



African Think Tank Inc.

WORKING WITH VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY

ABN 68 678 932 201

A: PO Box 2307 Footscray 3011 E: africanthinktank@hotmail.com

3 December 2007

On Saturday 1 December, 2007, approximately over 350 African residents in and around the Flemington/North Melbourne area met to discuss relations between the Police and African youth, and to establish the root causes, in a community-based forum attended by representatives of the Flemington and Kensington Community Legal Centre, the Moonee Valley City Council Partnership Manager, Jesuit Social Services and the African Think Tank. The meeting was chaired by a representative of Myriad Consulting.

The forum was very productive and participants expressed their views and frustrations at not being treated fairly, not being heard, and not being accurately reported on the media. The community forum identified issues and suggested a number of possible actions to address the current problems in Flemington.

Issues identified by community forums

- Rapid turnover of officers at the Flemington Police Station, particularly as newly graduated, inexperienced police are consistently stationed there.
- Community leaders flagged that the turnover ruptures relations that the African community develops with officers; and the inexperience of new graduates is seen as a factor in over-zealous, 'hair-triggered' and heavy-handed responses, which have done immense damage to the trust and confidence the young Africans have in the Police. African youth said that they are feeling like 'guinea pigs' in the training of new Police.
- This lack of continuity at Flemington Police Station has also resulted in the collapse and loss of community policing measures that had been developed over several years with strong input and commitment from the African community, including with the genuine interest and hard work of young African people.
- Young people reported that aggressive interrogations of young Africans on the housing estate, with reports that the same person can be intercepted and interrogated by police on repeated occasions on the one day, without apparent reason or cause. This is making young Africans feel they are being unfairly targeted due only to their skin color. They said that it is a very difficult and hurtful concept for young

refugees, who came to Australia for a better and safer life, to accept as setting the tone for their future.

- Some young people criticized Debney Park Secondary College and other schools in the locale, as responsible for the root causes of the problems; for failing refugee youth through not providing adequate education and skill development, particularly in vital areas such as English, despite being funded to provide a special English Bridging Program for refugee youth; and for expelling students with the result that they end up on the streets with nothing to do, and no tools to establish a future.
- Mothers also highlighted the need for a holistic engagement strategy for young people and the lack of recreational facilities in the area.
- The need for support for families, community leaders and the elderly is seen as a critical to address the current ongoing issues with young people in the areas. Particularly the local women group requires greater support as they deal with young people in Flemington.

Proposed Actions

1. The need for urgent action is needed from the top down through the intervention of force command of Victoria Police, with whom a meeting is being sought. The forum requests a senior member of the Victorian Police Force Command and other key government and non government bodies to meet with representatives of the African communities as soon as possible.
2. The forum nominated a committee of young people to engage with further discussion. A holistic capacity building approach requires addressing multi level problems and service shortages that disadvantage the local residents particularly the young people.
3. Auditing the existed local services and their coordination should be given priorities. This must be done in light of creating more opportunities for young people in employment and further education.
4. The need for ongoing consultations with key stakeholders, community groups including young people should be given priorities.

Please note that the minutes from Saturday's African residents in Flemington and North Melbourne meeting will be ready sometime soon.

Dr. Berhan Ahmed
Chairperson
African Think Tank Inc.