard to the cultural awareness and adaptability, flexibility and receptivity to change that Africans have demonstrated so strongly throughout their journeys as refugees. They come from a different continent in our global village; many come from countries that are, or were, members of the British Commonwealth; and many speak and/or were educated in English or European languages as a legacy of colonisation. As such, Africans have far more knowledge of, and connection to, mainstream Australian culture than simplistic or superficial factors such as differences in physical appearance and dress might suggest. Above all, the Africans have an extraordinary willingness and capacity to adapt and to learn quickly, given the chance.

The Australian Government and various State Governments have funded a range of community-based settlement service providers, entrusting them to give that crucial chance for Africans to settle seamlessly and harmoniously to the mutual benefit of the African communities and the mainstream society. For that funding to translate into optimum outcomes, is imperative that the providers deliver relevant, useful, effective, equitable and accessible human services geared to the priority needs of the African communities, as well as to the needs of the broader mainstream society.

Across the last half century, Australia has welcomed people from around the globe within an overwhelmingly successful migration program. Problems have been few and mainly transitory in nature. The receptivity, friendliness and tolerance of the Australian people have been proven over time, with barriers generally dissolving fast as newcomers participate in the community through friendships, employment, education, sport, and other community activity.

Good community relations have evolved naturally and strongly when people from different backgrounds have gotten to know each other personally. To the extent that funded providers support and facilitate networking and friendship creation across artificial barriers, settlement is greatly enhanced, and integration is assured. Conversely, the partitioning of new communities away from the mainstream can lead to an awkward entry to Australian society, with the media the main – and precarious - conduit between the new communities and the mainstream.

The media has proven inaccurate and capricious in its coverage of the African-Australian communities, vacillating between inflammatory reports that unjustly collectively punish whole African communities, and heart-warming stories of human interest. This distorts reality and creates barriers between communities. It highlights the overarching need for funded providers to ensure that African migrants interface extensively with the mainstream community in order that they become known personally and removed from dependence for contact with the mainstream society on press-mediated commentary and potential misinterpretation. Unless active engagement with the mainstream is facilitated, artificial barriers will be erected and unnecessary problems engendered, as instanced by the rise in verbal and physical assaults on African children in tandem with recent hostile media campaigns.

Mutually beneficial, good all-around community relations are readily obtainable, and require only well-considered strategies in service provision. Such outcomes require, in particular,

that the new and emerging communities have maximum opportunity to interact directly and to make connections with people in the mainstream as they learn about their new society and take steps towards engagement, participation, integration and contribution. If members of the broader community engage directly with the members of the new communities, they will more readily understand and acknowledge the commitment Africans make to Australia, and be more able to understand and value the heritage which they bring, together with their capacity to further enrich Australia's evolving multicultural landscape and national identity.

The Melbourne-based *African Think Tank* (ATT) was established by Dr Berhan Ahmed and Mr Haileluel Gebre-selassie in 2005 with the aim of arranging a national conference for community stakeholders to identify priorities to support enhanced settlement outcomes for African-Australians and for the wider society.

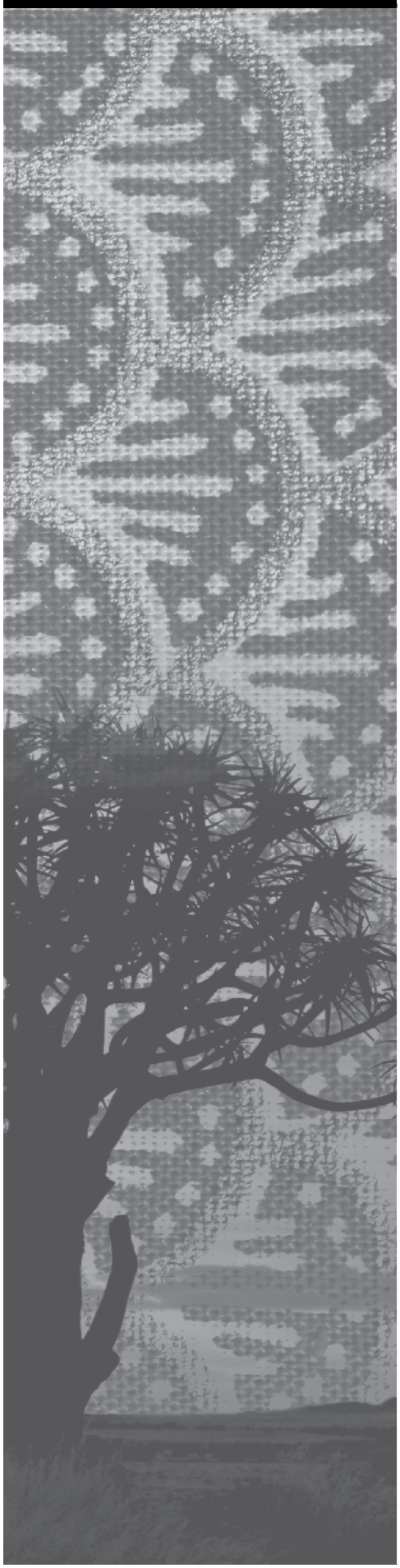
The ATT held a one day planning workshop in February 2006. The five key priority themes for the conference were identified as: community capacity building, youth, health, education and employment. It was also decided to extend the scope of the conference from being Victoria-specific to a national focus. Consequently, presenters and delegates were invited from across Australia and internationally.

The fully subscribed *African Resettlement in Australia 2007* conference was held from 11 to 13 April, 2007 at The University of Melbourne and involved over 400 delegates. In addition to addresses from African-Australian community leaders, the plenary speakers included Professor David de Kretser, AC, the Governor of Victoria; The Hon Dr Sharman Stone, MP, Federal Minister for Workplace Participation; Mr Tony Burke, Federal Opposition Spokesperson for Immigration; senior State and Commonwealth representatives; and leaders and supporters from the wider community.

Deliberation on the five key thematic areas was undertaken in concurrent workshops, yielding a wide range of recommendations, together with an agreed advocacy agenda and advancement strategies for future implementation.

Conference Key Recommendations – General

1. That the 2007 *Access and Equity Report* to the Commonwealth Parliament have a particular focus on the accessibility of programs and services (including those that are funded and contracted) and the equitability of outcomes for African-Australians.
2. That the Commonwealth Government consider identifying asylum seekers in refugee camps who are already operating as interpreters and bring them out to Australia with priority. Once here, they should be given special training and fast tracked into a NAATI recognition process.
3. That Commonwealth and State Ombudsman Offices advise African community leaders and their members, as well as agencies and individuals advocating on behalf of African-Australians, to bring forward complaints about poor access to government funded services and instances of inequitable service outcomes.
4. That community-based service providers funded by governments to deliver services to African-Australians appoint appropriately skilled individuals from those communities to their management boards and advisory groups.
5. That the government sector support initiatives to raise accurate awareness of African culture and to counter inaccurate stereotypes in order to eliminate this as a barrier to better service provision.
6. That government and all service providers constructively and sensitively support both African women and men equally, in recognition that this is imperative to shoring up families under duress and avoiding unnecessary family breakdown.
7. That government policies across all domains prioritise the support and nurturing of African individuals and families to facilitate healing after the enormous stress and trauma of the refugee experience.
8. That family support and cohesion is seen as the imperative pre-condition to minimising poverty, and preventing African youth becoming at risk of homelessness and law-breaking.
9. That education programs for the entire community are recognised as essential to building empathy, understanding and successful settlement; and are critical to minimising barriers from misfounded stereotypes and discrimination in vital areas such as employment.
10. That the 2007 FECCA Congress (Hobart, 30-31 July 2007) consider ways in which established migrant community organisations could contribute by mentoring African-Australian communities and sharing their resources.



Specific Key Recommendations

Capacity Building key recommendations

Recommendation 1

That government and service agencies deliver on their shared responsibility to actively assist African leaders to develop community structures that enhance their community self-determination.

Recommendation 2

That government and service agencies should better coordinate and resource their expectations of African community leaders and volunteers, particularly at regional and local levels. Effective resourcing of community participation requires flexible models, such as payment of sitting fees or establishing community enterprises.

Recommendation 3

That government and service agencies support African communities to coordinate a single point of advocacy for their shared needs.

Education key recommendations

Recommendation 1

That Commonwealth and State Ministries for Education urgently address barriers to education and school retention from placement of adolescent humanitarian entrants in the schools system by chronological age despite their lack of curriculum readiness across all subjects.

Recommendation 2

That Commonwealth and State Ministries for Education establish Refugee and Migrant Education Support Units - in charge of curriculum design and development, PD in-service training both mainstream teachers and bilingual teachers; and review the effectiveness of placing adolescent in the schools system by chronological age rather than educational attainment, albeit after initial placement in English language schools.

Recommendation 3

That African community leaders and members are proportionally represented on Boards and other consultative fora and in senior decision making contexts, with ongoing consultation at all levels, and are able to freely consult with African students in classes.

Employment key recommendations

Recommendation 1

African refugees need a publicity campaign and employer awareness program to promote the positive benefits of productive and workplace diversity and to raise awareness of existing safeguards. They need to generate a good news campaign to challenge stereotypes, promote best practice and foster positive opinions.

Recommendation 2

The provision of ongoing support to employers and new employees is essential for a successful transition. Mentors are a vital element and successful mentoring programs involving the business and government sectors, should be promoted and expanded. The establishment of a 'one stop shop web site' for employers/job seekers that want assistance in recruiting CALD clients, eg - on the job English classes, training or retraining, relocation assistance to rural and regional areas and other resources. This could be similar to the Job Access web site for persons with disabilities.

Recommendation 3

Governments encourage further research about qualifications available in African nations in order to facilitate recognition of qualifications gained by migrants and refugees from African-Australian communities. Building better awareness of skills recognition processes and to work with local training organisations and TAFEs to build on existing skills must be in place to assist refugees. There is also a need for improved links between ESL providers, vocational English and pre- employment programs such as the *Apprenticeship Access* program to support successful pathways to employment and sustainable outcomes.

Health key recommendations

Recommendation 1

That government and government-funded health service providers show greater flexibility in service delivery (impacting on funding agreements) recognising the time and space needed to work effectively with African communities e.g. support for networking, outreach, and community education components of culturally responsive work practice.

Recommendation 2

That government and government-funded health service providers work in respectful partnership with African communities, and recognising that African service organizations, and African bilingual / bicultural workers are central in the planning and provision of health services to African community members:

- Recognition of the work of bilingual / bicultural workers
- Support for the training of bilingual / bicultural health workers

Recommendation 3

Enhancement to language services and culturally competent service delivery, including:

- Training in interpreter access and use
- Identification and training of interpreters in new and emerging languages
- Culturally competent work practice training for health service providers, e.g. 'the refugee experience'

Youth key recommendations

Recommendation 1

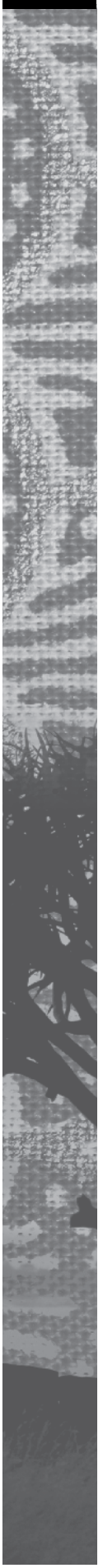
That the Federal Government prioritise the need for a national policy on strategies for refugee youth settlement developed in consultation with African youth and the African communities, and geared to substantially improve settlement planning, provision and outcomes, learning from the experiences of youth who have settled to date.

Recommendation 2

That an adequate, effective, culturally sensitive on-arrival program for all Africans, including youth, be provided for at least six months, introducing them to all facets of life in Australia, and to the law. That, wherever possible, the people running the on-arrival programs for African youth are also young people.

Recommendation 3

That an on-arrival case co-ordination model for young people be developed. It is recommended that present formats for on-arrival support be reviewed due to evidence of considerable gaps in meeting the needs of Africans, including young Africans. It is recommended that research-based analysis, based on the feedback and experiences of young Africans to date, be used to tailor improved on-arrival support for young people and their families. It is recommended that this include a dedicated youth strategy for youth orientation and comprehensive information provision.



Capacity Building Concurrent Workshop

Keynote Address: Mr Yehudi Blacher, Secretary, *Department for Victorian Communities*

Resettlement: A Challenge to Traditional Government

Resettlement services for refugee communities exemplify the type of problem that challenges the traditional way government services are funded and provided. It cuts across each of the three levels government in Australia:

- The Commonwealth Government has direct responsibility for immigration and on-arrival services – as well as important support services like Centrelink;
- State Governments fund and operate many of the services that have direct contact with refugee communities – schools, hospitals, police are obvious examples; and
- Local Government – as the level of government closest to the community – also operates important services like libraries and community health centres.

This complexity reinforces the need to ensure that different levels of government are working as closely as possible together. There is also growing recognition that government services alone, although crucial, won't be able to develop the sort of flexible holistic response that many new migrants need. That in turn suggests that, as well as new ways of coordinating our work, we also need to expand the circle of groups and organisations involved in working with refugee communities.

Principles for Reorganising the Government Services

The *Department for Victorian Communities* (DVC) uses a conceptual framework comprising six principles to guide the design and delivery of government services:

- View the world through the lens of the clients of government – whether those clients are individuals, families or communities;
- Government agencies need to be able to present a much simpler shopfront rather than a maze of multiple levels of government, multiple departments and multiple contact people.
- Government should make a philosophical shift from controlling and directing the delivery of services to playing the role of facilitator and enabler.
- Devolve service planning and delivery to the local level as decisions about how services are delivered is best done as close as possible to the service delivery level.
- Use partnerships as a way of addressing social opportunities and problems
- Harness the capacity of local leaders, such as the African community leaders on the organising this Conference.

Doing Government Differently

There are numerous examples of DVC programs that seek to apply the principles of doing government differently.

The *Refugee Brokerage Program* recognises that community leaders and volunteers are both the glue between fragmented groups of new arrivals and the bridge to the host community. By funding local partnerships of refugee groups and key services, the program is addressing skills gaps identified by local refugee leaders, such as the need for training in organisational governance, conflict resolution or fund raising.

Workforce Participation Partnerships seek to provide flexible solutions to the barriers facing disadvantaged job seekers by devolving service planning and delivery to the local level. In Dandenong, for example, the *Sudanese Development and Employment* project provides flexible prevocational training in English language and mentoring to assist Sudanese job seekers to adjust to Australian workplace culture.

These principles and examples of good practice offer new ways to help address the complex challenges facing African communities in Victoria and Australia.

Capacity Building Workshop

Across Australia, African communities are grappling with the challenges of building the skills and resilience of their communities. Amongst both the longer established arrivals from the Horn of African and more recent arrivals, such as those from Sudan and West Africa, leaders are looking for resources and assistance in running their own programs to address their communities' needs.

The Community Capacity Building sessions focused on three key areas: how communities organise themselves; how they advocate; and how they work with service agencies and government. Across these sessions a number of key themes emerged around encouraging and supporting African community action.

Better Organised African Community Structures

A key theme of the Community Capacity Building dialogue was the call from communities for government to work with them to better organise their communities.

Bobby Whitfield, Community Development Worker at Multicultural Development Assoc in Queensland and local leader of the Liberian community, called for innovative support to community leaders in "developing community structures that enhance their community's self-determination in relation to settlement need."

In addition, communities sought greater understanding by service agencies and government of common cultural priorities amongst Africans around collectivism and their connection to place. African communities are seeking support for these cultural norms through:

- Improving their skills and confidence to better organise themselves in line with the rules and expectations of Australian regulations; and
- Specific investment in creating accessible local community spaces either through new spaces or more innovative ways to share existing facilities.

Partnerships that Work for African Communities

It was apparent that African communities, service and government agencies share the view that only by working collaboratively will they be able to address the complex needs of newly arrived families.

This view was also supported by a number of keynote addresses to the Conference. For example, Yehudi Blacher, Secretary, Department for Victorian Communities, noted that:

> "There is growing recognition that government services alone, although crucial, won't be able to develop the sort of flexible holistic response that many new migrants need… reflecting the importance of harnessing the capacity of local leaders."

However, in the experience of African communities, although there is shared willingness to work in partnership, the structures and resources necessary for sustainable partnership are often lacking.

To develop sustainable partnerships service agencies and government will need to better recognise the significant expectations placed on community volunteers and workers by:

- Adequately resourcing community participation;
- Investing time and resources in building trusting relationships;
- Strategically coordinating refugee programs across the three levels of government to reduce duplication and maximise community participation.

Various speakers stressed the importance of working flexibly to resource community participation in service planning and decision making, such as through sitting fees or community enterprise models.

New Networks to Underpin Stronger African Communities

The third key Community Capacity Building theme reflected a theme evident in the broader Conference discussions: African communities are as aware of their shared needs as their unique identities.

African communities reflected on the knowledge and experience that existed amongst both longer settled African groups and the Australian community more broadly, including established migrant communities.

African participants discussed the benefits for their communities of expanding their relationships, whether through friendships, mentoring or peak bodies. In particular, participants were keen to learn from established migrant groups, highlighting the importance of effective advocacy and media strategies, such as those presented by Dr Dvir Abramovich from the Jewish Community Council of Victoria.

The issue of how to progress the various community strengthening strategies raised at the Conference was of particular concern to African participants in the Community Capacity Building sessions.

Participants suggested that the evidence of a shared vision amongst African communities at the Conference demonstrated the need for a central, strategic, community owned point of advocacy – a loud speaker for a unified African voice in Australia.

Such a peak body could facilitate ongoing communication between Australia's diverse African communities; pursue key community leadership goals, such as fostering potential leaders' particularly young people, and building networks with decision makers across Australia's political, business and philanthropic sectors.

Capacity Building Workshops: Session 1

The first Capacity Building session was entitled *Organising Communities* and involved presentations from Mrs Rachel Smith, Consumer Affairs Victoria on the formalities of incorporation; Dr Dvir Abramovich on organisational and advocacy strategies for communities; and Dr Berhan Ahmed and Mr Bedllu Despa on inter-generational leadership succession. The facilitator was Ms Maria Dimopoulos.

While all speakers provided a wealth of structural and governance guidelines that needed to be adopted by community groups to grow them into sustainable and successful organisations, frank comments from participants conveyed a sense that communities are often overwhelmed by the expectations of a complex economy and the mismatch of these expectations with the capacity of their communities.

Several participants asked why Australian institutions could not be made more flexible and inclusive, rather than expecting African entrants to struggle with often unfamiliar Western structures. In response, presenters urged communities to be more tenacious and offered their mentoring assistance.

During the plenary session that followed, African participants concluded that while their community groups needed to take up the challenge of meeting legal and organisational expectations in Australia, they required bureaucracies to step out from behind their desks and actively engage community leaders to build their capacity.

Capacity Building Workshops: Session 2

The second session was entitled *Strengthening Communities,* and included three examples of partnerships in service provision and advocacy. Bobby Whitfield presented on Queensland's Multicultural Development Association, Cathy Guinness of Jesuit Social Services on a partnership between her agency and three African communities; and Haileluel Gebre-Selassie from the Department for Victorian Communities presented on the Victorian Government's Refugee Brokerage Program. The facilitator was Mr Nick Chiam.

While it was clear that a "one-size fits all" partnership model does not exist, the success of the models discussed appeared to share a number of commonalities: a strong and forward-looking commitment from both the funding body and participating communities; shared planning and decision-making; and a clearly articulated communications and engagement strategy. Finding and joining up all the required resources – human, physical and economic – takes time and tenacity.

A strong measure of success of such partnerships was their ability not just to unify community members around mutual support and better relationships with service providers, but also to bring together different clans, language groups, religions and nations to benefit from a shared understanding and voice. Starting small and expanding at the pace set by communities was key.

Capacity Building Workshops: Session 3

The third session, entitled *Connecting Communities* was a combination of presentations and panel questions. Dr Moses Adepoju, African Information Network and Executive member of ECCV facilitated four presentations by Mr Adam Awad on New Zealand's Change makers Refugee Forum; Mr Ismail Ibrahim on New Zealand's *Strengthening Refugee*

Voices" and Anna Hall together with James Chol on SCAAB's *Leadership Dialogues*.

Community empowerment was recognised as a strong theme in all three presentations, in that well connected communities are in a better position to take up issues directly with those in positions of power and to influence services that would affect them.

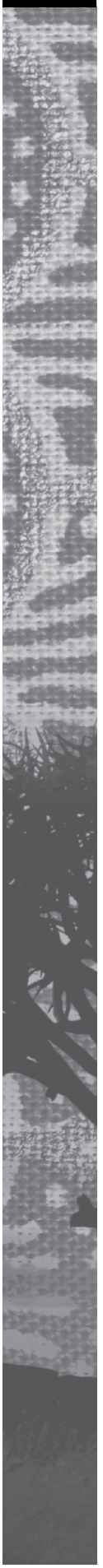
After the presentations, Mr Malcolm Thomas of the Islamic Council of Australia chaired a panel discussion featuring Mr John Williams, DIAC State Director; Mr Damien Ferrie, DVC' s Community Support Fund; Ms Catherine Rosenbrock from FACSIA; Mr Jorge Torrico of Hobsons Bay City Council; and Ms Kirsty Allen of the Myer Foundation and the Sidney Myer Fund.

The different dynamics of government and philanthropic funding elicited a variety of comments and questions, including the significant barrier for African communities, particularly newly arrived groups, created by complex applications and the opportunities and limitations of using an auspicing body, particularly the tension for communities between obtaining organisational support and losing power over their initiatives.

The theme of Australian institutions such as the legal system accommodating African family values and traditions was raised. FACSIA's *Stronger Families & Communities Strategy* was cited as one program helping communities by giving increasing preference to funding larger organisations with the capacity to partner with and mentor some emerging groups, and so to harness existing skills and pass them on to newer communities.

Capacity Building Recommendations

1. That government and service agencies work with African leaders (i) to assist them to develop community structures and programs to enhance the African communities' self-determination and self-reliance, and (ii) to assist with community access to appropriate facilities for these purposes.
2. That government and service agencies recognise the commitment of time and expense contributed from their own resources by African community leaders and volunteers, particularly at regional and local levels. That there is recognition effective resourcing of community participation requires flexibility, such as payment of sitting fees and expenses, or establishing community enterprises.
3. That government, service agencies and communities be willing to work in partnership based on an agreement to empower the weakest partners. There are numerous examples of good practice that should be used to inform these partnerships.
4. That government, service agencies and communities recognise the value of building African communities' networks and resourcing good practice strategies, such as mentoring of newly arrived groups by established migrant groups.
5. That government recognise that community facilities and meeting places are central to African communities' capacity to disseminate and discuss settlement information, prevent marginalisation, and to maintain their cultural and linguistic identity. Strategies could include investing in new facilities or more creative ways of sharing existing spaces.
6. That African communities be supported to develop the leadership potential of their diverse members, including women and young people.
7. That government and service agencies support African communities to coordinate a single point of advocacy for their shared needs.



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Education Concurrent Workshop

Keynote Address: Mr Stephan Romaniw OAM, Executive Director, *Community Languages Australia*

Community Languages Australia is outcome based and strives to find solutions rather than revisit and reinforce the problems and barriers that are articulated in many well documented reports.

Community languages schools provide a strong vehicle in helping to integrate communities, provide opportunities for students, parents, community members, mainstream agencies and others to work together in the maintaining a student's linguistic and cultural awareness and knowledge. The underpinning of this is not only for the purpose of heritage maintenance, but with sense of purpose in contributing the broader community in education, sport, and art, economic and social capital. This is putting our imprint firmly in stone for generations to come, for broader society to witness and value.

Community languages schools:

- are non- profit making and open to all students irrespective of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds;
- develop and promote the languages and cultures of Australian communities and promote cohesion within the diversity of Australia's multicultural society;
- provide authentic cultural contexts for language learning;
- promote the learning of a wide range of languages and an understanding of different cultures within Australian society;
- are funded by communities with additional funding support from the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments; and
- are accredited and registered, in accordance with state and territory funding guidelines

Community Languages Australia is more than willing to assist communities to make an imprint through –

- promoting activities for the development of community languages schools
- coordinating activities and foster cooperation between community languages schools authorities in their State/Territory
- providing opportunities for interaction between the school, teachers and the jurisdiction
- representing members and forge closer working relationship on behalf of members with Government and other key stakeholders

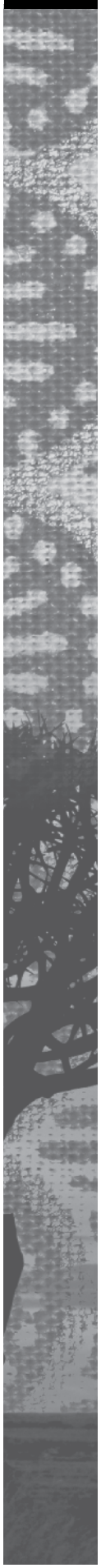
To leave an imprint community leaders and community languages school authorities are invited to put their hands up and participate in –

- National Coordination and Quality Assurance process
- Professional Development
- Credit Bearing Training Courses
- Mentoring programs in Curriculum Development
- Mentoring in programs Materials Development
- Mentoring program to assist in establishing and administering Schools
- Networking with many others with similar goals.

An Organisation and Procedures Manual is readily available as are models that can assist the process. Many strategic partnerships – AFL, Cricket Australia, an others are available.

The Challenge that lies before us is – Do we want to travel the path, *do the hard yards* to make an imprint not only in the sand that can be washed away, but in stone which reflects our commitment and beliefs?

Community Languages Australia commits to travelling the journey and calls on representatives of the African Communities to join in these travels and entrench the imprint – Not alone, but with over 110 000 students, 2000 instructors and teachers from over 70 language groups.



Education, Training and Pathways

Introduction

Africa is accurately described as the world's most genetically diverse continent, overlain with an almost infinite diversity of cultures and languages. Notwithstanding this great diversity, a valid profile of African values would rate a cherished and reverential desire for education as universal and cross-culturally long-standing across the continent.

Australian Gemma Sisia achieved international acclaim for establishing the School of St Judes for Tanzania's most impoverished children in 2002 with a few children and virtually no money or resources, but with boundless energy and commitment to "Fighting Poverty through Education." That school now with 850 children who receive a quality education, uniforms and food, stands in testament to the outstanding, life-transforming achievements that can be made to capitalise on the positive desire to learn held by the world's most disadvantaged people. It is a timely reminder that education is the best and most effective social security system yet devised, being uniquely able to transform poverty and disadvantage in one generation to exponentially expanding benefits for the individual, his/her family and their society.

The Education workshop sessions focused on three key areas:

Barriers to Education

This workshop explored the cultural, economic, language, physical, psychological and social barriers impacting on students and parents. Often students have to deal with cumulative pressure from parents, teachers and peers, the pressure of the home environment, indigenous cultures, a foreign education system and Australian expectations.

Vocational Educational Pathways

This session covered the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), which provides a pathway into vocational and higher education for young people. Sponsored by AMES, there was a focus on the AMES Refugee Youth VCAL program, its record in providing a transition experience in partnership with schools and language centres and examples of barriers that had to be overcome.

Families and Schools

A panel discussion and several presenters examined parental participation and engagement with their children's' schooling; reasons why young refugee students leave mainstream education; and the promotion of positive pathways of development and transition through schools for African young people

The Different Concepts of Education of Different Stakeholders

A barrier to optimum education outcomes arises when different, even discordant, concepts of education are held simultaneously by government funders, service providers, teachers, adult students, child students and their parents, guardians and families.

Invisible barriers can be unnecessarily erected if service providers do not understand or share the concept of education held by the students they are funded to teach. For example, the student wanting to learn grammar as a foundation for future study is likely to be disappointed in a classroom where a 'modern' osmosis style of language learning is favoured over traditional teacher-based exposition of rules.

The student facing this style of barrier is being expected to be able to manage all of his/her settlement related worries and concerns, including the refugee experience, and to still have sufficient reserves to intuit whatever educational philosophy and methodology are at hand in the classroom while managing his/her own disappointment and/or confusion, and devising strategies for resolving the situation. Self-evidently, too much is being asked of that student, far more than would be asked of a locally born student with a strong, established support system.

Powerful, invisible barriers of this type can only be minimised by transparency and communication, particularly via consultation with African communities and students to ensure programs are needs-based and appropriate to Africans' learning styles, needs and expectations. Independent feedback mechanisms are required to provide refugee students with a voice to the funders and the community.

The worst conditions occur when providers are funded irrespective of the incompatibility of their educational vision and methodology with the needs of the refugee students, with providers expecting that their explaining 'the way we teach here' will bridge expectations and learning style factors. This matter is complex and requires informed, research-validated awareness and approaches to ensure funded providers are not unwittingly erecting barriers to learning.

It bolsters the case for employing teachers from African communities who understand Africans' learning styles and the education values of African refugees. African educators with proven track records have strong, untapped capabilities as teachers, teacher-trainers and consultants. They can bridge the very gaps that, if not effectively dealt with, are likely to remain those through which many learners will continue to fall.

Inaccurate Understanding of African Cultures

Teachers may lump all Africans together when there is actually great cultural, linguistic and religious diversity in the communities.

Teachers are not accurately informed on African students' cultural backgrounds, and may base their understanding on unfounded, inaccurate stereotypes from the media and popular culture. The media from which educators may learn about Africa tends to selectively sensationalise and distort images about Africa to the sensational and negative, especially focusing on suffering. This eclipses positive, balanced news.

For example, Botswana has the highest per capita capital reserves in the world, and many blue chip Australian companies, such as Western Mining, Rio Tinto and several banks, operate in Africa. However this rarely finds mention in Australian public commentary.

Also, African migrants to Australia have higher rates of tertiary post-graduate qualifications than English speaking migrants (DFAT). This is poorly recognised, and Africans are depicted as typically illiterate, including in the media (eg Refugees in English Difficulties, The Age, 17/4/07).

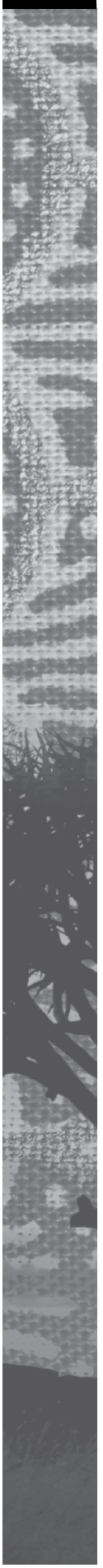
There is urgent need for fact-based training courses for teachers so myths and stereotypic misconceptions are dispelled, with input by members of African communities to ensure authenticity and accuracy of the training material.

Education Workshop Recommendations

1. That schools support greater family-school engagement by using culturally sensitive strategies to engage parents and carers.
2. That the education system strive to be flexible and responsive to students' needs, including modern life skills in all programs, and considering the culture of origin and learning style and the complexities of African cultural diversity when placing African students in schools.
3. That ethno-linguistic teachers/support staff are employed, especially those already qualified as teachers, and that training is given to bilingual tutors to teach with limited authority.
4. That English language education for young adults is extended to two or more years in English Language schools, focusing on English for careers, life skills and educational pathways.
5. That current research be analysed and appropriate findings acted upon across the three tiers of government to enhance educational effectiveness.
6. That the role of local government in the delivery of multicultural education and services be expanded, especially through public libraries.

Adult English Education

1. That Government maintains a continuously updated, central website listing all English programs state-wide, so people can more easily find suitable programs; and to avoid unnecessary replication via different funding bodies; or under-participation due to people not knowing what programs are on offer. That this also provide updated information on traineeships and apprenticeships accessible to African refugee youth and adults. (Refer also Youth Recommendations.)
2. That the 510 hours' AMEP provision be increased, with up-graded accountability, administration, flexibility, accessibility, academic validity, and learner-centred educational focus.
3. That all AMEP providers demonstrate educational excellence through an academically valid culture which prioritises, and is accountable for, maximising teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes for all students, including pre-literate people, with a high standard of qualified academic and educational leadership at all levels.
4. That ESL provision ethno-specifically designed for Africans is delivered by teachers by flexible methods, including through a "family learning together" model.
5. That skilled people in the African community help devise an English language curriculum for adult education learning that suits their community's needs. That the African system for teaching English be considered in adult education curricula for adult refugees who are accustomed to this model, and who learnt successfully with it.
6. That all AMEP providers streamline bureaucracy to a minimum, efficient, cost-effective level, ensuring it supports and does not impede maximised teaching and learning outcomes; with full accountability, transparency and public disclosure of funding expended on administration relative to service delivery and demonstrable, durable learning outcomes. That the upgraded 510 student-contact hours be used strictly for teacher-based learning activities in classrooms or on excursions.
7. That AMEP providers structure a common 'Orientation to Melbourne and Australian Society' excursion-based entry component for all new classes. That this mixes theoretical classroom-based learning (eg 20-30%) with practical learning-by-doing (70-80%) involving going to hospitals,



shopping, government offices and services, various workplaces, schools, TAFE's, VCAT, courts, markets, sports stadiums, police stations, low and no cost sources of entertainment, using all forms of public transport to become fully familiar with Melbourne, efficiently gaining confidence, cultural orientation and skills at the same time.

8. That all AMEP providers have an academically valid, up-to-date, relevant curriculum which involves stepwise incremental learning, and ongoing consolidation and revision, and which compulsorily follows the format of a high quality curriculum text book in all classes.
9. That it is recognised many African families need guidance in budgeting, particularly for women and female-headed households as many may never have handled cash or credit before. That on-arrival courses include money management and debt traps, recognising money can be a source of family conflict leading to family breakdown.
10. That AMEP providers have a strong, accessible academic preparation stream to accommodate all suitable students aspiring to high school, TAFE and university, with specialised focus on academic English, study tools and training for success in Australian academic contexts, including essay writing, grammar etc. That this stream not be limited, but open to as many participants as are suitable. That it improves on the Debney Park model.
11. That all AMEP providers supply all students with a copy of the curriculum text book and a quality grammar book free of charge, recognising that students cannot learn without quality materials and that on-arrival refugees do not have money to buy books. That this is a top priority, and costs of bulk book purchases are to be factored into funding and/or drawn from expenditure on non-essential items such as catering.

Employment
Concurrent Workshop

Keynote Address: Dr Sharman Stone MP, *Minister for Workforce Participation*

The key focus for the Government is employment for people who are welfare dependent. One of the key issues to overcome is the difficulty for those finding their first job. My focus, as the *Minister for Workforce Participation* is on the crucial role of connecting people to the labour market and getting them into jobs.

The focus should be for new arrivals to settle in quickly and smoothly so that they have the best opportunity to enjoy the great things Australia has to offer. You don't have the opportunity to enjoy these great things if don't have a job.

Personally I am very aware of the issues that migrants and refugees face in a new country. Two of my three children have married migrants so I have had firsthand experience with the challenges for new arrivals of fitting into a new culture and new society.

We are a rich nation and recognise our responsibility to take in refugees across the globe. During the period July to December 2006 we welcomed about 6,500 humanitarian refugees. However, as we know, many have difficulties gaining employment. There are issues of knowing where the vacancies are and understanding the work culture.

Many refugees also have language and literacy issues. This raises the question of how to effectively teach English. We need to look to encourage refugees to engage with Job Network or Disability Employment services shortly after their arrival. In my Electorate of Murray, I am aware some migrants are still learning English 5-6 years after arrival but not actively job searching at the same time. There are currently no timeframes or limits of effectiveness or efficiency.

There is no better time to find a job in Australia. We have shortages in trades and in the tertiary qualified highly skilled end of the market. We have a huge shortage in the health sector and also in engineering, particularly mining. But we also have a significant shortage in entry level positions particularly in the retail, manufacturing, hospitality, tourism and agriculture sectors.

There are of course issues to be overcome. There are issues of prejudice and discrimination. There are also dangers of new arrivals getting caught up in the cycle of intergenerational unemployment and welfare dependence.

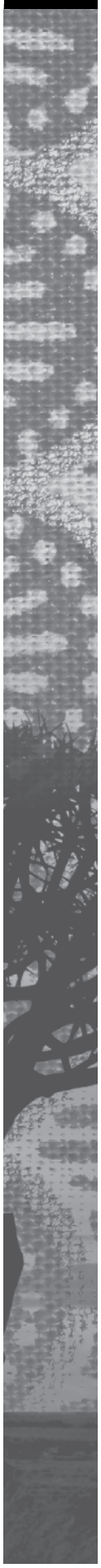
I am particularly concerned about the duration of unemployment for humanitarian refugees with a significant number remaining on welfare payments for over two years.

The Government's program is designed to provide the required support to humanitarian and refugee arrivals, to help them obtain the language and up skilling required to enter work.

In Shepparton, here in Victoria, an initiative that I was closely involved with, focused over a period of time, on the settling of ten Congolese families into the region. Job Network members were actively engaged together with a range of other community organisations and the local council to assist with their settlement into their new community.

There are a range of good news stories. I was in Perth yesterday and visited the Silver Trowel - a training provider in the building and construction industry. In attendance was a young woman, Jess, who is 19 years of age and originally from Sudan. Jess had just completed a three year apprenticeship as a brick layer and is earning very good money. Jess is in this enviable position that I am sure even her parents hadn't envisaged when they first moved to Australia.

I am also pleased to announce today, Australian Government funding for four projects under our National Action Plan for Social Cohesion, Harmony and Security. Community Employment Coordinators will be placed in the Lakemba and Macquarie Fields areas in New South Wales to run four projects to engage with the community and build better linkages between young job seekers, Providers of Australian Government Employment Services (PAGES) and employers. These projects aim to provide the right linkages with employers to generate jobs for disadvantaged young job seekers. The funding will provide the training, education and



up skilling necessary to help our younger job seekers move from welfare to work.

I have no doubt that by working together we can overcome many of the difficulties faced by newly arrived humanitarian and refugee migrants, particularly access to employment opportunities, so that they can take advantage of all that their new home has to offer.

Employment Workshop Sessions

Access to employment is an important issue for all African migrants and refugees. Gaining employment is one of the best ways for families and individuals to set up effective social networks and make resettlement as easy as possible. In addition to financial benefits, a job provides increased self-esteem and self-confidence. The employed person becomes a positive role model for his /her children and for others in the community.

Newly arrived migrants are at risk of being caught up in an unemployment cycle. Early exposure to, and accurate information on, the job market, along with supportive, early assistance from Job Network providers can be major factors in making a successful transition into the local labour market.

Transition into work is a particular concern for people arriving in Australia as humanitarian refugees as, despite wanting and needing to work, a significant number of this group remain on welfare payments for over two years. For example in 2003, 61% of refugees remained unemployed 1.5 years after arrival and 55% remained on welfare 2 years after arrival. Long term dependence on welfare can have consequences for the next generation. Teenagers growing up in welfare- dependent households are 5 times more likely to be welfare dependent themselves. It is in everyone's interests to break this cycle of unemployment and disadvantage.

Labour market conditions in Australia are very strong. Over the last 12 months, employment rose by 2.9% and the unemployment rate is 4.65%, the lowest rate for over 30 years. Between July 2006 to Jan 2007, the Job Network system placed around 50,000 people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds into jobs. Another 4,028 humanitarian refugees were placed into jobs.

The Conference explored ways we could build on this to improve employment prospects for African migrants. Migrants and humanitarian refugees face significant barriers to finding employment for a range of well-documented reasons. The discussion and abstracts presented at the Conference highlighted a number of barriers facing African migrants including:

- Limited general English, and lack of English for employment purposes
- Limited and disrupted education
- Lack of accurate knowledge of and information on the local community, job search resources, and the Australian labour market
- Absence of family or community networks to access the large, word-of-mouth job market
- Cross-cultural communication issues
- Lack of recognition of qualifications and experience
- Discrimination by employers
- Lack of adequate, proactive support by agencies, particularly for those who are not long-term unemployed, despite their strong wish to work

There are a number of key stakeholders involved in assisting migrants and refugees to access employment. They include the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEST), which provides language and literacy classes; the Department of Victorian Communities, which operates the Workforce Participation program; Centrelink; and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). DEWR provides a number of employment programs to assist job seekers, including the Job Network, Personnel Support Program and the Disability Employment Program.

The Conference and workshops concentrated on three key employment themes:

- **Pathways to Employment:** This workshop examined the barriers facing African-Australians and examined successful examples that could be used as best practice.
- **Skills of the Future:** This workshop examined training and employment opportunities in the current and future labour market; and
- **Community Driven Employment**. This workshop explored successful community examples that could be used as models of best practice.

The following summarises the discussion and outcomes of the workshops:

Pathways to Employment Workshop

In examining barriers facing African migrants coming to Australia, and seeking models of best practice, presentations were made by:

- Haileluel Gebre-Selassie on behalf of the Refugee Brokerage Program in Victoria
- Padma Raman from the Equal Opportunity Commission
- Juliana Nkrumah of Centrelink about its role in African resettlement
- Susan Chou-Allender from AMES about the role of Community Guides in AMES settlement services

The following key issues were identified:

- Lack of recognition of qualifications has lead to educated refugees working in low-paid, unskilled positions. Their skills are being under-utilised in a labour market currently experiencing skill shortages.
- This is exacerbated by refugees' lack of community contacts to access the hidden, word-of-mouth job market, where most white-collar jobs are filled. A critical part of gaining employment is therefore making wide networks with the mainstream community, and the use of mentors working in the refugees' professional fields (eg the extremely successful EMC Given the Chance program).
- The negative consequences on the second generation if the first generation does not obtain employment. This means a lack of positive role models and could lead to inter-generational unemployment unless there is significant positive intervention.
- The lack of accurate information provided to the African communities about services and rights available to them.
- The need for improved processes to support recognition of qualifications and skills obtained in African countries.
- Discrimination by employers
- Lack of understanding of African cultures, values and customs.

Employment Skills of the Future Workshop

Key speakers included Andrew Rimington, Ivan Neville, Liz Sinclair and Marie Raftis.

Discussion centred around the challenges facing an ageing population, the difficulties in attracting new entrants into traditional trades, and the broadly based labour and skills shortages.

The following key issues were identified:

- Australia has a strong labour market, particularly in the service industry where 2/3 of the new growth eg health, community services, retail, property and business.
- There are key skills in demand across the whole labour market: professional, trades, unskilled and IT.
- Employers should be encouraged to train African in trades, and Africans should be informed of this sector as it does not exist in Africa.
- Skill shortages are expected to continue due in part to the aging of the population.
- Regional areas have particular needs.
- The big question is how to match the needs of employers with the needs of new arrivals.
- Employment is crucial to new arrivals and breaking into the first job is the hardest.

Community Driven Employment Workshop

The key presenters were:

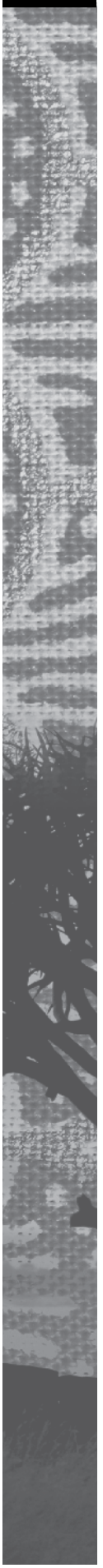
- Mr Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe, who spoke about lessons learnt from the Shepparton re-settlement project.
- Ms Maria Axarlis-Coulter and Anissa Mohammed, who spoke on Centrelink's successful recruitment of African Customer Service trainees.
- Ms Stephanie Lagos, who spoke on the topic of Helping African-Australians to gain new status and respect.
- Kay Davies, from the Brotherhood of St Laurence spoke about the "Given the Chance" program which links refugees with mentors from business, community and government. It offers work experience opportunities and job search training specific to the needs of refugees, and involves major employment pathway partnerships with businesses such as Coles-Myer, ANZ, Connell-Wagner and St Vincent's Hospital.
- and has employment entry arrangements with key employers such as large supermarket chains and a major hospital.

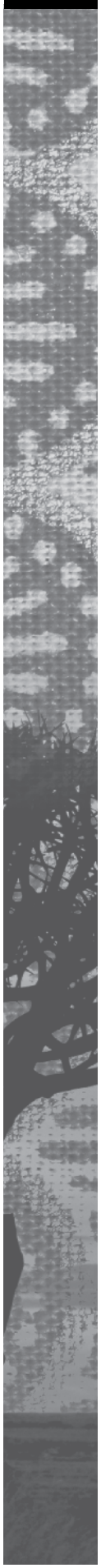
The key issues identified were:

- Community ownership and involvement is essential in order to obtain the best possible resettlement results.
- It is challenging to re-establish the previous role held in the country of origin into equivalents in Australia even if records of qualifications are available.
- Settlers need well extended and supported job search processes, with effective entry and induction orientation programs.
- Employers need to adapt recruitment practices to allow an equitable chance for migrants to gain employment.
- Refugees placed in employment need support to make a successful transition into the workplace, and for employment maintenance.

Workshop Recommendations

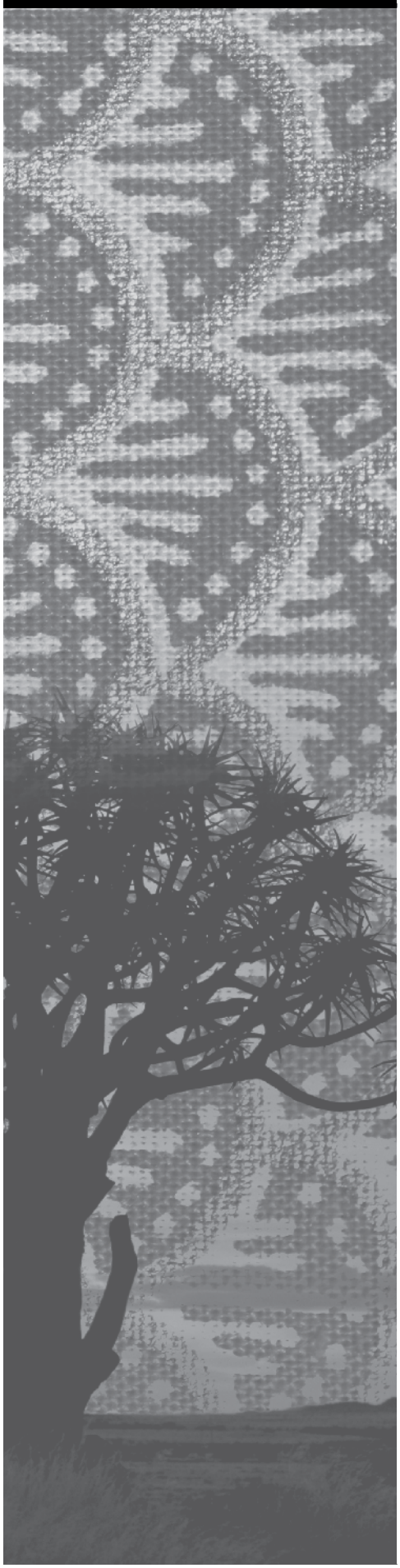
1. That English language ability is recognised as the pre-condition to refugees' employability, with more effective English teaching and learning the key measures towards reducing longer term unemployment among refugees. That providers funded to teach English include English for Employment instruction in classes and in workplaces.
2. That innovative programs such as the DEST Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL)





Program be extended, as it provides workplace-related language and literacy, and is designed to help workers meet current and future employment and training needs.

3. That all Job Network and other employment agencies working with refugees respect their strong work motivation, their great need to work, and their dependence on helpful support with structuring quality resumes and with other unfamiliar formalities essential to successful job search outcomes. That these funded providers proactively support refugees in job search activities, seeking to place refugees in suitable employment as soon as practicable, with bureaucratic delays eliminated.
4. That all Job Network and other employment agencies are trained to accurately understand African cultures and values by trained representatives of the African community, to reduce cultural misunderstandings and to eliminate misfounded stereotypes.
5. That improved information about and access to the Job Network and other critical labour market entry knowledge is provided for African refugees. That clear pathways for information are used for all Africans, especially for young people.
6. That a special employer campaign encourage Labour Hire employers to employ African migrants.
7. That all employment programs by funded-providers are flexible and proactively tailored to meet individual needs.
8. That proven, highly effective models for helping overseas qualified refugee professionals to access the hidden professional market be identified and replicated widely.
9. That apprenticeships and traineeships be flexibly administered and made available to African youth and adults. That better incentives are provided for small businesses to take on trainees and apprentices, including those of African background.
10. That all education, settlement and employment funded-providers recognise that Africans' capacity to access the large hidden market will increase with their increased contact and links with the mainstream community, enabling them to build up an expanded contact network. That all providers ensure Africans are actively engaging the mainstream in all programs.
11. That employers may bypass African applicants due to misfounded stereotypes and that this needs to be addressed through Job Network and other funded providers taking active, effective measures to counter racism and inaccurate, negative stereotypes by a variety of means including:
12. That newspaper and media coverage of African refugee issues is monitored by all funded stakeholders, with accurate reporting commended through feedback to the media source; and inaccurate or unfair coverage challenged through feedback and requests for correction, including through the Press Council. That this systematic, long term campaign is structured to reduce prejudicial reporting and misfounded stereotypes which can prejudice employers' attitudes to, and foreclose employment options, for Africans.
13. That more efficient and speedier skills recognition processes are available for qualified Africans through substantially upgraded links to African educational institutions.
14. That it is recognised refugees often have to flee without documents and processes are devised to support recognition of prior learning and/or acquisition of qualification documents via African governments.
15. That tailored bridging courses are devised by TAFEs and other local trainers in consultation with the African community to expedite entry into the labour market, especially in areas of skills shortage, by training refugees or building on their existing skills.
16. That more and better pathways for information about the local labour market are constantly sought and updated, ensuring accurate, relevant information reaches refugees on arrival. That teachers and guest speakers with employment experience in industry mentor students on the private sector workplace culture.
17. That access and equity issues form the basis of an ongoing publicity and education campaign to familiarise African refugees with their rights and responsibilities, and to ensure employers and employer bodies are supportively engaged.
18. That relocation assistance around Australia for work be better promoted. Those successful initiatives such as the Shepparton pilot are better promoted, with mindfulness of the need for local community support to be in place to make relocation successful.
19. That workplace support be incorporated to maximise African employee retention, with on-going support to employers and new employees seen as essential to successful work transition. That workplace mentors and enthusiastic volunteers are developed as a vital, underutilised resource of great potential benefit to employee and employer.
20. That safeguards are incorporated in all employment areas to ensure African employees are not treated unfavourably or exploited due to their lack of familiarity with Australian workplace rights eg some Africans have been injured at work, but did not know about Workcover.



Health Concurrent Workshop

Keynote Address: Dr Georgia Paxton, Specialist Physician, Immigrant Health Clinic, *Royal Children's Hospital*

Health literacy is defined by the World Health Organisation as the "Cognitive and social skills which determine the motivation and ability of individuals to gain access to, understand and use information in ways which promote and maintain good health"[1]. Other definitions focus on accessing, understanding and using information, although there is general consensus health literacy depends on basic reading and writing skills. Health literacy can be divided into four domains; cultural and conceptual knowledge, oral literacy, print literacy and numeracy. This separation of oral and print literacy is useful when considering health literacy in immigrant populations.

Earlier definitions of health literacy focused on print literacy (reading and writing skills) in the health care context. Until the mid-1990's research about literacy and health focused on understanding of written health education materials. The tools used to measure health literacy assessed print literacy. More recent research has examined the links between literacy and health. Literacy skills are associated with population well being and health outcomes, however assessing reading and writing skills in a newly arrived population does not capture an adequate concept of their 'health literacy'.

The immigrant health clinic at the Royal Children's Hospital has run since 2001 providing health assessment and consultation on refugee health issues. The attendance rates at clinic are equal to or higher than the attendance rates for the hospital. Families are resourceful in accessing health care and travel a long way to attend appointments. They will bring all the children for a health assessment. The health consultation relies completely on discussion and the help of an interpreter. Typically there are no written resources available. Families usually have knowledge and understanding of health conditions discussed during screening, including immunisations, tuberculosis, parasite infections, Vitamin D, bone health and nutrition. It should be recognised that these are all areas of health promotion and disease prevention. Families contribute to the knowledge of the health care providers and there are themes of learning from friends and community about health.

If the definition of health literacy is examined in the context of working with resettled communities it is apparent that motivation, ability, health knowledge, use of health information and an appreciation of health promotion are already present. The health literacy of resettled communities should not be underestimated, even though it is difficult to measure. Health care and education in resettled communities relies on dialogue and this expands and enhances the concept of health literacy. Examining health literacy provides insights into ways to optimise health care provision. These include:

- making care accessible and efficient in terms of time/cost
- supporting interpreter services to facilitate communication
- strengthening links between services
- involving the community in developing models of care
- community based education
- specific health promotion initiatives

Finding 'common ground' will enhance both service provision and health literacy within the community and facilitate individual and community health and empowerment.

1 Dr Paxton's full report and citations are held together with all conference proceedings at: http://www.union.unimelb.edu.au/conferences/att/

Health Workshop sessions

Introduction

African-Australians are not a homogenous group, but include people of diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, educational, and employment backgrounds, with a variety of pre- and post-migration experiences.

However, most recent African arrivals from the African continent are typically from a refugee background. Common refugee experiences include torture, war or civil unrest, the loss of family and friends through violence, dislocation and prolonged periods of deprivation. These experiences can have major implications for refugees' health, with ramifications for the delivery of health care services. Three Conference workshop sessions were focused on health issues for African communities in Australia:

- Mental Health
- Domestic Violence, and
- Appropriate Service Delivery

Each session included presentations from people of a range of professional and community backgrounds, all of whom share a role and interest in mental health, domestic violence and service systems issues.

There was strong representation in the workshops from African workers employed in the health sector. These workers were uniquely positioned to provide African community perspectives, and offer a range of practical solutions to improving health service responses to African-Australian community members.

Health Workshop: Mental Health

The facilitator was Dr Ida Kaplan of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture.

The presenters were:

- Sheik Issa, Werribee Mosque and Islamic Council of Victoria
- Jorge Aroche, NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors
- Amuna Abdella, Moreland Community Health Centre
- Frances Acquah, ORYGEN Youth Services
- Theresa Sengaaga Ssali, African Holistic Social Services Victoria / East and Central Africa Communities of Victoria
- Arhet Gebrat, Werribee Mercy South West Area Mental Health Service

The key issues are summarised below:

- The experiences of refugees offshore (human rights abuses, dislocation etc…) and onshore (early settlement challenges in a new culture and community) can dramatically impact on mental health.
- Traditional healing practices, including the support of spiritual leaders, herbalists and ritualists are often highly regarded by African communities in Australia.
- Currently many Africans access mental health services when in crisis (e.g. admitted to hospital for emergency care by the police). There is a lack of preventative health services, and few flexible, culturally appropriate mental health support options for African clients.
- Mental health services are generally poorly integrated for people with complex health, and high social support needs. Poor mental health and multiple on-arrival settlement needs require a holistic approach.
- Mainstream mental health services need to recognise that communication, and cultural barriers can impact on the effectiveness and relevance of commonly-used mental health assessment and diagnostic tools. This is also true of approaches to treatment.
- Bilingual workers can assist bridge cultural and linguistic barriers to Africans needing to access mainstream health services. This can include 'normalising' mental health issues and expanding people's understanding of mental health problems. Mental health services are practically non-existent in Africa.
- Cultural differences should not be a barrier to effective mental health treatment – we are all more similar than different – simple and practical changes in service delivery can make a huge difference.

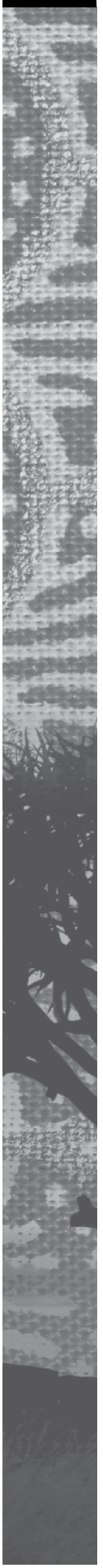
Health Workshop: Family and Domestic Violence

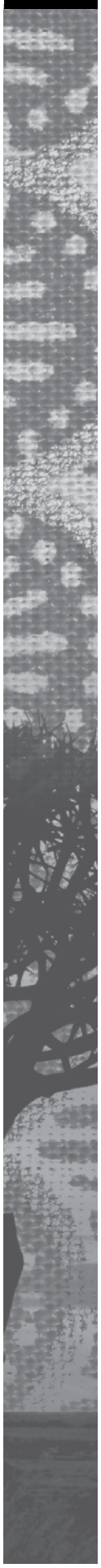
The facilitator was Maria Dimopoulos of Myriad Consultants.

The presenter was Samia Baho of the Centre for African-Australian Women's Issues.

The panellists were:

- Magistrate Anne Goldsborough, Supervising Magistrate Family Violence, Magistrates Court of Victoria
- Diana Orlando, Immigrant Women's Domestic Violence Service
- Sergeant Charles McIntyre, Victoria Police





The key issues are summarised below:

- Overseas experiences of deprivation, cruelty, loss, and human rights abuses impact substantially on a refugee family's holistic well-being.
- The male roles changes with migration to Australia as, in all cultures, men were the breadwinners and 'head of house' abroad, but with migration, children often learn the language quickly, and negotiate the outside world on behalf of the parents. This, along with unemployment and underemployment disempowers males in migrant families.
- In African culture, it is critical for a man to have a job. Without work, he is deemed to have failed. The same does not apply to women, who are free to work or be homemakers. Assisting African males to gain employment without delay will assist on all levels: family harmony, health and economic.
- In addition, differences in Australian community and social norms may be confronting eg women may not have been expected to work overseas. Also, money is a critical factor in African family breakdown, as some or all family members have not managed cash and credit before, nor been guided to understand how to do so in a modern economy.
- There are few experiences as stressful as changing countries, let alone under refugee conditions. The cumulative stress on refugee families and individuals may be very great, and this can be exacerbated by settlement challenges in Australia where, from arrival, families are put under sustained pressure to settle into new accommodation, manage meagre finances, learn English, settle children into schools, comply with Centrelink and other agencies' requirements, and gain work skills and employment as soon as possible. This cumulative stress can seriously impact on African refugees' experiences of family violence, and it needs to reduced and managed supportively wherever possible.
- In losing the extended family supports of the home country, significant pressure is born by the nuclear family on migration.
- Constructive early intervention can prevent the deterioration of a family situation, but often people do not know whom to turn to for understanding, and may be embarrassed to talk to people in their community. Sensitive, accessible services are available which could prevent deterioration.
- In Australia there are legal frameworks to protect people against family violence, which can include sexual and physical assault, threats, stalking, and controlling behaviour such as financial and social isolation.
- Behaviour begets violence not culture. Similarly family support and victim support services do not create family breakdown; violence and a loss of trust and love lead to family breakdown.
- There needs to be understanding of the extreme stress under which many African families operate by all local agencies and authorities.
- The role of the police is to establish whether a crime has been committed in a domestic violence situation; the role of the court is to determine how best the victim is protected and provided with appropriate legal and emotional/ social support (referral to legal and family support agencies), and to provide a response which deals with the actions of the perpetrator.
- Intervention orders (IO) can be applied for to protect the person suffering violence. Most victims don't want family separation but simply an end to the violence. An IO can often be tailored to suit the terms of individual family situations.
- Currently, there are no appropriate support services for men with low English proficiency. Behaviour change programs aren't available to people with low English proficiency.
- There are limited options, and real difficulties in using interpreters in domestic violence situations, where communities are relatively small, and people are known to each other.
- Community networks are vital for emotional support, but should not be overly relied upon. These networks must not 'fill the gaps' when there are poor family violence service responses.

Health Workshop: Developing Appropriate Services

The facilitator was Mmaskepe Sejoe : CAAWI and Victoria Police

Presenters:

- Wemi Oyekanmi - Centre for African Australian Women Issues
- Zeineb Mohaoud – SARRET worker Royal Women's Hospital
- Abdi Muhammed – Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health
- Halima Sheik El Din – Centre for Culture, Ethnicity and Health
- Jill Parris, Ecumenical Migration Centre
- Kate Walker - VicHealth

The key issues are summarised below:

'Space and time' needs to be available to work with newly African arrived communities: this has resource implications for government bodies funding CALD programs.

Service models need to be able to accommodate and respond to the collectivist/ family approach of African communities.

African bilingual / bicultural workers can greatly assist new arrivals connect with and navigate the service system.

Poor practice in language services (eg lack of racial or cultural sensitivity; lack of accurate cultural understanding; lack of competent interpreting etc) should be documented and reported: it is not acceptable.

Services focused on caring for women (e.g. FGM programs and antenatal care initiatives) need to be more responsive and emphasise early intervention. These programs need additional government funding to access women who comprise an often 'hard to reach' group in the community.

Services for men's needs should be equitably provided and geared to reaching African men.

Health Workshop Recommendations

1. That government support initiatives to raise awareness and accurate understanding of African cultures and values by health service providers to minimise or eliminate unnecessary stress and other problems due to misunderstandings and misleading stereotypes disseminated by the media. That, in particular, African refugees are not made to feel stigmatised, 'diseased' or otherwise unwelcome in accessing health services.
2. That health service providers are sensitive to the situation of African refugees and sensitively approach and explain all tests and health treatments.
3. That all services are provided in a gender-equal balance, with the needs of women's holistic health and men's holistic health addressed to strengthen individuals' health and family cohesion.
4. That government and government-funded health service providers adopt greater flexibility in service delivery (impacting on funding agreements) to better meet the needs of newly arrived African communities e.g. community outreach services to educate people about diet, sun-safety, eye health, malnutrition, emotional health, stress and trauma management, rubella, vitamin and minerals, folate and other factors imperative to improving health after the refugee experience.
5. That the time and space needed for culturally appropriate health services, including networking to outreach providers, be resourced in funding arrangements.
6. That government and government-funded health service providers work in partnership with African communities, recognising that African service organizations and African bilingual / bicultural workers are central to the planning and provision of culturally responsive health services to African community members:
    - Recognition of the work of bilingual / bicultural workers
    - Training of more bilingual / bicultural health workers
7. That upgrading of language services is provided to improve culturally competent service delivery including:
    - Identification and training of interpreters in new and emerging languages
    - Culturally competent work practice training for health service providers, e.g. working with survivors of the refugee experience
8. The HREOC recommends that:
    - there be an enquiry into discrimination against Non-English speakers accessing Health, DV services and preventative programs, and
    - Incident reporting/documentation when language services are withheld/unavailable in the health sector. This data should also be analysed.

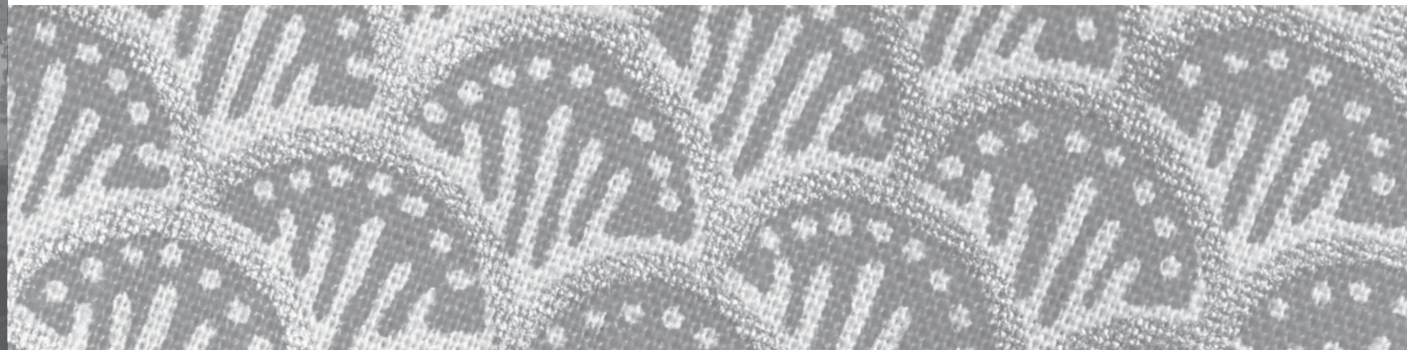
Mental Health

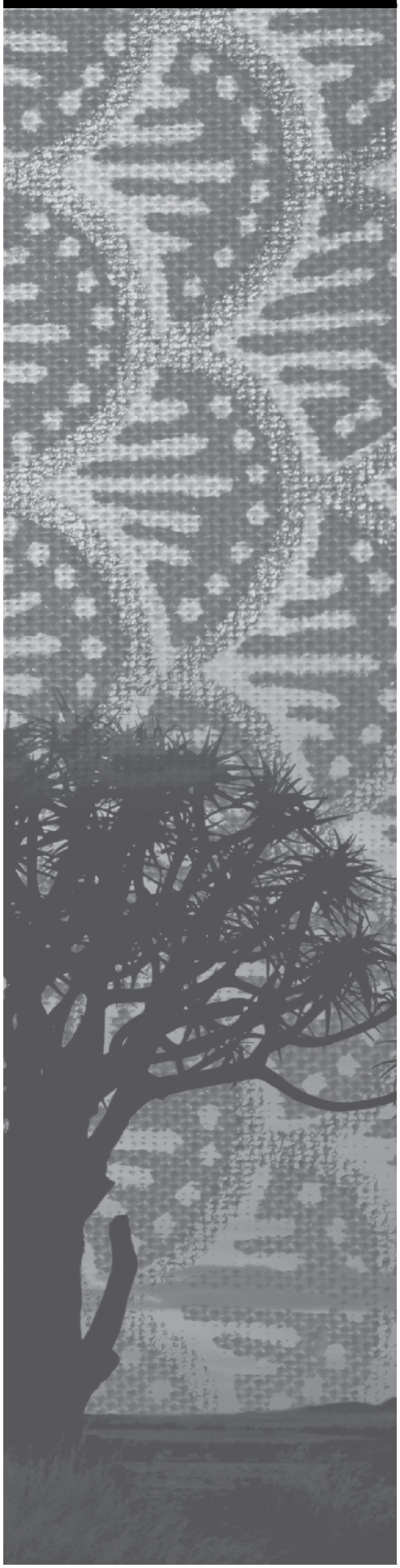
1. That because the term "mental health" is stigmatising and puts people off seeking assistance, it be disused in favour of "emotional health" or "emotional well-being" or "holistic health" or "holistic well-being" services.
2. That establishment of a centralised African Holistic Health Services unit is investigated, similar in scope and function to the Aboriginal Health Service model, offering flexible, culturally appropriate services to indigenous clients.
3. That community education and health promotion aim to de-stigmatise mental health problems, understanding the symptoms of mental health problems and information about how, and where, to seek help.
4. That all people who work with African clients, including educators and the police, are fully trained in trauma and its implications for human behaviour, and are therefore skilled in how to minimise harm to African clients under duress (eg exams, police questioning etc).
5. That trained interpreters are used cross cultural competency to assist mainstream mental health workers. That interpreter use be seen as essential, with knowledge of cultural background to assist bridge communication, and understanding 'gaps'.

6. That priority is given to health services' integrating African cultural knowledge and perspectives, including traditional healing practices, which are highly valued, and remain relevant to African communities in the Australian context.
7. That better integrated and holistic health service are made available for African clients, by mental health service providers working in respectful, equal partnerships with African community organizations and workers, recognizing the complementary skills, knowledge and resources both bring to treating African clients.
8. That opportunities are prioritised for African men and women to work in the mental health sector, particularly if they have had related employment or qualifications in an African cultural context.
9. That volunteer African elders or skilled African health workers are trained and available 24/7 to be routinely notified, to attend if appropriate, when police arrest and incarcerate people of African descent, as per the format used for Aboriginal people when arrested.

Domestic and Family Violence

1. That priority, urgent attention be focused on early intervention and preventative programs, identifying the conditions and stressors which influence domestic violence e.g. unemployment, budgeting problems, excessive pressures from local agencies, and pressures from adapting to a new culture and language, often with little or no support to the trauma residue and great loss experienced in the refugee experience.
2. That all strategies aim to help families solve problems and remain together, not break up, including the use of elders in the community, within a paradigm of "healthy relationships."
3. That improved social support be structured for women at risk of social isolation and/or family violence, with all strategies aimed to assist families to settle successfully and stay together.
4. That equitable support is given to the social, emotional and health needs of men, too, with recognition that if both men and women are well-supported, families under duress will be much more likely to stay together.
5. That the use of alcohol to blot out past bad memories be seen as indicative of the need for urgent trauma and mental health intervention strategies.
6. That behaviour change programs for men, and women, with low English proficiency which engage men and women about the causes, effects and short and long term effects of domestic violence and family breakdown on all family members.
7. That appropriately trained family counsellors are accessible and widely advertised throughout the African communities, with all family members encouraged to seek early assistance to solve problems before they grow.
8. That bilingual / bicultural workers working in the domestic violence field are provided with additional resources and flexible working hours to support families in crisis.
9. That African families are supported to better understand the law, and the role of domestic violence support services, by community information sessions regarding rights, obligations and duties. This can be particularly relevant in domestic violence situations when families are required to negotiate the Child Protection system.
10. That support is provided between the domestic incident and the court appearance eg a respite house to consider options, including culturally appropriate, bilingual support.
11. That locally-based research is undertaken to better understand the casual factors of family violence in African Australian families.
12. That information sessions for new arrivals focus on priority settlement needs, involve both genders, and do not demoralise or damage refugees' dignity through such subjects as hand-washing for Africans or misfounded assumptions about family violence.





Youth Concurrent Workshop

Keynote Address: Ashley Dickinson, Commander, Operations Coordination Department, *Victoria Police*

Underpinning Victoria Police's initiatives to more effectively engage African-Australian communities are our *Multicultural Liaison Officers* (MLOs). We now have thirteen MLOs located across metropolitan and regional Victoria, including one which has been designated primarily for the Flemington area. They are a visible presence at community functions and a first point of reference for the communities in which they are active. They are now, in partnership with our youth resource officers, established members of the multicultural service sector, providing mentoring and leadership roles, and information and referral services.

Our approach needs to continue to be mindful of issues that may not necessarily have been considered in a more traditional mode of policing.

We need to understand and be sensitive to the following facts. "African" is not a homogenous term. There are a multitude of varying ethnicities, languages, faiths, customs, and experiences that make up those who come from that part of the world. Secondly, we need to continue exploring the best mechanisms to engage with community groups from Africa. Thirdly, we need to continue to acknowledge the psychological trauma that may come from being a refugee. Fourthly, we must continue to engage with youth in the same proactive manner that we do with parents and elders.

We also need to be sensitive to the pressures that may be evident in African-Australian households. Youth are in a position where they often need to balance influences of mainstream western society with those of their more traditional parents.

The parents, some in one parent households with large numbers of children, may be experiencing all kinds of stresses. We should not forget that in their country of origin many refugees were qualified professionals, farmers, or business people. Undertaking roles of perceived lower socio economic standing may have an ongoing effect on the self esteem of parents.

We should also continue to acknowledge and be sensitive to the ongoing interwoven role of faith among Africa-Australian communities. Whether, they be Muslims, Christians, or another faith, all indicators suggest that faith has a positive role to play in the settlement experience.

Most importantly, we must acknowledge that amidst all these key differentiating experiences and issues, African-Australian communities in Victoria are no different to other communities – in that they are seeking equitable access to available social services.

This is the ongoing challenge for Victoria Police. We have developed an elaborate and responsive proactive structure – but we need to continue to build on this.

We don't even try to pretend that we can do it alone. Only through collective efforts with community and other stakeholders can we continue to build on our work, make a difference, and give all our youth the most positive experience possible under our community engagement models.

Youth Workshop sessions

Introduction

In 2006, 75% of the government's humanitarian programme comprised young people under the age of 30. A significant proportion of these young people came from African countries experiencing on-going conflicts such as Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, DR Congo, Burundi and Rwanda. Young people are also still arriving from the Horn of Africa, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

There are risks for those young people settling in Australia as refugees including from Africa, who are not able to access appropriate support, of exposure to social exclusion and disconnection, requiring assistance in the future to address issues such as homelessness, family breakdown, poor health, crime, drug and alcohol use, and other social problems.

Young refugees also have needs that are distinct from those of older refugees. As well as adjusting to resettlement in a new country, recovering from trauma, navigating education, employment and complex bureaucratic systems, refugee young people must also negotiate family, peer, individual and community expectations within the context of adolescence. *(O' Sullivan and Olliff, 2006)*

The youth stream sessions focused on three key areas in order to discuss, assess and make recommendations of the major issues impacting on African Young people in Australia. These sessions consisted of Youth Culture and Identity, Good settlement for Young People and finally, Youth and the Law.

Youth Workshops: Session 1

Sessions 1 was entitled Youth Culture and Identity. This session was chaired by Abdul Muse, with the presentation of three papers: Halake Ganyu presented Developing a Bicultural Identity for Better Integration – the Psychosocial Experiences of Horn of African Refugee Young Men; Peter Mbago presented Negotiating Cultural Identity through the Arts and Gatwech Puoch presented Impact of Settlement on Sudanese Family Structure and the Evolution of Intergenerational Conflict.

Following the presentations, a panel of African young people, Achol (Wilma) Madut, Akoc Manheim, Benjamin Madut, Faten Mohammed had the opportunity to respond to questions from the floor. Young African members of the audience were also invited to participate in the panel. Participants raised questions around relationships with the police and the law, the portrayal of African young people in the media and the participation and support offered to African young women both within their own communities and the broader Australian community.

Youth Workshops: Session 2

Session 2 focused on the theme of Good Settlement for Young People. Carmel Guerra, the Director for the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI), chaired the session. Al Hines, a family worker with the Newly Arrived Youth Support Service provided by Colony 47 in Tasmania presented the first paper entitled The Rights of the Individual and the Impact on Families and Communities.

Following this presentation, Ms Guerra facilitated a panel discussion on themes of:

- support, advice and guidance to African Young people when they first arrive and then periodically thereafter;
- assessment of which services or activities work best in assisting and promoting good settlement, and
- considerations for organizations employing African young people in the community services sector.

Panelists responding to these questions included; Leanne McGaw, Youth Participation Co-ordinator CMYI, Nik Filips, Manager Darebin Council, Ahmed Ahmed, Community Worker Jesuit Social Services, Yousif Mohammed, Active Young African's Youth Program (VICSEG) and Nadia Mohammed (CMYI).

Panelists of African background were also invited to reflect on and discuss their experiences of settling in Australia. Questions from the floor prompted discussion on subjects ranging from government policies being trend-driven, to young people facing systemic barriers such as racism and social exclusion.

The key issues raised were:

- Inconsistent, ad-hoc funding for programmes
- In focusing and supporting the young people, parents are often left behind
- Lack of connection between service providers and organizations that fund them i.e. Federal, State and Non-Government organisations.

Young people are not empowered to be involved and to participate meaningfully in their community. There needs to be more skills, knowledge and training opportunities for young people to become youth leaders within their community.

Young people over identifying with African-American "hip-hop culture" which has its advantages and disadvantages. It may reflect a lack of local African-Australian role models.

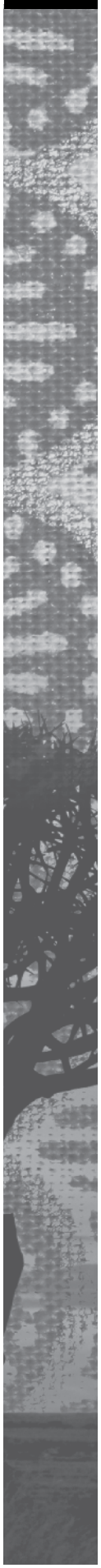
The session ended with a presentation from Helen Ware, Professor of International Agency Leadership, University of New England, on the *Basic Needs of Africans Settling in Rural Areas*

Youth Workshops: Session 3

Session 3 was on the theme of *Youth and the Law – Interface with Legal System, Rights and Responsibilities.* Les Twentyman, Youth worker from the Open Family organization presented his views. There was then a panel discussion which included Yousif Mohamed, Active Young African's Youth Program (VICSEG); and students, Achol (Wilma) Madut and Mido Amum.

A video was screened of a segment from Channel 9's A Current Affair which showed the result of a terrible gang assault in Australia, then suddenly cut to America where black gangs were shown. The assailants in the Australian crime were not African or even black. This video was criticized by members of the audience for being an example of media activities that have unnecessarily created difficulty and aroused unfounded suspicion towards young Africans trying to settle harmoniously in Australia.

Due to the video, discussion covered the subject of gangs and violence associated with young men from African backgrounds. The discussion sought to define what a gang, as opposed to a group of friends is, and the police said a gang is



a group with a criminal intent. The representative of Sunshine Police confirmed there were no African gangs. The discussion concluded that Africans were no more likely to form gangs than any other community group. This is also indicated by the facts that gangs have always existed in Australia, from the Ned Kelly (Irish) gang of the 1800's, through to the motor bike and surf gangs of the present day. Due to their distinctive appearance, African youth can be unfairly suspected of being a gang when they are a group of friends.

Police were in attendance at this session and discussion focused on how to improve relationships between the police and African young people. Key issues raised included:

Building positive relationships with the police through outreach and recreational programmes;

Strengthening the resilience of the African communities to provide support to their young people; and

Dispelling negative media coverage of African young people by challenging inaccurate and/or inflammatory reporting and providing accurate news stories which highlight the positive contribution African young people are making in Australia.

Youth Workshops: Final Session

On the last day, a plenary session focused on discussing and agreeing on key recommendations based on the three youth sessions presented. There were approximately 60 people who participated in this session. A representative from the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues convened the discussion whilst a representative from Department of Immigration and Citizenship recorded comments and recommendations.

Workshop Recommendations

1. That cultural orientation is two-way with all people who work with African refugee youth, including those in authority such as the police, being trained in cultural sensitivity; and to minimise anxiety through the use of positive body language, especially smiling and shaking hands, which are very important in African culture.
2. That all people who know and support Africans act as advocates, and introduce them to their networks in the mainstream either in person or by talking about them so the Africans become known in a realistically positive way to the mainstream.
3. That all forms of media are fed back commendation on accurate reporting of African issues, especially regarding youth, and, conversely, that the media is appropriately challenged, including through the Press Council, when reporting is inaccurate and damaging.

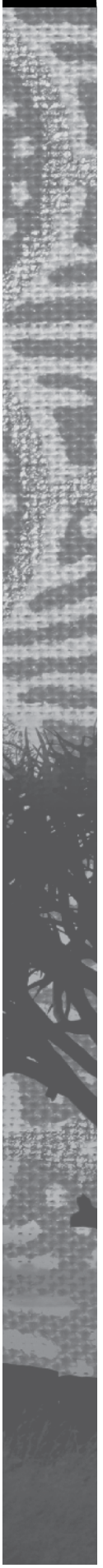
Youth - Police and the Law

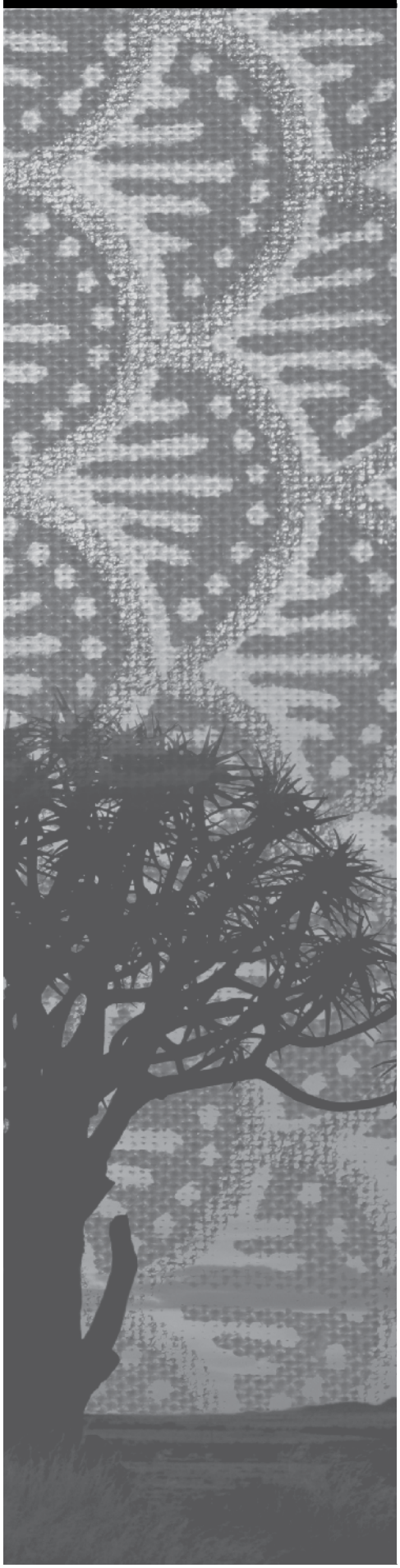
1. That initiatives are taken to support positive relations between the police and the law, particularly through social and sporting contacts as relaxed "getting to know you" forums.
2. That African youth learn about Australian law on arrival, and police are trained in cultural sensitivity, especially in the use of positive, friendly body language.
3. That early intervention is vigilantly practised to prevent young Africans at risk of crime, especially through programs to support family cohesion under duress, and initiatives to relieve pressure on families.
4. That early intervention diversionary programs are used for young offenders.

Youth - Building Resilience

1. That community development and participation is strengthened by building youth leadership skills amongst African youth, and extending networks across other communities, especially through programs such as:
    - Burns Bridge leadership training,
    - Rotary Young Leadership training,
    - Free Debate training in public speaking and conflict resolution.
2. That African youth-led initiatives be developed to provide responsive, holistic support for young people, with particular emphasis on activities that strengthen relationships across generations, and within families, and activities that engage young Africans with the mainstream community.
3. That recoordination of rollout of cross-cultural parenting programs, models of parenting program tailored to newly arrived communities with older children (10 - 18 yrs) be supported through ongoing funding.
4. That greater family-school engagement is supported and provided for. It is recommended that schools for young adult and child refugees employ culturally sensitive strategies to increase the engagement of youth, parents and carer, and that this includes comprehensive training for staff in engaging constructively with survivors of trauma.
5. That more intensive and flexible language on-arrival English programs are urgently provided, along with improved programs to prepare academic youth for study at Years 11 and 12 and for tertiary study. That these programs are academically and educationally rigorous, pitched at appropriate levels, and geared to effectively bridging gaps in the shortest possible times.

6. That specific school-to-work transition programs be developed for young people, aged 16+ years, with limited and disrupted schooling.
7. That programs aim to develop social capital. It is recommended that access to and utilisation of recreational services and programs be maximised, especially to enable young Africans to extend their sporting participation to new areas beyond traditional soccer and basketball.
8. That funded arts and community providers, including Free Debate, be asked to assist African youth to structure music, theatre/drama and dance programs outside of school hours and on weekends, providing low-cost or no-cost access to enjoyable, constructive, creative participation. This may also enable young people's talents to be identified and formally pursued. Healing of trauma can be assisted by creative outlets, and self-esteem rebuilt or bolstered.
9. That multicultural development officers be appointed across all sections of the arts (eg dance, painting, ballet etc) and across all arts organisations (eg the Melbourne Theatre Company; the Victorian College of the Arts, the Australian Ballet); and that there be strong outreach initiatives to inform and include African youth in all arts and arts providers.
10. That leaders in sports and the arts are asked to meet with African youth to inspire them on how to achieve your dreams.
11. That mentors with time, skill and capacity to assist young Africans to learn about modern Australian society, to solve problems constructively and to avoid pitfalls be sought to support school programs in social/life skills, so there are after-hours resources for extra learning and, ideally, for emergencies so young people have somebody reliable to turn to in times of crisis.
12. That all young Africans are made aware of telephone and other counselling services for people in crisis; and that African languages are provided.
13. That a Conference be held annually to allow for on-going discussion of issues arising, and to facilitate their prompt resolution.
14. That successful settlement should be assisted by focusing on qualitative outcomes not only on quantitative factors (e.g. time, money, statistics).
15. That youth in regional settlement be included in all initiatives, with strengthening of the link between family, local regional government and other government agencies.
16. That ongoing research monitor what models relevant to African youth are working well, with a view to expanding and replicating these. That this records how good results are gained to assist with replication.
17. That all funded initiatives are monitored for effectiveness, and that small amounts of seed funding be favoured to test the viability of community youth initiatives. That it be recognised African youth will gain confidence if they can develop self-help programs, step by step, to solve problems.
18. That young African journalists, writers and others with skills in media are assisted to develop and launch a magazine for African-Australian youth. That this be later expanded to young African film-makers.
19. That outreach services to African youth are flexible, involving delivery in and outside of schools; at homes, after hours etc.
20. That there is greater flexibility for job seekers, extending the 13-week exemption, with DEWR requested to look at flexible options in terms of the Job Network and School.
21. That employment options for African youth via apprenticeships and traineeships are made accessible through information to the African youth, and through flexible entry provision.
22. That all African youth are assisted to have equitable, affordable access to driver education and licencing programs; along with training in the main precepts of Australian family and general law.
23. That the 'empowering' of youth via rights without commensurate responsibilities in Australia can upset African families as African values place strong emphasis on responsibility, respect and the common good. That educators are educated in and sensitive to African family values, striving to educate youth in both rights and responsibilities to make well-informed, lawful decisions that are best for all people.
24. That African youth are recognised to have survived often harrowing childhoods, and to have developed resilience and insight beyond their years. That they are recognised as still requiring the same developmental grooming of all young people in areas such as human relations, budgeting, and effective skills for progressing in a modern Western society.





Day One: Plenary Presentations

Dr Jackie Huggins, Co-Chair of *Reconciliation Australia*

In many ways Australia is more comfortable talking about newcomers to our country than we are about the relationships between people who have settled here since 1788 and those of us whose ancestors have been here for tens of thousands of years.

Acknowledging the traditional owners of the country is about understanding history and recognising the special place of the Indigenous story in that history. The Native Title process goes some distance towards a proper acknowledgement of Indigenous land ownership, however many Indigenous people will never achieve this recognition. This makes it all the more important that new settlers to this country become familiar with the practice of acknowledging the traditional owners of Australia.

It's hard to say in most languages what the connection to their country means to Indigenous people. The well-known anthropologist W.E.H Stanner famously said, "No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland." Understanding this will help new arrivals to take a step towards meaningful relationships with the First Peoples of this country.

We need to be honest about our home grown problems in Australia and recognise that to address them; we need to involve all Australians, both new and old. 2007 marks the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, when over 90% of Australians came together to vote YES to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the national census count and allow the Commonwealth Government to make laws in regard to Indigenous Australians. While this landmark moment might not have fulfilled its great promise of equality, it does show us how effective we can be when non-Indigenous and Indigenous people work together for change.

Today, we are calling on everyone in the country, including new arrivals, to work together to close the appalling 17 year gap in life expectancy experienced by Indigenous children. The success of the referendum shows us what big changes we can make when we make a commitment and work together. Until we accept our responsibilities, Australia will be in no shape to offer a home to people who have suffered elsewhere.

We, the First Peoples of this land, welcome others to share our magnificent country. Work with us, hand in hand, to make it stronger for the benefit of all Australians.

Mr Laurie Ferguson MP, *Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs*

There has been a pronounced upswing in Australia's offshore humanitarian intake from the African continent. Thus for 2005-6, 56% of the intake was from Africa. The Opposition welcomed that agenda as it targeted the obvious region of critical crises and need.

This reorientation needs to be seen in the context of the historically low movement of Africans to Australia with only 9% of the 2001 Census population for overseas born being from the broader African/Middle East category. This was despite a series of earlier horrific conflicts that we saw on our screens.

Australia's aid effort is often compared unfavourably with advanced western European nations. When one ponders that only 2.8% of that figure goes to Africa our refugee/ humanitarian effort is only what should be done in a region of tremendous suffering and need.

The rhetoric of the National Framework for Settlement Planning of March 2006, is certainly indicative of a Government agenda to minimise particular assistance to people who are often in dire need. Thus it states "settlement needs are similar to the needs of the resident Australian population". "Services are not an alternative service network for new entrants," these services " have a specific and limited role."

However, we are supposedly caring for people who have in many cases endured at least a decade in camps, who have lost siblings, partners and offspring, who are often illiterate in their own language, who have been forced to trek sometimes for months and years and who have lived in extremely primitive housing.

Recently, we have heard the new Minister thinking out aloud about the difficulties of African settlement, leading to speculation about a further retraction of African intake.

Did the Government think that African settlement was going to be without challenges, without hurdles? Why are they now hinting at jettisoning UNHCR priorities? Does it have anything to do with the Tamworth debate?

The most apparent difficulty in my region and western Sydney more generally concerns education and this tends to be interconnected with the failure to procure a more diversified settlement pattern. The figures for 2003-4 in Sydney are stark. The municipalities of Auburn, Blacktown, Fairfield, Holroyd and Parramatta took 6,000 of the city's 7,250 refugee/humanitarian settlers.

What we are experiencing is a concentration of intense problems in limited regions and in a number of schools. The Department needs to be far more proactive in endeavours with its contractors to enhance settlement diversity. Real questions have to be asked as to whether in the battle of government expenditure demands, the need for a larger rental package might be necessary to widen geographic options. In an era with less Commonwealth interest in public housing and the resultant shocking waiting lists, the concept of set term tenure contracts for public housing for some refugee/ humanitarian claimants should be investigated.

Another issue is the widespread view that the Department has been too liberal in allowing sponsorships. One must now question whether it is sometimes an agenda to diminish the Department's own responsibility. Additionally, refugee advocates and documentary programmes have exposed instances of disproportionately high, sometimes crippling pay back schemes for sponsors.

There are no sanctions for failure to abide by agreements. More care has to be taken to ensure that people accepted to look after people are actually financially and in a practical sense, able to do the job promised. Those responsible for our immigration programme must be armed to provide more appropriate, more informative and clearly more thorough information packages. Additionally, we have the perennial blame shifting, cracks in the floor syndrome of conflict between state and federal.

I turn to English delivery. A one size fits all totally fails in this context for delivery of English to African communities. Other issues in education certainly include culturally appropriate places for classes, availability of child care, lack of personal transport options, and wider cultural sensitivities. There is a need for enhanced flexibility in delivery, most particularly in the hours of classes, including on weekends. We should also understand that people's needs change over time in regards to services.

Ms Voula Messimeri, Chair, *Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils*

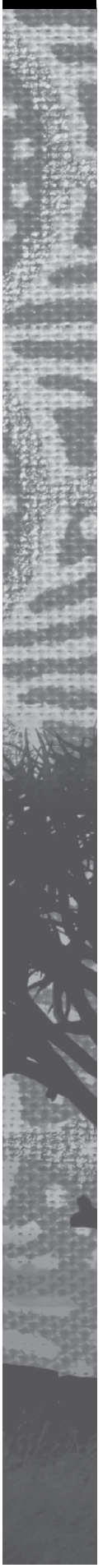
FECCA is the national peak body that promotes multiculturalism, community harmony and social justice. We endorse multiculturalism as a core value that defines what it means to be Australian in the 21st Century. Our goal is to enrich and enhance Australian society through the fullest participation of all members of our community for the benefit of all Australians. We see migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants as assets to this country that have made lasting contributions.

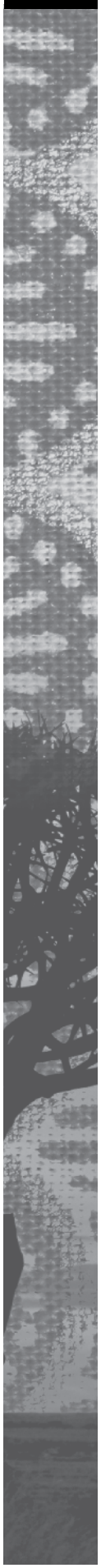
Australia has a long and positive history in the resettlement of peoples from over 200 different communities around the world. Since 1945 over six million people have arrived and contributed to the social and economic prosperity of Australia. More recently people from many countries of Africa are making a home in Australia and bring with them many qualities including, resourcefulness, dynamism, resilience and a desire to succeed, that will further enrich our nation. We need to recognize and talk up the positive benefits that the Australian community gains from these qualities.

Already we are seeing countless examples of entrepreneurial application by skilled and unskilled people from Africa adding a rich social dimension and benefiting the Australian economy. These include representation in leadership positions, establishment of small businesses in catering, finance, music, entertainment and an emerging presence in academia. It is acknowledged that African young women are doing particularly well both in secondary and tertiary educational attainment. This is a very positive trend that merits reinforcement.

Investing in timely and flexible settlement, education, training and employment programs can only positively contribute to and accelerate the engagement of African communities to this country for the prosperity of all Australians. Similarly the challenges that confront people, who come from so many different African countries under the humanitarian and refugee programs, require open and frank discussion and the application of innovative solutions. Solutions that cannot necessarily simply be borrowed from the settlement experience of previous migrant groups or for that matter previous groups of refugees to Australia.

There are some great programs in place for settlement services for the African communities. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship provides substantial resources





across a range of programs. More recently we have seen agencies such as Centrelink trial and adopt a specialist Unit in working with African communities a model that could be emulated by other government instrumentalities.

Recently the Victorian Government has released a major report focusing on culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women: the CALD Women's Project. Hundreds of women were consulted throughout Victoria including African women. Overwhelmingly physical health and mental health, employment and education were the areas that women from Africa noted as needing urgent attention. It is noteworthy to mention and welcome the Victorian government's key initiative of the Refugee Health Nurse Program which places appropriately qualified nurses in community health services with high refugee populations.

It is generally recognised however that more resources, better co-ordination and a more rigorous and consolidated approach to the provision of services to the African communities is needed that further consolidates the input at the community agency level and across all tiers of government.

The following needs to be given due attention when planning for services and programs:

- Responses at all levels must take into consideration that many people from Africa in Australia are displaced persons and refugees coming from war zones.
- Recognize the impact of racism and discrimination on African communities.
- Recognise and engage with the impact of disrupted schooling due to displacement, with ESL resources allocated accordingly.

Equally there is recognition that there needs to be:

- Greater focus on English Language acquisition and the provision of funding for more flexible programs
- Familiarisation courses re: Australian practices, currency, and public transport delivered both pre-arrival in appropriate languages and settings and in Australia as part of initial settlement services.
- Initiatives to address the great difficulties around affordable housing.
- Training and employment to be better aligned and new innovations introduced

African women have proved themselves to be enterprising and have overcome enormous hardship while supporting their families' settlement in Australia. Their endeavours and leadership must be seen as part of the solutions that we seek in this Conference.

Finally all of us must reflect on our own agencies and whether these have a responsibility to address issues confronting African communities in Australia. If the answer is yes, let's be very frank and honest. Are we geared up to respond and what resources do we need to devote to this task? Are our workforce, our management and governing bodies reflective of the communities we seek to engage with and serve?

Multiculturalism in Australia has, for over thirty years, embraced citizens of differing racial, ethnic and religious groups, living together in harmony, obeying the laws of our land. Australia is a multicultural nation with a rich linguistic diversity and competency that acts as a window to the world embracing and adding to the reality of a global economy. Migrants and refugees have accepted Australian values, its way of life and customs, and have contributed to the enrichment of Australian society though their own unique cultural backgrounds. People from the African continent are shaping not only their own destiny in Australia but equally contributing to that of the wider, more enriched Australian identity as we move into the 21st century.

Lord Mayor John So, *City of Melbourne*

Home to people from more than 140 countries, speaking over 200 languages, Melbourne is one of the world's great multicultural capitals. In this city we welcome people from all backgrounds and we are proud of the opportunities Melbourne holds for newcomers.

We have come to define ourselves not by race or religion, but by our pioneering spirit and democratic values. We are optimistic about the future and we are committed to social and political equality.

The great advantages of multiculturalism have benefited Melbourne well. We have a wealth of international trade and business connections, diverse food and cultural experiences, and a community that is among the world's most peaceful and harmonious.

However, the experience of entering a new community can be challenging - making a new land your home takes effort and time. Migrants must adjust to the new environment and Australians must strive to understand the culture of their new community members.

In Melbourne we want to provide an environment in which access to education, employment and accommodation is available to all people. We make an effort to engage all community members in order to understand their needs and respond effectively.

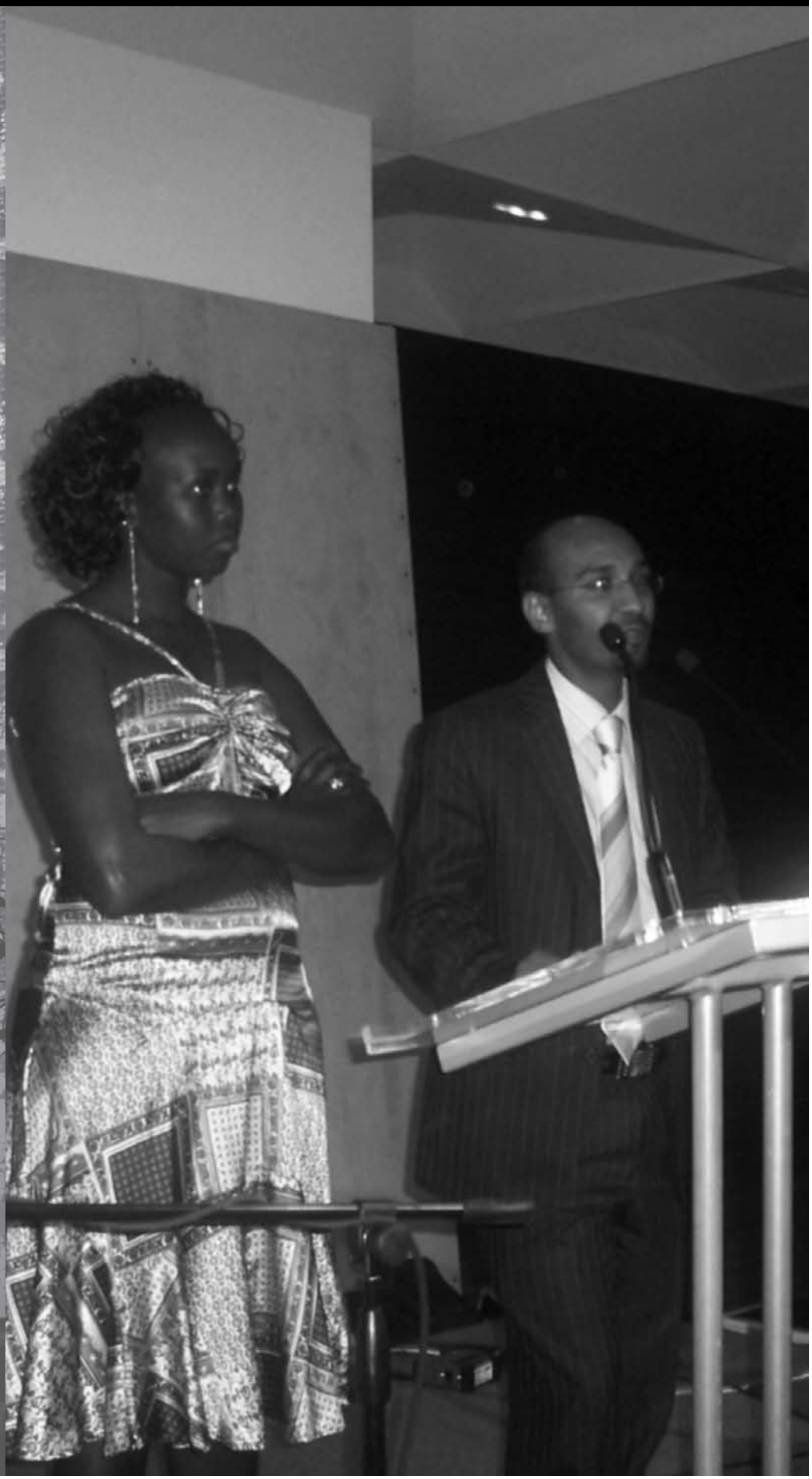
Refugees from the Horn of Africa are one of our fastest growing ethnic community groups. They are experiencing a period of great change and we have a responsibility, as global citizens and humanitarians, to give them the support they need.

The City of Melbourne has implemented a number of programs to support our African community members. We are involved in education, social and recreational

programs for young African people. We offer a language link service to ensure all communities can access City of Melbourne services as well as supporting the Victorian Interpreter Card initiative. Most recently, we launched the collaborative *Horn of Africa 'Men in Carlton' Report* which will support our service to African communities.

On behalf of the City of Melbourne, I wish to reaffirm our commitment to helping our new African population learn about, and enjoy all our city has to offer.

To members of our African community, I wish to offer a warm and friendly welcome to Melbourne. We look forward to a sharing a healthy, safe and prosperous future with you and your families.



Day Two: Plenary Presentations

Mr John Williams, State Director, *Department of Immigration and Citizenship*

While people from African nations have been migrating to Australia for generations, the history of larger-scale resettlement in Australia of people from the African continent is relatively recent – that is, little more than a generation.

The 2001 Census indicated that there were around 37,000 Africa-born people in Victoria. Since 2001, DIAC estimates that a further 16,000 have arrived – bringing the total to around 53, 000. These communities are diverse in terms of nationality, ethnicity, tribe, religion and languages spoken.

The Government views successful settlement as a key objective of Australia's Humanitarian Programme and offers one of the most comprehensive settlement programmes in the world for humanitarian entrants. In addition to general services available to all migrants, permanent humanitarian visa holders are offered a broad range of specialised services through the *Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy* (IHSS).

The Australian Government seeks to facilitate effective settlement and participation of newly arrived refugees and migrants in Australia through a range of targeted programs. DIAC funds a wide range of community-based agencies to assist new arrivals with initial settlement. The *Adult Migrant English Program* (AMEP) is a world-leader, offering new arrivals the opportunity to have intensive language classes – using a variety of media, locations and techniques. Our unique *Translating and Interpreting Service* (TIS) provides free interpreting to non-English speakers.

The Government views successful settlement as a key objective of Australia's Humanitarian Programme and offers one of the most comprehensive settlement programmes in the world for humanitarian entrants.

A particular achievement in the past twelve months, of which all those involved are very proud, has been the pilot project to settle ten Congolese families – 60 people in all – in Shepparton, in Northern Victoria.

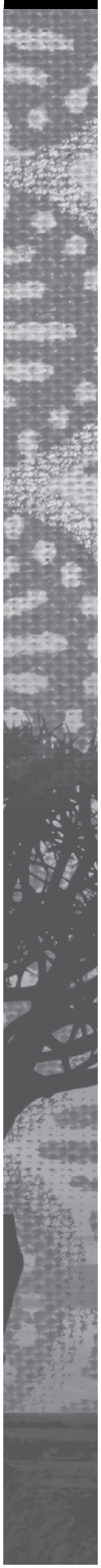
Another key area is our multicultural policy and programmes which facilitate the development of a more vibrant, respectful and inclusive Australia. They target the whole Australian community – encouraging all of us to look for ways in which we can learn more about each other, and foster shared understanding about our similarities and differences.

Through the *Living in Harmony* program we fund many organisations to run a range of activities that bring people together – to help break down the barriers of ignorance about our respective cultures, traditions, values and expectations of our lives in Australia.

Of course settlement and multicultural programs would mean nothing without the courage, tenacity, commitment and resilience of migrants and refugees themselves.

The success of Australia's migration and humanitarian-entry programs is dependent of the effectiveness of our settlement and multicultural policies, the quality of our settlement services, on the readiness of the broader Australian community to be open and sharing, learning from and with new migrants and refugees, and the commitment of new arrivals to create a new life in Australia.

Australia is proud that it has a very successful and harmonious society that has welcomed millions of people from other lands. The Australian government will continue to strengthen our commitment to policies of mutual respect and an inclusive Australian society.



Mr Tony Burke MP, Shadow Minister for Immigration, *Integration and Citizenship*

Citizenship is the common bond that unites individuals in their mutual commitment to Australia. Citizenship is also a central element to integrating and including new migrants so that they can fully participate in the Australian community.

Australia is a truly diverse society consisting of people from a variety of backgrounds. Labor believes that integration is how you make our multicultural society work. The Howard Government has failed new citizens by failing to support their integration.

Integration and multiculturalism are inextricably linked. Integration is about inclusion – it is the means by which a multicultural society works. Integration is not assimilation into a "melting pot" that requires loss of one's cultural identity. All individuals and groups must feel they are integral to a shared society with shared values.

Integration is about inclusion. It is about identity. It is about building a stronger community. The alternative to mono-culturalism is not enclaves. That is not the choice. It is actually possible to build a stronger community with good integration programs.

Under the Howard Government, settlement services have been run on a one-size-fits-all model. Successful settlement programs need to identify and address the barriers to fully participating in the Australian community. They are fundamental to building a stronger community.

The current settlement program does not match with the special needs of our new-arrivals. For example, the current provision of English language services is not flexible enough to discern between a migrant who has tertiary qualifications and the special learning needs of refugees who are not literate in their own language and have no formal schooling. Opportunities to learn English and to find employment are the key to participating in our community. We let everyone down horribly when we fail to provide the support needed for integration.

Labor believes settlement services must be flexible and take account of the specific needs of our new-arrivals. Learning English is critical to the successful settlement of new-arrivals. English is the key to entering the workforce and integrating into the social and economic mainstream of Australian society.

Labor will improve English language services for migrants and emphasize the importance of vocational English. Labor will provide clear pathways to employment for migrants. We recognise that work is the essential context for language acquisition and ongoing vocational training and support. A more targeted approach to settlement of new-arrivals, especially humanitarian entrants is important to Labor. Learning English, finding employment as soon as possible and becoming more self-sufficient must become real priorities.

Labor is committed to celebrating the diversity of all Australians in an inclusive society with shared values. Successful integration and Australian citizenship are central to building a stronger community.

Mr George Lekakis, Chairperson, *Victorian Multicultural Commission*

Walk through the streets of Melbourne and the descriptor "multicultural" is self-evident: Australia is and always was a nation of immigrants.

People from the United Kingdom and Eastern Europe, Italians and Greeks, Chinese and Vietnamese, Afghans and Iraqis, Somalis and Sudanese are all part of the Australian story.

As we address issues of African resettlement in Australia during this inaugural Conference, it is obvious that migrants and refugees from the vast and diverse continent of Africa are simply the most recent arrivals in a cycle of immigration going back more than two hundred years, with many undertaking extraordinary journeys and overcoming extraordinary ordeals in the hope of establishing a new life in a new land.

But in denial of this historic fact, the m-word has been expunged from the very Commonwealth department supposedly responsible for policy affecting Australia's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and instead fallacious citizenship concerns have been elevated to levels that bewilder many – including former Prime Ministers, Governors General, as well as currently serving members of Parliament.

How disingenuous of the detractors to suppose that the nation's multicultural reality and the policy outcomes developed over the last 30 years - a natural consequence of mass immigration – can somehow be downgraded, dismantled and overthrown.

Fortunately the Victorian Government considers multiculturalism an essential and core component of our societal make-up; a source of enormous economic, educational and cultural benefits to all Victorians. Both the Victorian Government and the Victorian Multicultural Commission have also been consistent advocates for the rights of humanitarian entrants and refugees.

We maintain targeted programs that reinforce and invigorate our cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, ranging from aged care, health care, ethnic schools, interpreting and translation services, employment and training, as well as a range of other initiatives bringing different faith and

community groups together to promote multi-faith and multicultural harmony. By identifying and addressing specific migrant community needs we strengthen the Victorian community as a whole as well. We also strengthen those fundamental principles of access, equity and justice for all without which no legitimate democracy is possible.

For this reason we must focus attention on the needs of our relatively new communities, with public scrutiny of government policies affecting them, by raising awareness of their special needs in order to consolidate their lives in their new homeland, and with assistance and approbation for their efforts. There is much to be done but, through dialogue and by directly consulting with communities themselves, we can and will remedy outstanding problems that obstruct newcomers wishing to contribute and participate in society.

That is why the "African Resettlement in Australia" Conference 2007 and other like-minded forums that provide a genuine platform to share experiences and discuss community concerns are increasingly important. Together, we can ensure that barriers are overcome and opportunities for attaining the full potential of each individual are made possible.

In doing so, we set an example for the world and all become the richer for it, as individuals, as communities, as a society and as a nation. Richer in countless ways – for, as the former Governor-General Sir William Deane succinctly put it, Australia's multicultural society should be seen as the nation's "greatest achievement", not "damn(ed) with lip service while undermining the mutual respect which lies at its heart".

Fr Joe Caddy, CEO, *Centacare Melbourne*

"Getting a Job- It's not **what** you know - it's **who** you know!"

Refugee families arrive with few resources which puts them immediately at a disadvantage. With few contacts, poor English language skills and difficulties adjusting to a new culture, gaining access to employment is particularly difficult.

A high proportion remain unemployed which makes settlement even more difficult, further erodes their self esteem and severely limits the income available to their families.

Many require culturally appropriate counselling and information even before they can begin to take advantage of mainstream Commonwealth job network services. While there are some excellent job network providers, there are also concerns that refugee and humanitarian entrants receive inadequate assistance from the mainstream services which concentrate efforts on placing clients who are easier to work with and who have fewer barriers into employment. (ACOSS 2006; Brotherhood of St Lawrence 2006)

Those who have the necessary skills and are relatively work ready require the contacts to get a first start in employment.

Initially both employers and the new job starters need assistance to explain the nature of employment relationships, the concepts of PAYE income tax and superannuation etc.

We all know that frequently it is not "what you know" but "who you know that gets you the job. Community service organisations can be the "who you know" that assists African refugees into employment. With adequate resources they can accompany the job seeker, encourage training, make contact with employers and support the job seeker in the work place.

Ms Samia Baho, *FARREP Coordinator and CAAWI Director*

I want to thank everybody for being here with us, and congratulate the African Think Tank for organizing this great conference in Melbourne. I also am very pleased to be given this opportunity to speak to you.

As I am an African female keynote speaker, I have been asked by my female colleagues and friends to present a voice of African women.

Over the last two days there was discussion on the roles of African women and men. It is no accident that gender roles are high on the agenda. Africa is a large continent containing some of the oldest civilizations on earth, with great diversity of religions, languages and cultures. In Africa women have traditionally provided the economic and moral foundations of community life.

Gender roles start within a family from the time a child is born, no matter what the religion or culture. In the early childhood years, African women are told that they are foreigners in their families, because they will marry and join their husband's family. They soon realize their role is to be beautiful daughters and perfect wives and daughters-in-law. Their training is on how to be good wives; however they must also learn to carry out multiple roles as bread winners, wives and mothers; to solve marriage problems, develop strategies for handling difficult people and for reacting to different situations. So being a refugee for African women is not new and does not only mean escaping war or seeking asylum. This was emphasized again and again.

African women accepted their role as natural, built their leadership skills and took their families' and communities' futures in their hands. This is particularly true when we think of the ones who live in war torn countries or as refugees in western societies. With men fighting civil wars or being killed, women were left to care for the family, carrying out their

traditional roles as well as those of men. The knowledge, life management skills and strong identities that African women develop in childhood allow them to always stand tall and strong no matter what comes their way. They always try to stand together as one, to make the weak of them strong.

Over the last two days of the conference there was a discussion about African women's voices. This led many to think that African women are oppressed, although one cannot deny the appropriateness of comments by some African men experiencing on-going tension due to their fear of losing their power and status. Most African women have never felt oppressed. We believe the women in Africa have always been more powerful, that they have no limit to what they can aspire to be or do. This is reflected in their ability to deal, participate and negotiate with Australia's diverse society. These are the same women who raised those men.

Conference Dinner Speeches

Mr Haileluel Gebre-selassie, *African Think Tank*

A few weeks ago I received an email from one of the gentlemen invited to attend this Conference – or more precisely his secretary. She very kindly informed me that unfortunately due to other commitments, her boss would be unable to attend this week's Conference, but that he did extend his best wishes, and looked forward to hearing of its outcomes. The gentleman concerned was Mr Barak Obama, and his other commitments were a small thing called the race for the nomination for Democratic candidate for US President in 2008. Under the circumstances, I was willing to forgive his absence.

He is certainly an inspiration to many around the world and we wish him the best of luck in the lead-up to the election.

Here in Australia too, it is an important time for our African Australian communities, as many people from Africa face formidable challenges during their transition into life in this country and becoming Australians. Challenges that cannot be met without the great contribution and active participation of ***all*** African Australian grass roots communities across the country, in partnership with the broader community.

I am sure you are all aware of the barriers that many newly arrived migrants and refugees encounter : adjustment issues regarding education and law and order; as well as access to essential local services and community structures such as sporting clubs to child care centres. In recent months, we have also seen numerous media attacks on the African-Australian communities by some sections of our society ranging from an academic to a former Mayor… the impacts of which are still reverberating across the broader community.

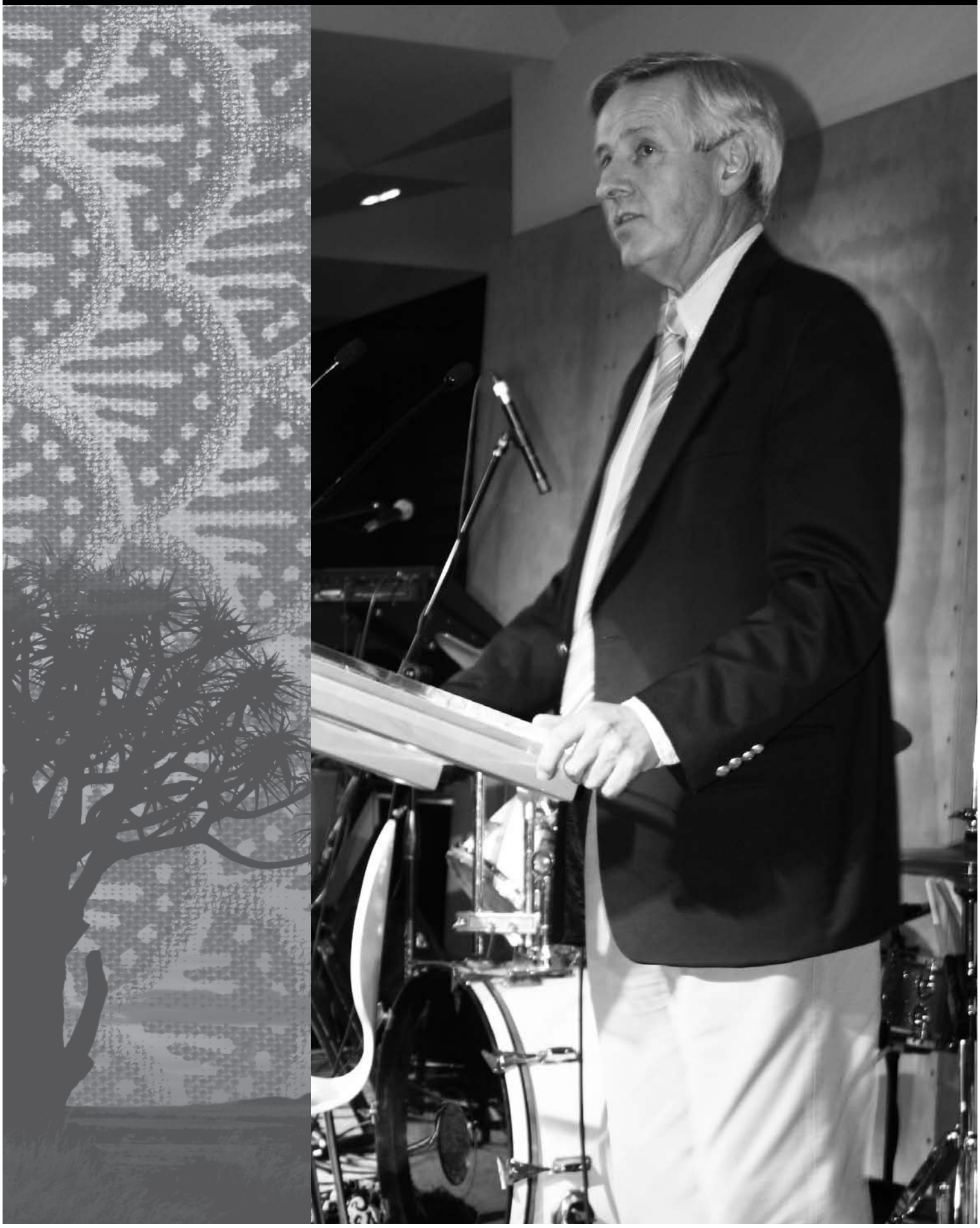
If we are to successfully navigate a path through these various challenges, we need to work together with agreed strategies. Strategies that open opportunities for all to participate; that are inclusive and meet the diverse and complex needs of African Australian communities; and that maximise social cohesion and integration through strategic partnerships with the broader Australian community. And that work for the young, for women and isolated elderly groups within the African Australian communities. Strategies that require and inspire visionary leaders within the African Australian communities

One of the short term strategies, for example, was to organise a pre-Conference workshop to maximise African Australians' participation for this Conference. The success of that workshop is seen today by how effectively almost all African Australian communities have been mobilised to participate and contribute at this Conference. Not surprisingly, one of our long term strategies involves the implementation of recommendations from this Conference which I will outline at Friday afternoon's concluding plenary session.

How are we going to implement our Conference's recommendations? Where are the available resources that may be utilised to achieve the best outcomes? These are just some of the issues we are all deliberating on at this forum.

I think we can all see that African Australian communities are determined to play a significant role in integrating our communities and contributing to build our nation. This Conference is all about finding ways to help fulfil this social commitment we all share. And to better mobilise the African Diaspora in Australia to meet the advocacy, mentoring and leadership needs of our communities.

I mentioned earlier about how important it is to have visionary leaders within the African Australian communities. The African Think Tank will continue to endeavour to be a forum for our collective community leadership.



Ms Nametsegang Okhola Rudd

Assimilating in a different culture is inevitably challenging. I found it initially hard to fit in, and still do in certain circumstances, and from talking to other people, I know most Africans feel the same way. Feelings of displacement, culture shock and loneliness are often experienced. I still experience difficulty in finding my place in this society.

But I know when my husband comes home to Botswana he feels the same, and I love watching his discomfort. For a short time he experiences what I experience for a long time. There is nothing right or wrong about that – it is simply a fact – a black face in a white crowd or a white face in a black crowd will always feel a little insecure.

Australians generally are friendly and welcoming people. Your laid back attitude of "she'll be right" is very comforting. Your openness to multiculturalism gives us a sense of belonging. For most of us this country is a safe heaven. It offers basic necessities of life such as food, water, shelter, medical assistance and safety that we cherish but some people may take for granted. We are forever grateful to be living in the "lucky country"

We Africans are not lazy as we are meant to seem. We don't want a free ride. We don't want to be spoon fed and we don't want to offload from the Australian Government anymore as the government has done enough already by welcoming us here. We want to work. We want to earn a living so we give back our fair share.

Many Africans come to Australia on humanitarian reasons as you know. People from countries like Burundi, Liberia, Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia (to mention a few) relocate here from refugee camps. You will find it that most of these people lack English Language skills and may find it difficult to understand Australian accent and expressions. The lack of African language translators makes basic communication a complicated task.

Some African immigrants may lack appropriate qualifications, work skills and experience. Even with those with transferable skills such as trades and retail may not understand the Occupational health and Safety and other workplace issues. In some cases, some need to retrain to fit in with Australian standards. Consequently a lot of African Immigrants work for minimum wage at factories.

I am sure you are thinking that well if you can speak English and have appropriate skills and experience then finding a job shouldn't be all that difficult, right? Wrong!

Even some of us who speak English reasonably well and have proper qualifications obtained here in Australia following the Australian education system still find it difficult to find employment. Well if it is not language barrier, lack of skills, and lack of qualifications, then what is it?

Many of us feel constantly marginalised. For a country that prides itself on egalitarian policy, we don't feel like we are given equal opportunity. I don't want to assume that the colour of my skin should matter in any shape or form, but it makes me wonder sometimes, it obviously does matter to some people.

Whether there are barriers to employment or not is an arguable point, but a lot of us think there is. Whether that is derived from our own insecurity of being in a new country, or from the insecurity of mainstream Australia having to deal with yet another wave of new immigrants after the Italians, the Greeks, the Asians, the Lebanese etc - and now the Africans is another story. Maybe mainstream Australia is as much intimidated by change as we are? The only thing I know is that it is only together that we can productively move forward – with patience and support – we can find our true worth in each other.

It is always easy to find the negatives in each other – the real challenge is to find the positives in one other – and it is those positives that will bring us together over time as an expanded grouping of Australians.

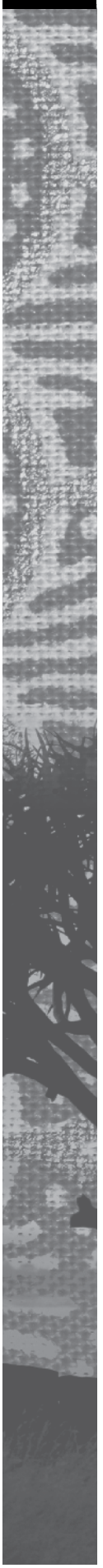
Finally what I want to say is that, we are committed to contributing to the Australian community. We like this country – there is a lot to like here. We interact with you, we befriend you, adopt your lifestyle and we embrace the Aussie culture, even though it is so different from ours. We also make mistakes – no one is pretending to be innocent and there is no mileage in playing the victim. We want to be part of the Australian nation and add to the Australian economy. We want to work with you, so work with us!!

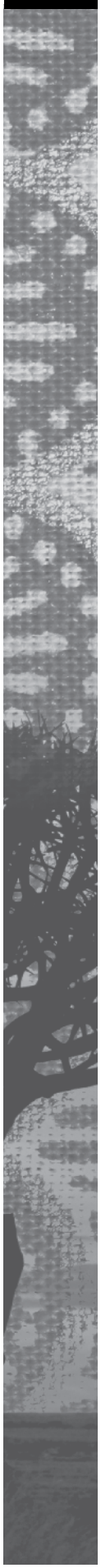
Mr Peter Hughes PSM, Deputy Secretary, *Department of Immigration and Citizenship*

This Conference is a welcome opportunity to reflect on the considerable progress we have made in resettling people from Africa.

When I say 'the progress we have made', I'm referring to the combined efforts of all levels of government, the many community groups involved, the not-for-profit and for-profit service providers and of course, the individuals themselves. We should also recognise the contribution made in schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods and in the community as a whole.

Nevertheless, the only person who can take the final credit for effective resettlement is the person who settles into a new life in Australia. They alone have made the immense physical and emotional journey from the land of their birth to adopt a very different culture here in Australia. As an aside, I don't think anyone can fail to be inspired by the courage and determination required.





This individual journey is clearly a life-changing event for the person involved. To be effective, the support we provide must be centred around the person making this enormous transition. This is the direct circle of support.

If we draw another larger circle around the person, we pick up the contribution of the rest of the team – the larger community organisations and peak bodies and the support from the three levels of government.

At the Australian Government level, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship provides some broad direction, information and funding, which can be used by other team members to provide the critical and effective interventions that make a difference to people's lives and their integration into Australia.

Our funding focuses on services that build self-reliance, developing English language skills and fostering links with mainstream services such as Medicare.

We launched the National Framework for Settlement Planning a year ago to provide a more strategic and coordinated approach to settlement planning at a national level. It's already proving its worth in improving the ability of governments, service providers, community organisations and other settlement stakeholders to plan for the arrival and settlement of new entrants.

The model I have described where the Australian Government provides funding and information, means that we have a degree of influence over the activities of other members of the team. However, we also have a lot of experience to bring to bear in the settlement of refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia.

Australia's annual resettlement programme, which actively seek out and resettle those in humanitarian need, currently runs at around 13 000 places a year, putting us in the top three countries for refugee and humanitarian resettlement along with the United States and Canada. This has been the case for the past 50 years or so.

The size and regional composition of Australia's Humanitarian Programme is planned on an annual basis after a comprehensive consultation process with a range of interested parties.

In recent years, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Refugee Council of Australia and other groups have recommended that Africa be considered a priority region for resettlement. Accordingly, Africa has become a substantial component of our programme. This is in step with other resettlement countries such as the United States, Canada, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

While Africa is now a substantial part of our resettlement programme, I should note that we have been accepting people from Africa for many years. Before 1983 there were only a handful of Africans in our programme, building up but still less than 200 people annually until about 1990. These were predominately Ethiopians with a very small number of Somalis and South Africans.

In the early 1990s the African component increased, with 580 grants in 1991-92 and almost 1000 Ethiopians, Sudanese and Somalis resettled the following year; then from the mid 1990s, there have been steadily increasing numbers peaking at nearly 8500 people a couple of years ago, equivalent to 70 per cent of the total intake for that year.

What has changed in the past five years or so is that we have been accepting people from a greater range of African countries and the challenge is to provide the individual support for people from these diverse cultures and backgrounds.

For the future, there are likely to be further changes in the composition of the intake. The source countries from which we draw refugee and humanitarian entrants varies with greatest need, and it is likely that we will see increased emphasis on countries such as Burma or Iraq. This is not a shift in sentiment away from Africa, but the reality that to be of greatest benefit, the programme needs to help the people most in need at any time.

Much of the consultative and planning work that goes into deciding the size and source countries for our annual refugee and humanitarian intake also informs our later work on settling the people that follow as a result. We consult frequently with service providers and community groups on the needs of particular cultural groups.

And we take some pride in the very successful outcomes that have resulted.

For our relatively high levels of refugee and humanitarian entrants compared to most countries, we have had remarkably little discord or social unrest as a result. Nevertheless, the people we have accepted from Africa in recent years pose some particular challenges based on the likelihood of having experienced, high levels of poverty, torture, trauma, a lack of formal education and having little knowledge of English.

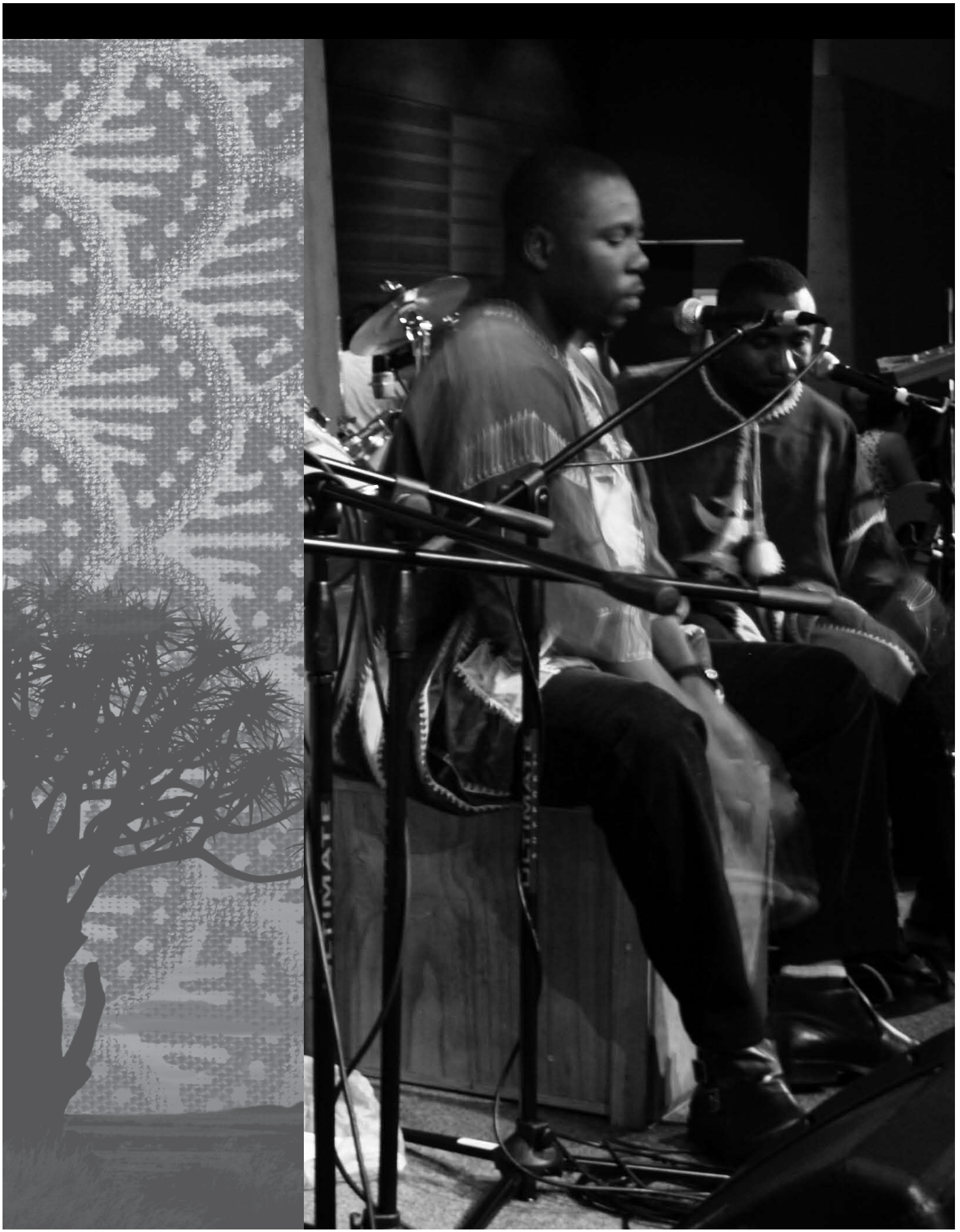
For instance, the Congolese community in Australia is heavily weighted to younger ages and so we need to put more emphasis on schools-based programmes to makes sure these children get a good start in Australia.

With so much effort going into settlement of African refugees – not just from my department but from everyone involved, it's important to consider some of the results. Here in Victoria, there's the resettlement of ten Congolese refugee families in Shepparton, which has been a great success through a combination of effective community consultation and planning. It's a model which we are keen to roll out elsewhere, starting with the resettlement of some Togolese people in Ballarat.

While there have been many successes in integrating people from Africa, I do not deny that there are significant challenges also. This Conference is very worthwhile in terms of bringing people together to talk about how we can meet those challenges and keep improving our work.

But to put this in context, we should note that we have just celebrated 30 years of Vietnamese resettlement in Australia after difficult beginnings. There is no reason why we should not look forward to celebrating 30 years of successful African resettlement in Australia and I certainly do look forward to that.

And to complete the tremendous physical and emotional journey that people make to come here and be part of our country, we look forward to welcoming everyone as full participants in the Australian community through the taking out of citizenship.



Day Three: Plenary Presentations

Mr Abdulla Saleh Mbamba, Director, *United Nations Information Centre for Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific*

Many people are leaving their home countries for a combination of refugee-related, economic and other reasons, making the categories of people on the move more complex and less clear. This has a profound effect upon the ability and willingness of many governments to receive refugees. Industrialized countries have introduced migration control measures that impact indiscriminately on people who need protection and those who do not. They have made it more difficult for asylum seekers to reach their territory, interdicted them at sea, detained them upon arrival, interpreted protection obligations restrictively and created new and lesser forms of protection.

Developing countries are also increasingly reluctant to host refugees for prolonged periods. Rich and poor countries alike are claiming that the costs of granting asylum are too high – financially, politically and socially. The inevitable consequence is that some people are sent back to places where they have a real fear of being jailed or killed.

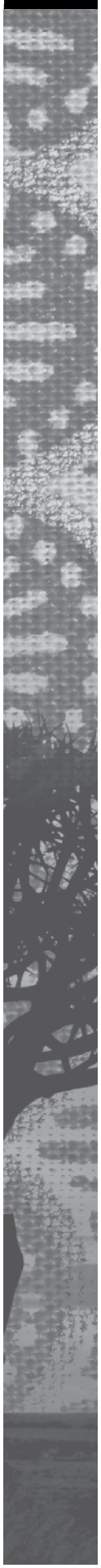
Refugee movements are indicative of a world in turmoil – rife with humanitarian crises. With more than 16 million persons uprooted, Africa remains the continent most affected by forced displacement. The estimated 13 million IDPs represent more than half the world's total IDP population, according to figures from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. There are still 2.6 million refugees in Africa, despite a decrease of 300,000 in 2005.

However, there are a number of encouraging developments and new initiatives that took place last year. Return is already happening on a large scale in Africa. Several parts of the continent are on a march homeward. Sierra Leone, Angola, Burundi, Eritrea and Liberia have all witnessed repatriation. Each operation represents a particular challenge; common to all is the need for a commensurate commitment to post-conflict reconstruction in order to break, once and for all, the cycle of violence.

Most refugees prefer to return home as soon as circumstances permit, generally when a conflict has ended, a degree of stability has been restored and basic infrastructure is being rebuilt. The last four years have seen an unprecedented level of return and continued in 2005, with an estimated 1.1 million exiles returning to their countries. Resettlement continue to be a valuable protection tool as well as a durable solution for refugees in many countries, including Kenya, Burundi, Ghana, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia. Though many nations have agreed to accept refugees on a temporary basis during the early phase of a crisis, fewer than 20 nations worldwide take part in UNHCR resettlement programs and accept quotas of refugees on an annual basis.

The stabilization of peace processes and security in some regions of Africa has enabled displaced persons to return home even though hundreds of thousands of people have gone home to find little or no infrastructure, no education or health-care facilities, no means of self-sufficiency and no employment or other livelihood opportunities. The risk is a recurrence of conflict and new upheaval — another loop in a cycle of perpetual displacement.

Clearly, instability and conflict continue in many parts of the world. More persecution and human rights violations, more wars and violence against civilians are likely to occur, at least for some time. As a consequence, it is easy to foresee that more people will be forced to flee their homes.



Mr Paris Aristotle AM, Director, *Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture*

There are many fantastic reasons why a Conference of this nature is so valuable, and one of the most important is as a magnificent representation of our rich cultural diversity and the benefits of multiculturalism.

Valuing diversity in a culturally diverse world is one of the most critical elements to making it a healthy and secure one. We often take it for granted—we sometimes think it's about tolerating each other, enjoying exotic foods or valuing art and history. While it is all of those things and much more, its most fundamental importance rests with its potential to bind us in a web of humanity; to enrich us by consolidating those things that we share in common; and to enlighten us with those things that define our difference, in order that they too can strengthen our bonds.

In Australia we stand as one of *the* most vibrant and culturally diverse societies in the world. Our diversity nourishes the rich human reservoir emanating from our history of migration, a reservoir that in turn helps to sustain us all and shape our place in the world. It enables multiculturalism to flourish, making what happens here important in terms of domestic stability and in terms of stability within the international domain. As we learn how to value and manage diversity better, we can help the rest of the world learn to do it better as well. Our treatment of refugees is one critical area where this is definitely true.

The Generation of Refugee Flows

The forces displacing people in the world today are much more powerful than we can appreciate. The relationship between poverty, the instability it creates, and the generation of refugees is stark. For example;

- In the world today 2.8 billion people live on less than $2 a day (UNDP).
- The top ten refugee producing and refugee receiving countries in the world are amongst to forty poorest.
- Of the 20 million people of concern to UNHCR, 7.7 million are children.
- The total number of resettlement places available to this 20 million last year—otherwise referred to as the queue—was in the vicinity of a meagre 50,000.
- In recent times the number of war victims who are civilians as opposed to combatants has risen from 5% to 90% and some five million people died in intrastate conflicts throughout the nineties, two million of them were children a further six million were wounded and over one million orphaned. (UNHCR)
- Studies of resettled refugees suggest that around one in four will have been subjected to torture or severe psychological violation prior to their arrival and seven in ten will have been subject to less severe but nevertheless traumatic experiences in violent circumstances.

These are a mere glimpse of the many reasons that perpetuate the deprivation and political instability that in turn drives human displacement globally.

The total number of people of concern to the UNHCR has not dropped below 17 million since 1990. This figure peaked at about 26 million in the mid 1990's, of which almost 15 million were designated refugees. In 2003 the total number of people of concern fell back to about 17 million, 9.5 million of which were designated refugees. By the end of 2005 that figure had jumped back up to 20.8 million of which 8.4 million were recorded as refugees—the lowest level since 1980. To think that in a quarter of a century the lowest number of recorded refugees was 8.4 million speaks volumes about the failure of the international community to either prevent refugee crises from emerging or resolve protracted refugee situations.

The proportion of Africans of concern to UNHCR since 2000 has ranged from 6 million to 4.85 million. Only a small proportion are identified as in need of resettlement, as the preference of the international community is for either voluntary repatriation or local integration as the first two preferred durable solutions. Resettlement has always been considered to be the option of last resort. However, even with a preference for resettlement being considered as the third most desirable durable solution, its full potential to rescue people in need is compromised by a lack of resettlement countries and overall places. The lack of resources for UNHCR to fully process existing caseloads compounds this problem. There is little doubt that if UNHCR had a greater capacity to assess, identify and refer all those who required resettlement, the annual figures would be dramatically higher than what they currently are.

Integration Potential

I wanted to start this presentation in this way to help contextualise concerns I have had in recent years about an emerging dialogue amongst the world's resettlement countries that could radically alter the focus of refugee resettlement programs around the world. This dialogue is about prioritising people for resettlement that have strong settlement prospects, euphemistically referred to as "integration potential" as opposed to prioritising those who are in greatest need.

This is alarming because it fundamentally distorts who the primary responsibility for responding to the human misery of war and enduring life in a refugee camp should be

shouldered by. Rather than requiring privileged developed countries to adapt and embrace people who are literally in need of saving, it locates the responsibility at the feet of refugees to demonstrate they can successfully integrate even before they have stepped foot on the shore of the would be resettlement country. In this dialogue the interests of the resettlement country are the primary concern and not the interests of refugees identified for resettlement by UNHCR as having no other viable option.

This discussion takes place in UNHCR's annual tripartite consultations on resettlement and is being lead by countries such as Denmark. I should state here that Australia has not advocated such approaches and nor is it the preferred option for UNHCR.

In 2004 Denmark introduced legislation that the integration potential of a refugee identified for resettlement be assessed as a key selection criteria. In 2005 the then Immigration Minister from the Netherlands was considering a similar initiative because of concerns about how effectively many newly arrived refugees were assimilating within Dutch society.

Further complicating this has been an escalation in concern about security issues post September 11, 2001. The introduction of much more rigorous security screening processes has significantly slowed the pace of the identification and granting of resettlement places and, in some cases, policies affecting who can be granted a visa.

Perhaps the most striking example of this can be seen in the US Patriot Act whereby any person giving material aid of any form to a combatant group or terrorist organisation cannot be granted a visa into the US. One consequence of this Bill (though unintended) has been to see women from Africa who had been forced into sexual slavery with "combatant" or "terrorist" groups being denied a visa on the basis that the sexual slavery fell within the broad definition of material aid. While there have been attempts to create exemptions that would allow people in such circumstances not to be denied a visa, this has been a slow process and has had a substantial impact on the US's ability to fulfil their resettlement quotas recent times.

Other countries have begun to structure aspects of their social policy that by default can have a detrimental impact on the settlement potential of newly arrived refugees. Here in Australia, great caution must be taken with respect to the introduction of a new citizenship test to ensure that the parameters of such a test will not unfairly discriminate against newly arrived refugees. Without a clear commitment to acknowledging the impact of prior experiences on a refugee's ability to pass the requirements of citizenship test, they may never be fully able to integrate into the Australian community. This would be experienced as yet another form of discrimination not of their making.

Misperceptions of African Resettlement

This little known dialogue is important in the context of the overblown and at times histrionic headlines splashed in some media about African, particularly Sudanese, refugees. I'm referring here to articles that deride African resettlement as exceptionally difficult and a threat to public safety, particularly in relation to the potential threat of infectious diseases and "gangs" of African young men. Both of these claims are greatly exaggerated.

It is relevant to the question of integration potential because of the extent to which such misrepresentation frightens the general public. In doing so politicians can feel a need to respond to what are really ill informed views. The danger here is that responses are ill-conceived or an over reaction, which compound the difficulties faced by refugees in the resettlement process.

In doing this such coverage runs the serious risk of diminishing essential public support for the refugee program or shifting our emphasis to only resettling those whom are easy to integrate.

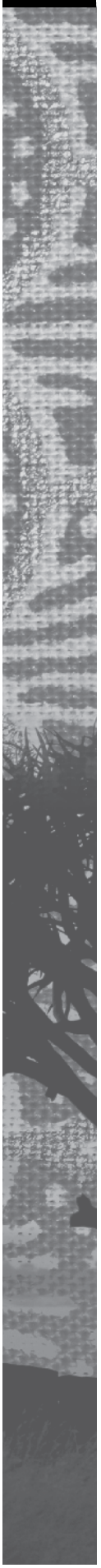
Misperceptions of African Youth Gangs (Racial)

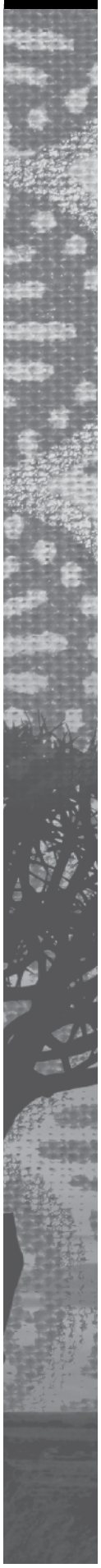
One of the criticisms of the program has centered on the existence of so called "youth gangs" and the problems they cause. This concern has often been put in racial terms as if African young people were more likely to form a "gang" than any other racial group. In my view the use of the term "gang" is inappropriate and in these circumstances such labels are unfounded and border on being racist.

When I grew up as an adolescent in West Heidelberg the "gangs" tended to be Anglo Saxon, in Fitzroy they tended to be largely Italian, in Richmond they tended to be Greek. The notion that such behavior was racially based is erroneous and demonstrates a failure to appreciate the social, structural and economic factors that shape such behavior. The claims lack any empirical evidence to support them with some senior police arguing that the claims of huge problems with African gangs are exaggerated. They claim to actually have more problems with Caucasian youths, as opposed to Africans.

Shooting Ourselves in the Foot

Another contention often argued by many people in recent years and agencies in the sector, which I believe inadvertently contributes to a negative and erroneous perception of African refugees, is that they are more difficult to resettle, that they have had more terrible experiences than previous refugees and that we do not have the capacity to respond without more resources. While I never shy away from arguing for more resources in the sector, arguments such as these taint Africans as being more complex and problematic to resettle than I believe is the case.





There are arguments that position African resettlement within a deficit framework when in truth it is merely a different kind of complexity to resettling Bosnians who spent years in concentration camps; or single Iraqi Shiite men resettled out of Raffa in the early nineties; or the Latin American communities that had fled widespread torture and persecution of a grotesque nature; or the Cambodian Lao and Vietnamese refugees who fled years of war deprivation, horrific loss and the wholesale destruction of villages.

They were all complex and challenging in their own way and we managed to help them settle and they are now part of our lives and our community and we are richer for it. We have learnt an enormous amount about how to meet such challenges and turn them into positives features of Australian society. Why do some people think it is any different when it comes to Africans? It's not…and just like those communities that came before them we are now better off for African communities forming part of our national identity also.

In concluding, the main points I want to make are that this is not a time for us to panic, we must avoid misrepresenting the challenges in a public and political sense as being overwhelming, particularly in the context of it being a problem of race. In Australia we have some of the best refugee resettlement programs in the world. We have an extremely solid foundation for the provision of settlement services through the Federal Government's Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy, through initiatives such as the Adult Migrant Education Program, Settlement Grants Program, migrant resource centres, state based refugee programs such as Victoria's Refugee Health Nurses Program, the Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma and many more that are designed to provide strategic assistance and support to newly arrived refugees. Our challenges and our responsibilities are to build on these programs in order to improve them, to strengthen the collaboration between refugee communities and service providers and to strategically advocate for changes to policy and programs wherever necessary.

For example, improving the new arrivals English-language program for young refugees and transition pathways into mainstream education, vocational training and employment is an area where we could commit more resources. If we would do this young refugees would be able to develop a clearer sense of their future and a more positive outlook.

The same applies to the Adult Migrant English Program and the Job Network Program which ought to be able to work together to facilitate a much smoother and supported transition for newly arrived refugees into the Australian workforce. The quality and caliber of health services can be improved with a particular emphasis on children and adolescent services because we all know that early intervention yields far better results in responding to the entrenched in crisis ridden problems.

And finally, perhaps one of the most critical issues is that of family reunion. Family reunion is one of the pivotal issues in enabling a person to recover from past experiences of trauma, torture, social, cultural and family dislocation. Overcoming profound experience of loss and grief is one of the most complex issues for refugees who have survived severe trauma to achieve. The ability to re-establish family in safety and security is critical to maintaining family and community integrity and achieving successful settlement in Australia.

Mr Abeselom Nega, Chairperson, *Federation of African Communities Council*

Australia has long been proud of its commitment to human rights and its role as a good global citizen, our resettlement program is tangible evidence of this. Australia's refugee humanitarian program is amongst the most generous in the world and is making a significant contribution to addressing the world-wide problem of displaced people. In this context, the Australian Government's decision to increase the African refugee intake was highly commendable. This program, which focuses on protracted situations in Africa, has been settling refugees who have significant torture and trauma experience, refugees who had no access to government services and young people with disrupted schooling. The decision that the government took to increase refugee intake from Africa reaffirms the non discriminatory nature of Australia's migration and refugee humanitarian program.

FACC considers it is essential that the benefits to Australia are recognised while acknowledging the significant challenges to service providers and policy makers. At a time when there is chronic labour shortage and more and more are looking for early retirement, the arrival of young and fit men and women from Africa is potentially good for the economy. It is now very clear that Australia will be facing significant labour shortages over the next few decades and African refugee and humanitarian entrants, along with other fellow young Australians, will be the next generation who will take part in nation building projects. For this to happen, it is critical that Government funded early intervention programs are designed to offer maximum benefits for those to whom the service is provided.

Given the challenges we face and the opportunities presented in settling refugee and humanitarian entrants, it is important that we measure the effectiveness of programs that are designed to assist the group. FACC argues a new national contract management framework be developed for IHSS and AMEP to include KPIs that link these services to refugees self reliance and support through sustainable employment outcomes. All settlement services must be measured for their effectiveness through performance measurements systems that promote accountability and transparency.

Increased numbers of African refugee and humanitarian entrants have enriched the lives many Australian communities. Who would have thought twenty years ago that African small businesses would flourish in South Western Sydney, Western Melbourne (Footscray) and South Western Brisbane? These success stories and the individual raw models that we create and nurture are critical to hopes and aspirations of many refugees. By streamlining early intervention programs and by creating an environment of self reliance and support, we are able to create citizens who are confident about their future and effective in their contribution to today's Australian society.

The significant increase in numbers of Africa refugees in a short period of time has its own challenges as African refugees coming as they do from period of protracted displacement have much more complex resettlement needs than earlier arrivals. FACC argues that the settlement service delivery model that successfully worked for earlier arrivals will need to be supported by a deliberate, integrated and well-resourced effort. This would best be realised through an information, training advocacy and help desk national centre to provide customised support services to staff of settlement services providers, national agencies and policy departments. The lack of an integrated approach to the provision of early intervention measures by all levels of governments is a significant problem. Australia will face significant social challenges if early interventions measures are not appropriate and are resourced adequately.

FACC at its recent National Conference argued that the following recommendations be implemented to overcome the current problems facing African refugees:

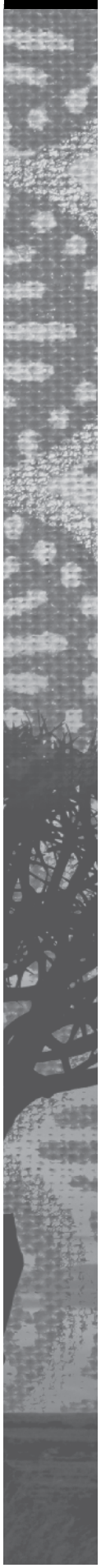
FACC Recommendations

Extend all early intervention Commonwealth funded programs, as the long-term social and economic benefits outweigh the short term investment beyond and above what has been outlined in budget 2005 and is planned for 2006. Such services include:-

- IHSS service provision for highly traumatised and vulnerable entrants- introduce provisions for long term case work service for 'at risk' cases once exited from the IHSS.
- That a provision be made for refugee and humanitarian entrants with complex cases.
- Job Network Intensive Support Customised Assistance -extended service from 9 months to 18 months with adequate resources provided to agencies to focus on long-term employment outcomes. The service should include an element of mentoring and coaching to support refuges achieve their full potential.
- Provide financial support to support community capacity building and community development projects through SGP focusing on refugee women and young people.
- Assist State governments to develop best practice education models to support young people from refugee backgrounds to obtain vocational pathways to obtain and maintain employment. Currently young refugees are disengaged from the labour market and FACC and its members organisations are very concern that these young people have the potential to exposed to crime, alcohol and drug abuse unless these timely and appropriate early intervention measures are taken
- Increased levels of resources that are allocated to the volunteer sector to introduce mentoring for those who are at risk of being long-term welfare dependent.
- Develop service standards and code of practice that governs the work of IHSS case managers, CSS case workers and other settlement workers to ensure service guarantee and ethical practices to be used by settlement services providers.
- Develop/enhance the key performance indicators for each of the settlement programs currently funded by the Commonwealth to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided to refugee humanitarian entrants. Establish an independent compliance audit framework to ensure the integrity of the service and there is value for the money invested by the Australian tax payer.
- Ensure that AMEP delivery is consistent across Australia particularly its focus is on preparing individuals to reach their full potential to gain self reliance
- Provide adequate resources to Regional IHSS service providers reflecting the special needs of those who settle in those communities particularly women at risk and young people with high support needs.
- Finally and most importantly, FACC strongly believes the creation of a national resource body which would responsible for the provision of resources and training to service providers, agencies and departments in all layers of the Australian Governments.

Concluding Plenary Address: Mr Haileluel Gebre-selassie, *African Think Tank*

In drawing this African Think Tank to a close, I believe it is important to take a moment to take a step back to reflect again on a few of the key points which have been made over the course of the Conference; examine some of the implications and outcomes; and start to turn our attention to where we go from here.



I know, when the original idea for the Conference was first mooted back in 2005, the primary motivation was to create a forum for developing a united African voice to inform, influence, and promote the well-being of African-Australians. To have – what I hope will ultimately be the first of many – specific and specialised avenues for open dialogue.

But in thinking about the goals and outcomes of this Think Tank, I am reminded of an African proverb which states that: *"Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested."*

It is a sentiment that resonates in many ways. On one level, the knowledge being referred to can mean the knowledge within the African communities : of what our major areas of need are; what upcoming concerns lay on the horizon; and what support opportunities are available. On another, it can also encompass knowledge *of* the needs and aspirations of the African communities amongst the broader Australian population – particularly policy makers, agencies and service providers. Either way, it is important to recognise that we cannot simply expect that knowledge to automatically be there at our fingertips, available to all to act upon as required. Knowledge that is fair, accurate, up-to-date, impartial, and culturally-appropriate has to be cultivated. In this, we all have a responsibility.

I think the Conference has already made some positive progress in terms of cultivating that knowledge, by fulfilling the two vital components of representation and participation. Over the past few days, one of the most satisfying comments I keep hearing is how wonderful it is to see some many different cultural and community groups gathered in the one place and able to have their voices heard. I'm sure many here will agree that it hasn't always been easy to assemble a significant representation of our African-Australian communities in one place, let alone have time to hear a range of voices and try to work through to a common view.

One cannot underestimate how important fair and accurate representation is – for smaller cultural and ethnic communities in particular. Especially if we are to overcome the problems that arise from representations and misrepresentations that have been imposed by others.

We have heard from politicians and public servants, academics and advocacy groups, social workers and community leaders. We have had rather open and honest sessions addressing issues around: mental health and the problems of domestic violence; the struggle to negotiate a dual-identity that straddles two or more cultures; barriers to employment and education; as well as strategies for organising and strengthening community action and interaction.

Representation has been diverse, and the level of participation has been impressive. But what have we learned? What are some of the key outcomes and recommendations that we can take away from the past few days? Or to continue the metaphor – having cultivated all this knowledge … it's harvesting time!

There are some key outcomes that are worth highlighting. Beginning with Commonwealth and State Government programs and services, the key themes are undoubtedly the need for improved accessibility and equitable outcomes for African communities. This applies not just to the delivery of those Government services specifically directed at culturally and linguistically diverse groups, but also funded third party programs managed by non-government agencies and service providers.

One way to help remedy this would be to ensure that the 2007 Access and Equity Report to the Commonwealth Parliament includes a particular focus on the fairness of programs and services for African-Australian communities. Another would be to require that government funded community-based service providers which target African-Australians endeavour to appoint appropriately skilled individuals from those communities to their management boards and advisory groups.

Certainly, one area in which the special needs of African-Australians needs to be better acknowledged and represented is health care – and in dealing with issues of mental health in particular.

Which is why we would like to see improvements in the education and training of mainstream mental health workers when dealing with African refuges; and greater availability of targeted, culturally-sensitive and supportive communication and community education about mental health issues such as depression and post traumatic stress; including advice on how to access appropriate support networks.

In the area of education, we believe it is time for the respective Commonwealth and State Ministers to review the effectiveness of a placement system where adolescent humanitarian entrants are inserted into schools by chronological age rather than educational proficiency. Simply put, this strategy has not worked. Perhaps it worked for other refugee communities who were already acquainted with a classroom environment and Western system of learning, but for many young African refugees, this educational format is foreign and intimidating.

With this in mind, another recommendation would involve the establishment of a specialised Refugee and Migrant Education Support Unit by the Education Department with a bilingual teaching staff and curriculum suited to the unique needs of African students. Similarly, we have found that the current arrangements for the teaching of English to young African refugees have been inadequate.

Not only would we like to see the present 6 months of English language schooling extended to 2 or more years, but ensure that English learned has a clear focus on developing careers and vocational skills pathways.

If it seems that a good deal of this Conference has focused on issues affecting African-Australian youth, it is because we are acutely aware that human loss and dislocation can be especially cruel and devastating on the young, where the impacts may not be immediately apparent.

Amongst the recommendations specifically relating to African youth, we propose a National Refugee Youth Settlement Strategy be developed at the Federal level.

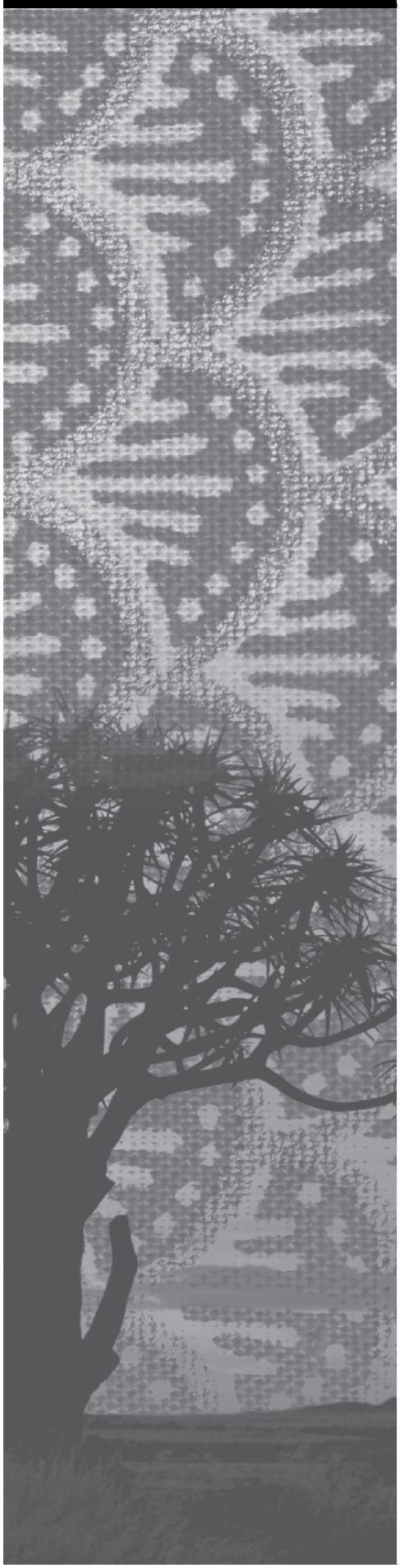
At the grassroots level, we'd like to see initiatives that : assist in building youth leadership skills amongst African Youth; strengthen cross-generation relationships between young people and adults, community leaders, and of course, their parents; assist in accessing and utilising sport and recreational services and programs.

To restore that much-needed sense of stability, hope and faith in themselves and society, a holistic approach is required. One that is not only sensitive to their particular circumstances, but recognises the need many have to maintain a living connection with their own culture, history, customs and traditions back in Africa.

It goes without saying that every child is entitled to a well educated, healthy and dignified life and the prospect of a bright future. And we are already making important progress in this regard …

Thank you all for sharing your ideas and opinions; for helping to get this garden of knowledge about the African-Australian communities up and growing.

We all have a desire to see our African-Australian communities flourish and become more self-reliant and sustainable. Let's ensure we keep the momentum of this Conference going forward and make that ambition a reality.



Where to from here?

The *African Think Tank* (ATT) successfully mounted a fully subscribed national Conference themed: "walking together at the same speed: a forum for dialogue...a cultural journey". The ATT's objective was to facilitate a "grassroots" initiative-based conference to articulate a collectively agreed advocacy agenda that African-Australian communities could adopt as a common blueprint for their support. Post-Conference feedback from the more than 400 local and interstate delegates has been overwhelmingly positive.

The inaugural *African Resettlement in Australia* conference was a historic first endeavour to bring representatives of Australia's new and emerging African Australian communities together in Victoria. The conference was strongly supported by partners in the community and government sectors who came together with a wide range of African-Australian community representatives to deliberate on settlement and community relations issues around the key themes of: community capacity building, youth, health, education and employment.

The Conference followed a similar forum auspiced by the Sydney-based *Federation of African Communities' Councils* in November 2005. FACC's *Conference Report* was launched at Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre on 2 May 2007. The ATT has worked collaboratively with FACC to ensure a strong partnership and coordinated advocacy efforts. FACC was an active and valued contributor to the ATT Conference.

The theme of "walking together at the same speed … a forum to dialogue" drew innovative, achievable ideas and proposals to enhancing education, employment, health, youth and capacity building for the mutual benefit of newly arrived communities from Africa, and the broader Australian society.

The conference was organized by Dr Berhan Ahmed and Mr Haileluel Gebre-selassie of the Melbourne-based *African Think Tank* (ATT).

"Africans arrive in Australia with tremendous good will and motivation to contribute, and we need to target service provision to support the realization of their potential," said Dr Ahmed at the time of the Conference. Dr Ahmed added that this can only occur if African-Australian clients, service providers and government work together to deliver better designed services to address areas of greatest need. *"The Conference has enabled all stakeholders to gain an updated, broadly-informed vision that we will work to translate into better outcomes for the entire community,"* added Dr Ahmed.

Recommendations to local, state and federal government have been drawn from the conference deliberations, emphasizing the need for representation and participation, as well as improved planning and delivery co-ordination, accessibility and equity of outcome. The report's recommendations call for more effective child and adult refugee education programs to optimize learning outcomes, and the further development of community-based health initiatives. The conference's youth and capacity building workshops emphasized the need for African-Australians to be actively engaged in leadership and advocacy. Support for families, with emphasis on family cohesion, emerged as a strong, overarching requirement for all aspects of a positive settlement experience. Grassroots recommendations included strengthening cross-generational relationships.

The conference called for realisation of a vision that will enhance stability, hope and faith for people emerging from trauma and stress and adjusting to a new cultural landscape. Fair and balanced reporting of refugee issues in the media was deemed critical to allowing integration and acceptance into the broader community. Too often the media is driven by commercial considerations and engages in sensationalised reporting irrespective of the prejudice generated, and it distorts situations and incidents into a collective punishment that places an unfair additional burden on struggling new communities.

The main recommendations that emerged through the three day conference have been listed at the beginning of this volume. The recommendations are mainly addressed to the government sector; but a number are directed to the wider community sector, including to the African-Australian communities themselves. Post-conference consultation on the refinement of recommendations took place with African-Australian community leaders represented on the Conference Organising Committee chaired by Dr Ahmed.

In advancing the agendas articulated through the conference, a range of possible strategies have emerged:

- The ATT needs to consolidate and strengthen its credentials as a peak advocacy agency by developing the Conference Organising Committee into an ongoing forum for articulating a unified voice for African-Australians in Victoria and nationally, underpinned by "grassroots" confidence and support. This is effectively the core of the Think Tank.
- The ATT needs to better articulate the notional framework that its constituent affiliates have the key role to bring to the Think Tank forum their ideas, concerns, suggestions and proposals from the grassroots of their respective communities. The ATT provides the opportunity for community leaders to bring these to a common table for strategic development and implementation of a shared advocacy agenda. This is much the same way that FECCA represents the collective views of its constituent State-based ECCs; and they in turn represent the collective views of their constituent ethno-specific organisations.
- The ATT needs to brand itself clearly as a vehicle for public policy advocacy by distinguishing itself from organisations with more of a settlement service delivery orientation.
- The ATT needs to grow their partnership with ECCV and FECCA to take advantage of their well-established infrastructure for contributing to public policy debate, and harness the goodwill of more established migrant communities. Presenting a paper on the ATT conference outcomes at the FECCA Congress in Hobart on 30-31 July 2007 will build a sound foundation for this partnership-building process.

Following the formal launch of this conference report, the ATT needs to lead the advocacy agenda arising from recommendations herein through a range of strategies and activities that should include:

- Formal correspondence to all Commonwealth and Victorian State Ministers to whose portfolios the report's recommendations are addressed enclosing a copy of the report and seeking a formal response;
- Similar correspondence to the local government sector at the Victorian (VLGA and MAV) and national (ALGA) levels;
- In cooperation with FACC, develop partnerships with African-Australian peak agencies in other States and Territories with a view to those organisations undertaking similar state-based strategies locally; and
- Facilitation and lobbying for formal written government responses to conference recommendations by seeking meetings with relevant Ministers and senior bureaucrats following-up ATT correspondence.

In particular, the ATT, in collaboration with FACC, needs to engage:

- Commonwealth-State Ministerial Councils and related forums that have focuses on the key areas identified for reform in this report; and
- the Australian Government's *Interdepartmental Committee on Humanitarian Settlement* chaired by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

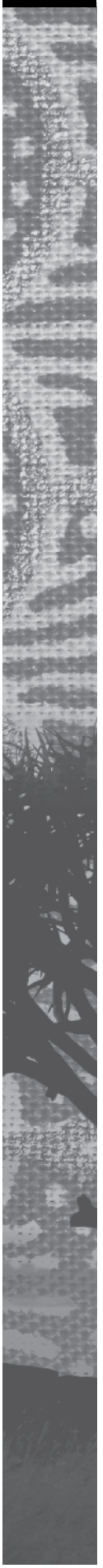
The ATT should also:

- Maintain and develop the Conference Secretariat with representation from key government agencies to provide the core "Think Tank" with advice and facilitation in progressing the advocacy agenda at the political and bureaucratic levels. This group could become known as the ATT's "Advisory Working Group".
- Consider conducting a second ATT Conference in 2009 to take stock of progress and refocus priorities and directions for 2010 and beyond.
- Consider less formal periodic community consultations to report back to stakeholders in the wider African-Australian communities and seek input from the grassroots constituency through:
    - Community meetings at MRCs, AMES etc with African-Australian clients
    - Community Radio, e.g. 3ZZZ, 3CR
    - Community newspapers such as *The Ambassador*
    - A periodic ATT newsletter
    - The new ATT Website
- Consider rebadging itself as the "African-Australian Think Tank" (*AATT*)

As the Conference drew to a close, Mr Gebre-selassie recognised the support and hard work of African community leaders and members, many community and government sector agencies, and individuals in helping to craft a better way forward for our refugee communities. Quoting an African proverb he characterized the Conference dialogue to gardening saying "Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested".

The opportunity for sharing knowledge, experience and insight provided by this Conference is critical to timely and more effective settlement of new arrivals in our community; and to realizing the potential of their contribution to the wider community.

Australia's migration and humanitarian programs are about nation building. We need to be strategic about optimising this investment's dividend for Australia.



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Appendices

Conference Program

Program Schedule

All plenary sessions will be held in GM15 (access from Level 1). The workshop rooms are correct at time of printing. Please see the Registration Desk for any amendments to room allocation during the Conference.

	WEDNESDAY 11TH APRIL 2007
14.00 – 14.30	**Registration** — Level 1 Function Space
14.30 – 15.00	**Opening Ceremony** Room GM15 **Chairperson: Margaret Coffey,** Broadcaster, ABC Radio National **Joy Murphy,** Welcome to Country **Dr. Berhan Ahmed,** Chairperson, African Think Tank Inc **Dr. Jackie Huggins,** Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia and Deputy Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland **Prof David de Kretser,** AC, Governor of Victoria
15.00 – 15.30	**Plenary Session: keynote speakers** Room GM15 **Mr Laurie Ferguson,** Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs **Ms Voula Messimeri Chair,** Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia **Lord Mayor John So,** City of Melbourne
15.30 – 16.00	**Afternoon tea & networking** Level 1 Function Space **Proudly sponsored by Victorian Multicultural Commission**
16.00 – 17.00	**Cultural festival —** Level 1 Function Space
18.00 – 19.00	**Soccer match**
	THURSDAY 12TH APRIL 2007
08.30 – 09.00	**Registration —** Level 1 Function Space
09.00 – 10.30	**Plenary session: keynote speakers** Room GM15 **Chairperson: Dr Bulent (Hass) Dellal** OAM, Executive Director, Australian Multicultural Foundation **Mr Abdoulie Janneh** UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of Economic Commission for Africa **Mr Yehudi Blacher** Secretary, Department of Victorian Communities **Dr Georgia Paxton** Specialist Physician, Royal Children's Hospital, Immigrant Health Clinic **Mr Tony Burke** Shadow Minister for Immigration

10.30–11.00	**Morning tea** Level 1 Function Space **Proudly sponsored by Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs**
11.00–12.30	**Concurrent Sessions (choose one)**

Room GM15 **Health:** **Mental health** **Facilitator:** **Dr. Ida Kaplan** **Presenters:** Theresa Sengaaga Ssali, Arhet Gebrat, Amuna Abdella, JorgeAroche, Sheik Issa, Frances Acquh	**Room 0104** **Youth:** **Youth Culture & Identity** **Chair: Abdul Muse & Abdi Salad** Halake Ganyu, Developing a bicultural identity for better integration — the psychosocial experiences of Horn of African Refugee Young Men Peter Mbago Wakholi, Negotiating Cultural Identity Through the Arts Gatwech Puoch, Impact of Settlement on Sudanese Family Structure and the Evolve of Intergenerational Conflict **Panellists:** Khalid Abdulwahab, Achol (Wilma) Madut, Akoc Manheim, Benjamin Madut, Faten Mohamed	**Room 0102** **Employment:** **Pathways to Employment** ***Sponsored by AMES*** **Chairperson:** **Ahmed Yusuf** **Presenters:** Haileluel Gebre-Selassie (recruitment) Malyuun Ahmed (discrimination) Dr Melika Yassin Sheikh-Eldi (networks) **Equal Opportunity Commission:** Padma Raman **Juliana Nkrumah,** Centrelink s Role in African Resettlement in Australia **Israel Osonmoh,** How Have African Immigrants to Tasmania Fared in the Local Labour Market?	**Room 0106** **Education:** **Vocational education/pathways** ***Sponsored by AMES*** **Chair:** **Dr Abraham Mamer** **Presenter:** Khalid Osman **Panellists:** David Rosel, Michael O Brien, Margot Hennessey, Fran MacMahon-Sers, Mohamed Sifaf	**Room 0109** **Capacity Building:** **Organising Communities** **Facilitator:** **Maria Dimopoulos** **Presenter:** Rachel Smith **Panellists:** Bunmi Ajayi, Clyde Salumu, Abraham Hadgu, Dr Dvir Abramovich

12.30 – 13.30	**Lunch**
13.30 – 15.00	**Concurrent Sessions (choose one)**

Room GM15 **Health:** **Domestic Violence** **Facilitator: Maria Dimopoulos** **Presenter:** Samia Baho **Panellists:** Magistrate Anne Goldsborough, Sergeant Charles McIntyre, Diana Orlando	**Room 0104** **Youth:** ***good settlement for young people*** **Chairperson:** **Carmel Guerra** **Panellists:** Leigh Hunter, Leanne McGraw, John Zika, Nik Filips **Young Persons:** Nadia Mohammed, Abdul Muse, Yusuf, Ahmed Ahmed **Prof Helen Ware,** Basic Needs of Africans Settling in Rural Areas **Al Hines,** The Rights of the Individual and the Impact on Families and Communities	**Room 0102** **Employment:** **Skills of the Future** **Chairperson:** **Stephen Ward** **Presenters:** Andrew Rimington, Ivan Neville, Liz Sinclair	**Room 0106** **Education:** **Barriers to education:** **Chair:** **Helen De Silva Joyce** **Presenter:** David Dorward	**Room 0109** **Capacity Building:** **Strengthening Communities** **Facilitator:** **Nick Chiam** **Presenters:** Leanne Tu ipulotu and Bobby Whitfield Cathy Guinness, Haileluel Gebre-Selassie

15.00 – 15.30	**Afternoon tea —** Proudly sponsored by Centrelink
15.30 – 17.00	**Plenary session: keynote speakers** Room GM15 **Chairperson: Margaret Piper,** Margaret Piper and Associates **Mr. George Lekakis** Chair, Victorian Multicultural Commission **Fr Joe Caddy** CEO, Centacare Melbourne **Ashley M. Dickinson,** APM, Commander, Operations Coordination Department, Victoria Police **Samia Baho,** Multicultural Centre for Women s Health for African Australia Women s issues.
19.00 – Late	**Conference Dinner**
	FRIDAY 13TH APRIL
08.30 – 09.00	**Registration**
09.00 – 10.30	**Plenary Session: keynote speakers** Room GM15 ***Sponsored by Community Languages Australia*** **Chairperson: Ms Fiona Sharkie,** Director, Office of Women s Policy **Dr. Sharman Stone** Minister for Workplace Participation (rural/regional refugee resettlement including workforce **Mr. Abdullah Saleh Mbamba** Director, United Nations Information Centre For Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific **Mr. Stefan Romaniw OAM,** Executive Director, Community Languages Australia **Mr. Paris Aristotle AM,** Director, Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture
10.30 – 11.00	**Morning tea** Proudly sponsored by Department of Immigration and Citizenship
11.00 —12.30	**Concurrent sessions (choose one)**

Room GM15 **Health:** ***Developing appropriate service models for communities; rights and access*** **Facilitator:** **Mmaskepe Sejoe** **Presenters:** Wemi Oyekanmi, Zein Ab Mohaoud, Naomi Ngo, Abdi Muhammed, Halima Sheik El Din, Jill Parris, Kate Walker	**Room 0104** **Youth:** ***Youth & The Law — interface with legal system, rights and responsibilities*** **Chairperson:** **Sam Blay** Presenter: Les Twentyman	**Room 0102** **Employment:** ***Community Driven Employment*** **Chairperson:** **Susan Chou Allender** **Presenters:** Kay Davies, Chris Hazelman & Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe **Maria Axarlis-Coulter,** Customer Service Traineeships — Recruits from African Communities **Stephanie Lagos,** Helping African-Australians Gain New Status and Respect	**Room 0106** ***Education:*** ***Families and Schools*** **Chair: John Bellavance** **Presenters:** Ahmed Bawa Kuyin **Panellists:** Robert Colla, Thiik Giir, Stella Girr **Kellie Karanztas,** Promoting Pathways Through School for African Young People: Initials Programs **Jarrah Hoffmann-Ekstein** SPARK (St Vincent de Paul Assisting Refugee Kids)	**Room 0109** ***Capacity Building Connecting Communities*** **Facilitators:** **Dr Moses Adepoju &** **Malcolm Haddon** **Presenters:** Ms Jamila Homayun & Mr. Ismail Ibrahim, Anna Hall **Panellists:** Damien Ferrie, John Williams, Frances Davies

12.30 – 13.30	**Lunch**
13.30 – 15.00	Health, education, youth, capacity building, employment groups get together and summarise recommendations based on the issues raised by community groups and speakers; critical analysis and proposed policy solutions
15.00 – 15.30	**Afternoon tea** Proudly sponsored by Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
15.30 – 17.00	**Plenary: Resolutions, frameworks, recommendations presented by each 5 workshop groups** Room GM15 **Chairperson: Dr. Geoffrey Hawker,** Department of Politics and International Relations, Macquarie University **Mr Abeselom Nega** Chairperson, Federation of African Communities Council **Conference Close: *The way Forward*** **Haileluel Gebre-Selassie,** Policy Advisor, Department of Victorian Committees

Membership of Conference Organising Committee, Secretariat and Program Committees

Organising Committee

Conference Organising Committee

Berhan ***Ahmed***
Haileluel ***Gebre-selassie***
Samuel ***Kout***
Salaad ***Ibrahim***
Adamu ***Tefera***
David ***Lukudu***
Sarah ***Berberi***
Faten ***Mohamed***
Abdurehaman ***Osman***
Ahmed ***Abdelrahim***
William ***Daw***
Amelework ***Bezabeh***

Program Committees:

Health

Theresa ***Sengaaga Ssali***
Adamu ***Tefera***
Yusuf ***Haibe***
Sarah ***Berberi***
Samia ***Baho***
Caroline ***Butterworth***
Kate ***Bean***
Michal ***Morris***
Jill ***Parris***
Moses ***Adepoju***
Amuna ***Abdella***

Youth

Abdi ***Salad***
Faten ***Mohamed***
Isaac ***Achol***
Carmel ***Guerra***
Anthony ***Abate***
Steve ***Soden***
Abdul ***Muse***
Belinda ***Duggan***
Halakhe ***Ganyu***
Diana ***Amato***
Ahmed ***Bawa Kuyini***
Akoc ***Manheim***

Employment

Adamu ***Tefera***
Jama ***Farah***
Maria ***Axarlis-Coulter***
Issa ***Farah***
Hakan ***Akyol***
John ***Reen***
Apollo ***Nsubuga-Kyobe***
Tony ***O'Farrell***
Belinda ***Duggan***
Viviane ***Chemali***
Kay ***Davis***
Bekelech(Becky) ***Habte***

Education

Deng ***Tor Yong***
Amelework ***Bezabeh***
Samuel ***Kout***
David ***Huggins***
Kris ***McDonald***
Issa ***Farah***
Mary ***Scully***
Christine ***Howell***
Kelly ***Juriansz***
Ahmed ***Bawa Kuyini***

Community Capacity Building

Abraham ***Hadgu***
Clyde ***Salumu***
Abdurahman ***Osman***
Gatwech ***Kulang***
Peter ***van Vliet***
Nick ***Chiam***
David ***Dorward***
Margaretha ***Korn***
Stephen ***Oluyide***
Bunmi ***Ajayi***
Esmeralda ***Gaba***
Linda ***Petrone***
Moses ***Adepoju***
Amuna ***Abdella***

Conference Secretariat:

Abraham ***Mamer***, City of Darebin
Akoch ***Manhim***, Sudanese Lost Boys Association of Australia
Belinda ***Duggan***, Department of Immigration and Citizenship
Berhan ***Ahmed***, African Think Tank
Caroline ***Butterworth***, Department of Human Services
Con ***Pagonis***, Volunteer, consultant
Dian ***Amato***, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues
Faten ***Mohamed***, Refugee Young People
Gail ***Latchford***, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
Geoffrey ***Leach***, Department of Immigration and Citizenship
Haileluel ***Gebre-selassie***, Department for Victorian Communities
Hakan ***Akyol***, Victorian Multicultural Commission
Kelly ***Juriansz***, Department of Education and Training
Katrina ***Lee***, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
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Margaretha ***Korn***, Department of Immigration and Citizenship
Elleni ***Bereded***, Victorian Multicultural Commission

ATT Website Homepage

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Department of Human Services

Foundation House
The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture

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NEW SOUTH WALES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NSW AMES
QUALITY LANGUAGE & LITERACY SERVICES

AMES

VICTORIA POLICE

COMMUNITY LANGUAGES AUSTRALIA

CITY OF Moonee Valley

City of Whitehorse
City of Melton
Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups
Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau
Maribyrnong City Council African community Partnership
Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues