



African Think Tank Inc.

WORKING WITH VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY

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RE: ATT Media Release:: Call for State and Commonwealth Leadership

In response to a near breakdown in relations between Victorian Police and African youth following the heavy-handed treatment of a young man returning home to Flemington from work on 25 November, 2007, the African Think Tank (ATT) has taken the initiative of organising a forum for African youth.

This forum will be held in Flemington on Saturday, 1 December 2007.

Once again, responsibility has fallen to voluntary leaders and concerned members of refugee communities, and their volunteer assistants, to try to deal with serious matters, however and whenever they arise, using their own personal resources of time and money.

The ATT believes that the lack of proactive, consultative support by the State and Federal Governments for the grassroots of refugee communities has contributed significantly to ongoing, avoidable problems which are unnecessarily draining the morale and settlement progress of refugee communities.

This perpetuates a pattern whereby:

- Refugee community leaders and volunteers have been providing endless voluntary service input to address issues affecting their communities. Simultaneously, Governments channel almost all resources to service agencies. Thus, unpaid refugees and volunteers effectively prop up and subsidise multi-million dollar bureaucracies and service agencies, including via unpaid after-hours and weekend work as problems arise, without even receiving reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.
- Hundreds of millions of dollars in funding is allocated by State and Commonwealth governments to assist refugee settlement. Yet, almost none is allocated to grass roots refugee community associations, and there is little public accountability for how massive funding appropriated to refugee service providers is used, and for what outcomes.

- In Government-funded organizations ranging from small to high level settlement providers to ethnic organizations to welfare organisations, recently arrived Africans do not appear welcomed into their senior management structure. However, such organizations regularly invite Africans for public photo opportunities, to launch African refugee-related projects, and to appear on their promotional leaflets. Africans are also approached, as outsiders, to provide letters of support for the continued funding of such organisations. This cannot help but fuel cynicism that Africans are used as passive, voiceless ‘funding fodder’ recipients of services, not included as equal, active partners in service provision, and its fine-tuning.
- The overall result is ongoing, systemic discrimination and weakening of refugee communities, with extreme stress placed on their volunteer leadership and support.
- Lack of adequate support for community capacity building, together with the failure of Governments to support grass-roots refugee community associations, has also resulted in the lack of culturally appropriate governance training for disadvantaged African communities. Thus, the leadership and administrative skills base of communities is not being developed. Africans are therefore missing out on vital skills that would more rapidly facilitate self-reliance, and social mobility. Inevitably, African refugees feel that they are being used to justify massive funding for the career advancement of non-Africans, and the bureaucratic growth of service providers.
- Africans simultaneously come under pressure because the media reports on Government funding data of hundreds of millions of dollars for refugee services. This expenditure seems to be vocally resented by some in the community, and thus potentially increases racism. (Correspondence received by the ATT demonstrates this.) African refugees ask, “Where are the benefits in terms of our priority needs from this funding?” They feel they are blamed for the funding being appropriated, but do not receive the benefits. This double bind is actively damaging our communities.

Call for Urgent Action

We call upon the State Premiers and Commonwealth Ministers to demonstrate leadership. In particular, the ATT requests:

1. That the Victorian Premier, Mr Brumby, implements, as a matter of urgency, the recommendations tabled in the Report of the African Resettlement Conference of April 2007, most of which are within the State jurisdiction. Excellent grassroots initiatives and effective, proactive measures across all settlement domains were formulated at the Conference, with the input of over 540 participants. The Report was distributed to all State Premiers, the outgoing Prime Minister’s office, and to all responsible State and Commonwealth Ministers, as well as funded service providers. So far,

there has been little or no response, indicating a closed door to input from refugee communities to the solution and prevention of problems.

2. That the State and Commonwealth Governments support African community voluntary leaders and their volunteer assistants with appropriate resources to implement grassroots community initiatives.

3. That the State and Commonwealth Governments consult directly with African community leaders prior to appropriating resources for refugee resettlement, and consult to devise appropriate measures to prevent the recurrence of incidents such as have occurred around the Flemington housing estate between Police and African youth.

4. That all community leaders at Commonwealth, State and Local Government level work to end systemic discrimination against refugee communities in all contexts, from media denigration of refugees, to institutional racism in a range of contexts, to provocative Ministerial commentary, to the exclusion of Africans from policy formulation.

5. The ATT calls for all levels of all Governments to attach strong and open accountability conditions to their funding agreements, and require that all funded service providers involve refugee communities in managing funded organizations and programs.

Following the adverse public comments on African immigration of former Immigration Minister, Kevin Andrews, upon the tragic murder of Sudanese teenage, Liep Gony, the ATT organised a community forum in Flemington. Participants recommended that the ATT establish a TASKFORCE to deal matters such as this. Over 15 community leaders from almost all parts of Africa nominated to join the TASKFORCE.

Please find the attached minutes from the forum.