



MEDIA RELEASE

From:

African Think Tank Inc.

WORKING WITH
VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY
www.att.org.au

ATT Media Release 21 June 2010

FREEDOM FROM FEAR MEANS FREEDOM TO GIVE

This year's Refugee Week is an opportunity for us all to rejoice in the welcome that Australia continues to give to refugees, asylum seekers and to celebrate the rich, varied and powerful contributions that refugees have made to Australia.

Since 1945, over 750,000 refugees have settled in Australia. They brought with them hope, dreams, ideal, ideas and a desire to contribute dynamically to our wonderful rainbow land. Working hard to establish themselves and to build their lives, they bring with them energy and diversity. They keep our culture fresh and thriving. They build our economic capacity by giving us the ability to connect with markets, peoples and cultures across the world.

During the course of history, the sources of refugees changes. There is no part of the globe, not even our own, that has guaranteed safety from convulsions and storms. During the middle of the last century, it was European culture that experienced war, suffering and famine. Let us not forget that at that time, Africa was almost the sole source of refugee and freedom for the displaced. Jewish refugees and others found harbour in Africa when no-one else would take them. During the second half of the centuries, conflict and natural disasters displaced many in Asia – Bangladesh, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia. Our own country was one factor in creating that disruption, and in helping to heal it. In this century, it is the countries of Africa that are experiencing the worst torment and the worst horror, and that are calling on us for aid. Let us keep the long view of history, and remember that we too may one day need aid. Let us remember, also, that when peace and healing came to these historical areas of convulsion, they experienced unprecedented economic growth as their people seized the opportunity to make up for lost years. This will come with Africa, too.

The theme of this refugee week is 'Freedom From Fear'. Fear of war, fear of torture, starvation, disease, severe and deadly poverty. A person that lives in fear can never contribute to society: his/her live is concerned completely with just keeping him/herself and their families alive. In Australia we may disagree with our government, we may work for change, but we do not fear bullets or knocks at the door in the night. And we have much to be thankful for in that Australia missed most of the economic downturn and is still the land of opportunity. The refugees that come here seize that opportunity with both hands, doing everything they can to build their lives and their families lives. And among refugees there is a culture and a commitment, too, to giving back. To building the country that has harboured them.

Yet there are still fears. Refugees fear for relatives and friends, still in the most extreme, urgent and terrible of dangers. Often it takes years to find scattered family, who fled to different countries as the opportunity arose. Helping refugees to settle here also means that we understand that they will work towards helping family to join them. This is a necessary and healthy part of refugee settlement. Really to make a difference means that we help families to unit and to stay together. And refugees also bear many scars from severe mistreatment, misfortune and torture. We have facilities to help with the physical problems, but we are lacking in programs to help refugees deal with the terrible trauma and losses in their pasts.

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Australia is the lucky country. It is a compassionate country. Much of this understanding and compassion within us comes because we are a diverse culture and one strong thread in that culture has been the gifts that refugees bring. Let us continue to work together in brotherhood to make a fairer country and a better world.

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