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Sanctuary Northern Rivers

Keeping in touch

Responding to refugee needs

I wonder if we are able to put ourselves in the shoes of the refugee. Taking flight from all that we know and love – seeking somewhere, somehow, the means to find peace – if only for a moment. I wonder if we are able to put ourselves into the heart of those who venture through the customs gates of Australia, in a sea of faces – searching longingly for the hand that has reached out to them. And as recognition dawns that there is a face that is known, although never seen, I wonder if we could know whether it is sadness or joy, love or pain that washes over that heart.

We are strangers perhaps, inasmuch that in the physical sense, our paths have not met. Yet in the inevitable tearful embrace of that union, we both realise that our journeys have been intertwined, our hopes have been shared, and that our joy is mutual.

To use the phrase of “sponsoring” a refugee has a hollow ring to it – as though packaging a commodity of sorts. How far could this be from the truth? Our work to support refugees operates at a much deeper level – it is an endeavour

that moves all involved; profoundly so. From the earliest days of that courageous contact made by an individual or his/her family, to the ongoing dialogue over months – years, chemistry evolves. This chemistry must be allowed to permeate beyond the individual contact, but touch widely – both from the community that farewells its



travellers, and the community that receives them. For that is what is abiding – that collectively we share the sadness and the hope, the pain and the joy. Our endeavours are not individual but communal, and highly dependent upon the efforts and energies of each community.

We continue to be blessed with a trickle of new arrivals, but we

have concern, that there may again soon be a hiatus in the pace of this settlement. In mid 2009, Sanctuary Northern Rivers determined that a manageable target of local settlement was in the order of 4 – 6 families each year. This is factored upon considerations that include volunteer supply, housing, employment, and funds. It is not easy to know how many of the refugees we ‘sponsor’ will be approved by Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). DIAC have the unenviable task of sifting through 60,000 – 70,000 applications to support settlement of about 6,500 sponsored applicants each year. Our success rate at different times has

varied from 20% down to less than 1%. Of late, the refusal rate has again been very high. This may have much to do with the pressures of onshore applications – asylum seekers.

Those who have fled their countries and found their way to Australian soil/waters are in no different circumstances to those who have found their way to other sovereign nations of Africa, Asia and Europe. Over the past year, Australia has received in the vicinity of 4,000 – 5,000

“Any person who owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his or her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself to protection of that country”

UN Convention on Refugees, 1951

Responding to refugee needs (continued from page 1)

asylum seekers – this compares to Pakistan who has received about 1,800,000, or Syria – 980,000. Australia, as signatory to the UN Convention on Refugees, is obliged to accept any asylum seeker if they are determined to be a refugee. That is, someone who has a well founded fear of persecution. This is regardless of their financial or professional background or heritage – they have fled because their life and their family are at grave risk.

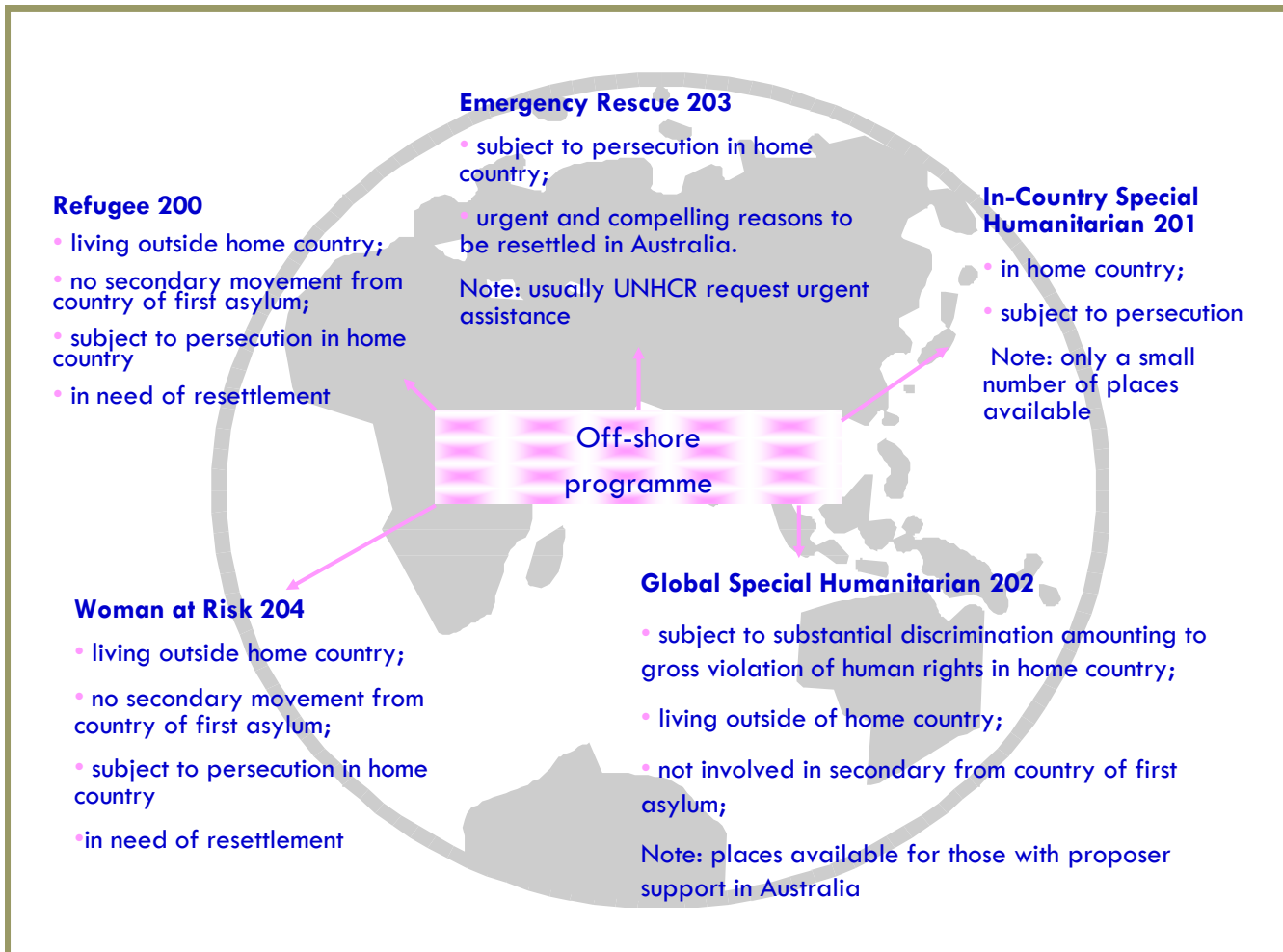
Australia’s immigration program, however, unlike any other Western country, is structured in such a way that asylum seekers who are determined to be genuine refugees, are allocated places that would have been pro-

vided to sponsored applicants. With the current ‘spike’ in asylum seekers being detained, we fear that this may explain the recent increase in refusal for many that we have supported.

This leads me to seek support in two ways: (a) I would encourage advocacy that government policy be more accommodating of humanitarian need; rather than one desperate group being seen to be portrayed as displacing another, that we seek that asylum seekers be absorbed in the broader immigration program; (b) given that we expect a slowing of sponsored arrivals, perhaps we should consider an active role in regional and supported settlement of asylum seekers. Your advice and direction is greatly valued.

Michael Douglas, June 2010

The Australian Commonwealth Humanitarian Support – off-shore programme



HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE EQUITY FORUM – MONDAY 7TH JUNE

On Monday 7th June some 250+ high school students from across the region attended a Human Rights and Social Justice Equity Forum instigated by Richmond River High School and supported by Southern Cross University.

The students came to learn about a range of human rights and social justice issues and to explore what can be done about them.

Michael Douglas and I were invited to be part of a panel at one session which focussed on Taking Responsible Action – a session at which there were approximately 150 students. Michael

spoke about the journey that many refugees have to take to preserve their life and about Sanctuary's role in helping some of these make a new life in Australia.

I spoke about our Universal Declaration of Human Rights project and how our commitment to human rights underpins everything we do in Sanctuary, emphasising that we only have rights to the extent that we stand up for the rights of others, in particular the least empowered in our society.

After the session there were a number of students from local

schools that expressed interest in their school obtaining a UDHR wall hanging (we had one on display at the forum). These expressions of interest we are following up and hope to be able to make a presentation some time next term.

All in all it was very inspiring to see 250+ high school students who considered it worthwhile to explore the issues of human rights and social justice as they impact on our society and world today. It gives one great hope for our future – particularly the future of the Northern Rivers.

Russell Trebilcock
Vice President

"... the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people."

Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Rhythm Konnections African Village Nite: A Celebration!

Greetings!
Just letting you know we have another African Village nite coming up on the 4th of July at Ewingsdale Hall. The last one was a huge success and this one the food promises to better with our professional Congolese chef Bhahati Salema preparing traditional vegetarian and non vegetarian Congolese dishes.

Entertainment by Rhythm Konnections Students, performing rhythms and dances from West Africa. The film is African Footprint. An amazing journey of dance.

All newly settled refugees are invited as guests so please let everyone know to come bring their families and share culture with the wider community.

**African Village Nite
4th of July
Ewingsdale Hall
6pm
Performance, African feast and film
\$10 @ the door
Traditional African food from \$10-\$15**

New arrivals:

We welcome the first Rwandan family to Lismore, Sibomana and Emilienne and their two delightful girls: Janine and Constance, who arrived in Lismore on May 19. Sibomana and Emilienne left their home in Rwanda in 1994, fleeing to the Democratic Republic of Congo. Following 18 months in a refugee camp there, they were forced to leave, spending the next 5–6 years in

the jungle of the Congo. For the last 8–9 years, they have lived in Kenya. They are delighted to be able to make Lismore their home of peace.

Their settlement has been supported by Pam Ashton Thank you!

Last week, we received the letter of approval for a Sudanese family – Hellen Deng, and her four

boys, aged 12–22 years. We expect that they will arrive by August. Anyone who may be able to give a hand with their settlement is encouraged to call Julie.

Julie: 6629 8393



Jemima – resident of Lismore since 2009

Fundraising activities

The following events are planned to help enhance our funds. Help for any or all of these activities would be greatly appreciated:

- June 20 – Lismore Car Boot Market – charity of the day
- August 1: Byron Community Market – charity of the day – volunteers needed please
- August–Lismore Farmer’s Markets – BBQ every Saturday at Lismore Showgrounds- Volunteer Master BBQers please!
- September 7: Lismore Square – UDHR stall
- Father’s Day, September 5: Cafe NASHUA . What better way to spend Father’s Day! Come and soak up the sunshine and beauty in the hills of Bangalow.

Tentative plans are in place for several other activities:

Film Night, Bangalow A&I Hall

Scrabble Night

If you wish to host a meal on behalf of Sanctuary – not only is it a great family/community gathering, it also has an extended purpose. Each \$1,000 raised will support an airfare for one new arrival.

Any other ideas are welcome. Our hope is to achieve a wider reach while still able to raise much needed funds through a number of smaller activities. Creative minds and enthusiastic helpers are required.

A big thank you to Corrine and Brian Nash who hosted a French Restaurant night at their home in June, raising \$1150.

Millennium Development Goals Plenary

Sanctuary Northern Rivers hosted a community discussion in late March on meaningful efforts to tackle global poverty. The forum provided an opportunity to hear the insights of the people, policy makers and practitioners that have been at the core of international aid programs in recent decades. It provided an opportunity for the community to shape and put forth its views on development that will better the lives of many.

The discussion was lead by a panel that included renowned author and pioneer of world lo-

calisation movement, Dr Helena Norberg-Hodge, regional manager of Australian Red Cross, Dr Vahideh Hosseini, Professor Lesley Barclay, Head of University Department of Rural Health, and Adeyemi Johnson, formerly of Sierra Leone.

It was witness to the amazing well of wisdom and experience in our own community. The evening was attended by 60-70 persons, who probed the panel on aspects of poverty and the means by which we may go about tackling this most significant of concerns.

The Honourable Janelle Saffin, herself no stranger to international development, provided a fitting conclusion to the evening in challenging community and practitioners to understand the factors that contribute to poverty and holding the belief that we as community can change the current norms in achieving a more equitable world.

Our thanks to Caritas who hosted the exhibition on the MDGs, and Sarah King, who very kindly filmed the night. A DVD is available of the forum.





Brian, Corrine and India Nash, in French mode, hosted a restaurant night in their home for their local community, raising \$1150 – a magnificent effort. They said that the sparkle was not just in the eyes of those who shared in the amazing meal.

Congolese gathering

In early May, the Congolese community gathered to celebrate their growing community.

The day was touched with emotion, as we all joined in song, and prayer, story and laughter.

It also celebrated leaving behind a difficult past. They put out an unbridled display of gratitude for the freedoms they have found in this Northern Rivers community. It is their hope that they may continue to re-

gather with their lost families, and continue to build their new community to shine as a beacon of hope for all in this, their new home, as well as for those who continue to walk the refugee road.



The Congolese communities of Lismore and Mullumbimby recently celebrated a day of welcome and shared song

In today's world, increasing numbers of people are not able to avail themselves of the protection of their state and therefore require the protection of the global community. Refugees are a painful living reminder of the failure of societies to live in peace and our responsibility to help those forced to flee. Flight often follows human rights 'abuses and violations as well as various forms of social breakdown, including war. These issues are linked to concepts such as justice, equality, tolerance, freedom, minority rights and the formation of community.

<http://www.unhcr.org/uk/info/>

5 Improve maternal health

6 Combat HIV/AIDS malaria and other diseases

7 Ensure environmental sustainability

8 Global partnership for development

Human Rights and Social Justice in the 21st Century

On June 7, the student equity and social justice group of Richmond River High School organized a very successful forum for high school students at Southern Cross University. Over 500 students participated in a series of panel discussions and presentations that explored many confronting human rights issues and practical ways that these could be addressed.

The day was nothing short of inspiring, to witness so many

school-aged youth exploring a passion for justice.

Sanctuary Northern Rivers was invited to provide two presentations. Russell Trebilcock spoke on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights school banner project, and Michael Douglas spoke on the global reality of and issues facing refugees.

Well done to all those students and their mentors for putting together a program that showed

so much foresight and displayed so much hope.

Michael Douglas

... it again shows the level of goodwill that exists within our community, and the broader level of concern that our local community holds for global need and the fragility of human nature

Support for African family

Last month we put out a plea to assist three young persons who have been living in deplorable circumstances in Kenya.

These three – two brothers and a sister – were recently ‘found’ by their brother, who has settled here in Lismore. It was a finding of mixed emotion – of joy that they were still alive, yet painful to know of their current conditions.

We estimated that for a total of \$8000, we could provide shelter and health care, and enroll them into a school in Nairobi, keeping them safe until such time as we may be able to re-unite them with their brother here in Australia (dependent upon the success of their application)

What a generous community we are shown to be. All \$8,000 has

been donated! While this may seem remarkable, it again shows the level of goodwill that exists within our community, and the broader concern that the local community holds for global needs and the fragility of human nature.

THANK YOU!

African Refugee Community Development Project

Over the past 2-3 years, the different sectors of the African community have managed a large project grant to strengthen their leadership and assist in the development of their fledgling community. It has been a magnificent effort from all concerned, embracing a wide range of activities.

The project is due to wrap up, and will celebrate its journey with a picnic day at Lake Ainsworth on Saturday 26 June.

All are invited to join in us in a relaxed BBQ lunch. Other activities planned for throughout the day include canoeing and raft building,

beach games, archery and indoor rock climbing.

You are asked to contact Luke Addinsall, project coordinator if you would like to attend.

Luke's contact: **66226116**

Position Vacant Sanctuary Policy Officer – Volunteer Coordination

Sanctuary has received a grant to fund a person one day a week to assist with the development of our policy and procedural framework for the coordination of volunteers – in particular those assisting with the settlement of refugees.

Position : 1 day / week from ASAP to end March 2011

Placement : The person will be employed through the Lismore Neighbourhood Centre for the fixed term of the contract

For a job description and selection criteria please contact either:

Russell Trebilcock: rjtreb@tpg.com.au

or

Julie Webb: 66298393

Applications will close on : Thursday 8th July

Interviews during week beginning : Monday 12 July

The Arrival of the Congolese Family in our Street

On returning from our recent holiday from the Daintree, we were pleasantly surprised to find the Congolese refugee family, who had been warmly welcomed to our community by the local newspaper, had moved into our street.

There they were, six children riding their bikes up and down the street. My kids were excited to have new play mates – and so many of them. And not only that, it turned out that some of that beautiful family's children were put into the same school classes as some of our children.

Our eight year old son is very social and he soon was not seen anymore. Well, you could find him three houses down the road playing with his new friends. Other neighbour's kids included them in their soccer training and you can now find a whole bunch of children walking over to the soccer fields and kicking the ball.

Other neighbour kids are a bit more reluctant with the new energy in the street, but no doubt they will soon be included in the big bunch of ten children playing in the street now.

Interesting is that the street has not become more noisy – the children's play is very joyful and harmonious. It seems that the Congolese children still know how to play outside instead of sitting in front of television or play stations. It is great to see that this family is integrating well into the community. There are many cars coming with volunteers helping them initially to stand on their own feet soon.

Whenever we walk through town or around the block and meet the new neighbours, they always wave with a beautiful smile on their face. They have certainly been a cultural enrichment to our neighbourhood.

Lismore Car boot market 20/06/10

Coin donations

\$ 716.00

Cake stall

\$ 260.00

Fair trade goods

\$ 36.00

Busker \$ 15.25

Total \$ 1,027.25

Many thanks to all involved – particularly Jayne and Brian for their organisation efforts, and the many volunteers who undertook the rather thankless task of 'bucketing'. And special thanks to Isaac.

*There they were, six children
riding their bikes up and down
the street*

*My kids were excited to have
new play mates – and so many
of them*



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contact details
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Email: info@sanctuary.asn.au



Sanctuary Northern Rivers Inc is an organisation committed to the betterment of the life and welfare of refugees throughout the world. It accepts that persons flee their home and country for fear of persecution – be it for their race, their religion, their nationality, political opinion or because they belong to a particular social group.

Many of these people are unable to return home. Frequently, they remain in intractable situations, in makeshift shelters, dependent upon inadequate sources of food and water, living with prevailing hostility and daily vulnerability. Their fundamental human rights of freedom, and their aspirations of hope are elusive, their lives seemingly without opportunity for a future of stability and joy.

Sanctuary Northern Rivers Inc brings together people and institutions of all persuasions and common interests, in an effort to better the lives of refugees in a compassionate and just manner.

All members welcome to the next Sanctuary board meeting:

July 8th

6.30pm

Lismore Workers Club

Membership due this month . . . annual renewal is needed!

We hope that this newsletter inspires you, to renew your own membership with Sanctuary Northern Rivers, and also to encourage others to join.

We recognise that by opening our hearts and doors to new arrivals, we not only enhance our community, but we create an environment in which successful refugee settlement can happen.

This is the fundamental reason we need members—to be a part of a community that makes refugee settlement in our region viable.

We have included an application form in the email as a pdf that you can download and print

We thank you for your past support and we are very appreciate of any further support you wish to give.