

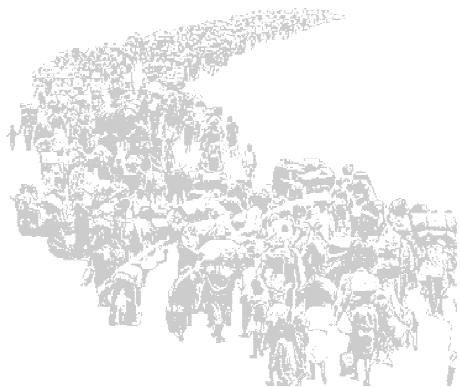
# REFUGEE AND MIGRANT EDUCATION KIT 2004



**BUILDING  
OUR FUTURE TOGETHER**



NATIONAL  
COUNCIL OF  
CHURCHES IN  
AUSTRALIA



## Building Our Future Together!

### HOW TO USE THIS SHEET?

This sheet focuses on the breakdown of the international refugee protection system, which has led to over 7 million refugees being left for over 10 years in refugee camps with little hope for a normal life. It also looks at why refugees are forced to leave these camps in search of 'effective protection' and seek safety in other countries like Australia.

Read this information sheet together with the personal stories in this kit to:

- Find out more about refugees
- lead a group discussion
- inspire your media competition entry
- Download and share these and other resources: [www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees](http://www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees)

### WHO ARE REFUGEES?

- Most people have a mental picture of a refugee as a poor, homeless, uneducated person who decides to come to Australia for a better life. But the truth is very different.
- Refugees flee in fear of being persecuted due to their race, religion, nationality, gender or political opinion. Unlike migrants, refugees are forced to flee their countries and cannot return home.
- Refugees are people like you and me that have been targeted for abuse because of who they are or what they believe. In danger from, or unable to be protected by, their own government, they are forced to flee to escape attacks, imprisonment, torture or even death.
- Many refugees have been tortured, imprisoned, raped or seen their family killed. Most have had to leave everything behind, including family and friends.

### DURABLE SOLUTIONS?

Most people who flee persecution stay in their 'country of origin' and become 'Internally Displaced People' (IDPs) or cross borders in search of protection in a nearby state and become 'refugees'. What kind of durable solutions exist for refugees after they flee their country?

1. **Voluntary Repatriation** – refugees can return home if conditions back home change enough to make it safe for them to return.
2. **Local Integration** – when it is too dangerous to return home, refugees may be allowed to stay and live in the country to which they fled.
3. **Resettlement** in another country when none of the above options are available.

**Questions:** Which of these solutions do you think is the best? What would happen if this system broke down? Where would refugees go and who would protect them?

### WAREHOUSING REFUGEES

Although this system sounds ideal, the reality for two-thirds of the world's 12 million refugees is somewhat different. Instead of being repatriated, integrated or resettled, they have been left in remote refugee camps and often forgotten by the international community.

The *US Committee for Refugees* now estimates that over 7 million refugees have spent longer than 10 years in refugee camps with little prospect of any solution.

### Shelved Refugee Populations:

- Over the course of 25 years, two million Afghans have been in exile in Pakistan and Iran. Although Iran provided generous support at first, when the international community failed to properly assist, Iran withdrew much of its support and became increasingly strict, preventing refugees from working and confining them to camps.
- Half a million Burmese refugees have lived in Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia and India for up to 20 years. Most are confined to refugee camps and are denied the right to work and travel. They live in terrible conditions.
- Half a million Sudanese refugees are stuck in camps or segregated settlements that have been operating for 20 years.
- For 53 years, two million forcibly uprooted Palestinian refugees have lived in camps and urban slums deprived of their rights.

Source: *World Refugee Survey 2004*

## How Many Did You Say?

**Refugees and Asylum Seekers.....11.9 Million**  
**Internally Displaced Persons.....23.6 Million**  
**New Refugees and Asylum Seekers.....1.12 Million**  
**New Internally Displaced Persons.....5.28 Million**  
**Refugees Warehoused 10 years or more...7.35 Million**

### LIFE IN A REFUGEE CAMP

Picture fleeing your home with few possessions and arriving at a remote refugee camp just inside a neighbouring country's border:

- The Government or group who persecuted you may operate across the border and continue to harass you in the refugee camp you arrive in.
- You might find that the Government of the country you arrived in does not give you any legal recognition as a refugee residing in the country. You might live under the threat of being harassed by the local authorities as an 'illegal'.
- You may not be allowed to work and then you may be arrested or detained because you were forced to work illegally to support your family.
- The refugee camp you have been placed in may have a cholera or typhoid outbreak and you fear for your family's health.
- You may live in fear of being rounded up and deported back to the country that you fled.
- Discriminatory restrictions may prevent you from obtaining health care, housing and education.
- You may apply to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for resettlement only to realise that you may have to wait years for a place and suffer the injustices mentioned above (less than 2% of the world's refugees are resettled each year).

These are common problems for people living in refugee camps. They are also the reasons why many refugees try to leave the camps and find safer countries in which to seek asylum.

**Questions:** *Read the stories in this education kit and ask yourself what it would be like to flee your home country and be stuck in a remote refugee camp? What possessions would you have? What future would you dream of? What would you do if you could not find 'effective protection' in the refugee camp or a durable solution?*

### EFFECTIVE PROTECTION

Under international law, refugees are permitted to cross borders in search of asylum even without a visa. However, once they find protection, they must stay in that country. Yet, many refugees who flee their homes and cross into neighbouring countries often find these governments are unwilling or unable to offer 'effective protection'. In this situation, refugees are often forced to move on in search of a 'safe country'. This is why many refugees have made their way across vast tracks of open sea to Australia.

### WHY THE BREAKDOWN?

In the 1960s and 70s, refugees were often the result of anti-colonial and national liberation struggles and regional states were often more willing to help them. Greater prosperity in newly-independent states and smaller refugees numbers also made the burden easier.

In the 1980s, however, refugee influxes increased and international aid declined as Western states became less interested in helping refugees fleeing Communist states. Many countries that were promised aid to shelter refugees were neglected after emergency periods subsided and media attention shifted. As the burden of support increased and aid declined and unemployment and economic decline set in, political parties began exploiting nationalistic sentiment by demonising refugees as job-takers and illegal immigrants.

As protection broke down in places like Pakistan and Iran, refugees increasingly began to move in search of protection to developed countries, who responded with stricter border controls, rather than on resolving these underlying causes. This increased demand for people smuggling.

### 10 WAYS YOU CAN HELP:

1. Urge your government to provide more resources for those in refugee camps. In 2002, UNHCR had only \$US40 per refugee per year to provide protection, food, shelter, medical care, water, sanitation, education and community services.
2. Urge your government to make greater efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts.
3. Work for sustainable peace when peace agreements are signed.
4. Be informed, know the facts and inform others of world events that force refugees to flee. Call the National Program on Refugees & Displaced People at the National Council of Churches or the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office to find out more about how to help
5. Make a contribution - financial, phone cards, housing, food, clothing & skills.
6. Be a mentor and friend to a refugee
7. Lobby politicians on legislation, human rights, conditions of refugee camps and detention.
8. Use talkback radio to have your say.
9. Join a support or action group.
10. Encourage others to participate and pray.

***“A refugee’s flight only ends when ‘effective protection’ is found”***

- Erika Feller, UNHCR Department of International Protection



Katrina McNamee, Year 9, St Mary Star of the Sea 2003  
Refugee Sunday Poster Competition Entry

## HOW DID AUSTRALIA RESPOND?

As the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq intensified and refugee protection increasing broke down in countries like Pakistan and Iran, the number of refugees arriving without visas in Australia increased from around 1,000 to about 4,000 a year in the late 1990s. Although the numbers were small compared to Europe, which receives hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers each year, the Federal Government likened the situation to a 'mass influx' and campaigned on the issue of 'border protection'. The focus soon shifted to whether they had visa instead of whether they needed protection as refugees. Misleading official statements stated that they were migrants making a conscious choice to move in search of a better lifestyle rather than refugees forced to flee persecution. However, the Government's own figures show that it found 90% of all asylum seekers entering Australia without a visa for the three years to June 2002 were refugees who had fled persecution and had genuine protection needs.

Despite the small numbers arriving and the high refugee percentage, the government introduced harsh measures to prevent and deter people seeking asylum in Australia. These include: a restrictive refugee definition; airline fines; mandatory detention; temporary protection visas; restrictions on appealing asylum decisions; naval interception, forced removal and detention in the Pacific and denying welfare and work rights for asylum applicants.

The NCCA has called on the Federal Government to address the real causes of increased refugee flows instead of using expensive interception and deterrence measures that simply 'bottle-up' the problem and push the responsibility onto other countries. It has asked that more resources be devoted to addressing the root causes of refugee flows (conflict and human rights violations) and strengthening the ability of regional states to deal with refugee arrivals.

## HOW ARE AUSTRALIANS RESPONDING?

All over Australia, however, people from different walks of life have responded to the plight of refugees in a very different way. Instead of fearing refugees, they have reached out and found both good friends and help:

*"We've had 90 refugees on temporary visas living in Young for the past three years. Most of them have been working in the local abattoir. A study released by Sydney University has shown they have contributed more than \$2.5 million over 18 months to our local economy. For a small town like Young, it would be a huge economic loss if they were sent back. If the government was serious about helping country Australia, it would review these visas and make them permanent."*

- John Walker, Mayor of Young in Central NSW

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

**National Council of Churches in Australia** – has more educational materials, plus statements, submissions to Parliament, briefing papers, policy documents and reports, see [www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees](http://www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees) Also on our site:

- Read about the [Complementary Protection Model](#), which would provide protection for those who do not meet the strict refugee definition, but still need protection.
- Read about [The Better Way](#), an alternative to Australia's harsh mandatory detention system.

**Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office:** [www.acmro.catholic.org.au](http://www.acmro.catholic.org.au) – read the Catholic Bishops Conference statement on refugees and asylum seekers

**Mercy Refugee Service:** [www.mercy.org.au](http://www.mercy.org.au)

**World Council of Churches:** [www.wcc-coe.org](http://www.wcc-coe.org)

**Action by Churches Together Int'l:** [www.act-intl.org](http://www.act-intl.org)

**Refugee Council of Australia** has fact sheets, position papers, reports, submissions, an events page and key statistics - [www.refugeecouncil.org.au](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au)

**Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission** – has online study guide that covers children in detention and focuses on its recent report titled "A Last Resort". [www.humanrights.gov.au/human\\_rights/children\\_detention\\_report/report/index.htm](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/children_detention_report/report/index.htm)

**UNHCR initiatives** – to solve these problems: search [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch) for the 'Agenda for Protection', 'Global Consultations', 'Convention Plus', or UNHCR 2004.

**Human Rights Watch** has a major report looking at Australia's treatment of refugees, detention and temporary visas. [www.hrw.org/asia/australia.php](http://www.hrw.org/asia/australia.php)

**US Committee for Refugees'** has the 2004 World Refugee Survey, a report on Australia's treatment of refugees and reports on internally displaced people in Afghanistan and refugees in Pakistan - [www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

**The Witness Project** For a comprehensive list of short videos you can watch online, visit: [www.witness.org/](http://www.witness.org/)



**A Burmese refugee child shelters in the ruins of her house after soldiers destroyed their refugee camp**

### **THE BURMA BORDER CONSORTIUM**

For over 20 years, half a million Burmese refugees have lived in Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia and India. Most are confined to refugee camps and are denied the right to work and move from their camp. They live in terrible conditions.

For over a decade now, Christian World Service has been supporting Burmese refugees in Thailand through the Burma Border Consortium, which runs several refugee camps for 152,000 refugees on the Thai-Burma border.

"I was shocked. In January, 11,500 Karen refugees were moved to Mae La Oon camp. Only 2,500 thatched houses had been built. 500 houses were still needed for 2,000 families." - Charlie Ocampo, Manager of CWS International Programs, on his return from a 2004 visit to Mae La Oon and Mae Rama Luang refugee camps.

### **DONATE TO ASSIST REFUGEES:**

Christian World Service  
Locked Bag 199, Sydney NSW 1230  
or phone 1800 025 101  
or donate online [www.ncca.org.au/cws](http://www.ncca.org.au/cws)

### **WHY REFUGEE AND MIGRANT SUNDAY?**

You may have noticed that "Refugee Sunday" has been renamed "Refugee and Migrant Sunday". This broader focus allows us to take up the World Council of Churches' wider concerns on "uprooted people", which includes issues of "mixed flows", people trafficked into forced labour or sexual servitude and the exploitation of vulnerable migrant workers. Given the strong Australian church and community concern for refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, however, the focus will still be on refugees and asylum seekers. All of these groups are adversely affected by racism and xenophobia.

***"There is no greater sorrow  
on earth than the loss of  
one's native land"***

**- Euripides 431 BC**



### 1). ALI TELLS OF HIS ESCAPE FROM AFGHANISTAN TO AUSTRALIA

I lived in a village in central Afghanistan with my father, my mother and my older brother. My father was headman of our village and had a shop at the front of our house. We are of the Hazara tribe and the Taliban, who ran the government, did not like the Hazara people. One day, when I was seventeen, a group of Taliban armed with guns arrived in our village in trucks to take the young men away to join their army. My father and some of the older men tried to defend our village but he was shot and killed in the main street.

The Taliban took all the young men including me in their trucks to an old fort outside the village. They told us that unless we joined their army they would beat us. The Taliban had just killed my father – I refused to join their army. So they beat me and kicked me and kept me in the fort. I don't know how long I was there.

When the Taliban left our village I was very sick for a long time and my mother had to look after me. She sold our farmland and her jewellery to get me out of Afghanistan. She arranged for me to go with a people smuggler by truck to Turkmenistan, a country north of Afghanistan. I don't remember much about this journey, as I was still sick. From there he flew me to Indonesia and put me on a fishing boat to Australia.

The fishing boat was old and overcrowded and many of us were seasick. The boat arrived at Ashmore Reef where we were caught by Australia's coast guard. From there I was taken to an Immigration Detention Centre where I stayed for many months. I have now been released but I am only allowed to stay in Australia for three years, on a Temporary Protection Visa.

This story comes from the **Roads to Refugee: Refugees in Australia**, a secondary school teaching kit, produced by the Center for Refugee Research, University of NSW for the Migration Heritage Center and the NSW Dept of Education & Training.



Produced for Refugee and Migrant Sunday 2004 by the National Program on Refugees and Displaced People, Christian World Service, National Council of Churches in Australia. For more information, contact your state ecumenical council or James Thomson in the National Office on (02) 9299 2215 or [jthomson@ncca.org.au](mailto:jthomson@ncca.org.au) or see [www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees](http://www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees)

### QUESTIONS:

People smuggling for money is a crime in Australia. Boat trips to Australia can be dangerous. However, sometimes people are forced to flee and must make difficult choices.

1. Do you think it was OK for Ali's family to pay a people smuggler and escape by boat to Australia?
2. What other choice did his family have?
3. What were the risks in those other choices?

The Australian refugee system found Ali was a refugee but he was only allowed to stay in Australia for three years on a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV). He then has to apply again and prove he is a refugee needing protection if he is to be allowed to stay. The Australian Government will decide if it is safe for him to go back to Afghanistan.

4. What problems would Ali have living on a temporary visa?
5. Why would he fear being sent home?



### ACTION IDEAS:

1. Use the questions above to lead a discussion or inspire student entries for the media competition
2. Use this story in your newsletter or pew sheet
3. Find out more about children in detention or TPVs
4. Call your state ecumenical council and volunteer  
NSW: (02) 92992215 [lphelan@ncca.org.au](mailto:lphelan@ncca.org.au)  
VIC: (03) 9650 6811 [vsanyu@ncca.org.au](mailto:vsanyu@ncca.org.au)  
SA: (08) 8221 6633 [Denis.Voight@unisa.edu.au](mailto:Denis.Voight@unisa.edu.au)  
QLD: (07) 3369 6792 [v.graydon@trump.net.au](mailto:v.graydon@trump.net.au)  
TAS: (03) 6234 2543 [tcc@trump.net.au](mailto:tcc@trump.net.au)  
WA: (08) 9385 5477 [eclapton@churcheswa.com.au](mailto:eclapton@churcheswa.com.au)  
NT: (08) 8945 3371 [lloydkent@optusnet.com.au](mailto:lloydkent@optusnet.com.au)
5. Support CWS refugees programs in Australia and overseas by calling toll free 1800 025 101

### OTHER RESOURCES:

1. For other stories about refugees and asylum seekers, or to find out more about children in detention or TPVs, see:

[www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees](http://www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees)

## 2). FLEEING SOUTHERN SUDAN

I am "Kuol" (not real name), a refugee from Southern Sudan in Africa. I now live in Australia. In 1983, when I was only ten, my village was attacked by the army and burned down. People were killed, including women and children and my uncle. The government accused my father, a doctor, of aiding the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which was fighting the government. My father and mother fled to a SPLA stronghold.

I wanted to fight but my father would not allow it. He insisted I get an education. I fled to Sudan's capital city, Khartoum, in north Sudan. At high school, I let other students know what was happening in the South - the killings, persecution, and discrimination. The other students, mostly Arab, had no idea. They thought that Dinkas, my black African tribe, slept in trees, that they smelt and lived in the jungle.

I helped the Sudan Council of Churches deliver emergency food to Southern Sudanese displaced by fighting and living in the desert near Khartoum. Because the displaced were not Muslim, the government would not allow us to do this freely. If these Southern Sudanese converted to Islam, they would be fed and given blankets. My heart was full of anger. So our team distributed the food without permission.

That night we were arrested and handed to the secret police. I was terrified. We were taken to a place that smelt, with people lying dead in their cells. I was questioned and told to confess to being a rebel. I was beaten, tortured, electrocuted and hung up by my feet. They tried to make me convert to Islam or confess to being a rebel. I told them I believed in Jesus. On the 21st day they said they would kill me unless I converted to Islam. I refused. Then amazingly I was released, conditional on me reporting to the police everyday. I knew I had to escape.

### **MORE INFORMATION:**

For background on the different conflicts within Sudan and for examples of peace and humanitarian work of the Sudan Council of Churches in the north and the New Sudan Council of Churches in south see:

[www.ncca.org.au/christian\\_world\\_service/at\\_work\\_with\\_our\\_partners/africa/sudan](http://www.ncca.org.au/christian_world_service/at_work_with_our_partners/africa/sudan)

Conflicts have occurred between southern Sudan ethnic groups and rebel movements. The north-south conflict is seen as racial, economic (about control of Sudan's oil) and religious. The international community and Sudanese groups are working for peace. Read about Sarah's flight from Southern Sudan and her hard life in a Kenyan refugee camp: [www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees](http://www.ncca.org.au/cws/refugees)

### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Discuss the different things you think caused the war and terror Kuol describes
2. "The other students, mostly Arab, had no idea". How can we learn more about other people's cultures and needs? How might this help us resolve our big or small conflicts peacefully?
3. Do you have a religion? If yes, tell others what you like about your religion? If no, what belief or worldview is important to you?
4. Do your friends have a different religion or no religion? What do you have in common? What is different? Do religious differences cause wars?
5. What can you do to welcome refugees like Kuol into Australia? What can the Australian Government and community do?
6. Why do you think the torturers finally let Kuol go? Why did he fear staying in Sudan?

### **TAKE ACTION:**

1. Write to your local Federal Member of Parliament or the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Alexander Downer, Parliament House, Canberra. ACT 2600 asking the Australian Government to support the peace efforts in Sudan and to increase aid to Sudanese refugees fleeing war.
2. Contact your state or territory ecumenical council for a speaker about refugees in Australia and overseas and how your school can support them (See front page for contact details).
3. Write to the Immigration Minister, the Hon Amanda Vanstone, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600 thanking the government for resettling more refugees from Sudan and other parts of Africa.



### 3). EAST TIMOR

East Timor (or Timor Leste) was only made an independent country in 2002. Since 1975 it was occupied by the former Indonesian military-dominated government against the will of most East Timorese. It was a difficult and dangerous time and many people lost their homes and their lives in the conflict.

During the long war many East Timorese fled to Australia, Indonesian West Timor and other countries. After the 1999 United Nations-sponsored referendum (national vote) when 78.5% of East Timorese voted for independence from Indonesia, some armed East Timorese groups (trained and funded by parts of the Indonesian military) took revenge by killing people, burning houses and looting. A United Nations peacekeeping mission and transitional authority was then set up to guide Timor Leste to independence.

During Indonesian occupation, thousands of East Timorese fled across the border to the sprawling refugee camps in Indonesian West Timor. The armed Indonesian-backed militia that wreaked havoc in Timor Leste ran the camps and treated suspected independence supporters badly. Despite the violence and poverty of the camps, however, many refugees did not want to return for fear of being punished and because they had lost their property and livelihoods.

#### **The Uncertainty of Temporary Protection**

Many East Timorese who fled the war have been in Australia for 10 years or more, waiting a final decision on their futures by the Australian government. Long delays and the Immigration Department's 'processing freeze' on refugee applications led to most cases being rejected because Timor Leste is no longer at war and now independent. However, from late 2003, the Immigration Minister has been reversing earlier department decisions and giving most East Timorese permanent residency on humanitarian grounds.

**MARIA:** Arrived in Australia in 1994. Married with five children, one born in Australia. The children are all at school and one is now in High School. None, except the eldest boy, has any memory of Timor Leste. They speak good English and have settled well into Australian society. Maria has worked in a laundry for the past five years, leaving home at 5 a.m. each day. The family has nothing to return to in Timor Leste.

**FRANCISCO:** Arrived Australia in 1994, aged 17, a victim of the 1991 Santa Cruz Massacre in Dili. Immediately began to learn English and adapt to Australian society. Although a very intelligent young man, he was not permitted to study at university or TAFE, because of visa restrictions. Found employment in the hospitality industry and worked long hours to provide for himself and his widowed mother and large family in Timor Leste. He has made every effort to further his studies in computer technology. If he is forced to return to Timor Leste he would have no job, no financial support and no way to contribute to the well being of his family.

#### **QUESTIONS:**

1. Do you know any people from Timor Leste? Did they tell you some of their stories?
2. Do you know other things about Timor Leste? Share anything you know and see the website in the "action ideas" below.
3. What do you think are the main problems for someone not being able to go back to their home country but being unsure if they can stay permanently in Australia?
4. Do you have classmates or friends whose family fled from wars? If yes, when and how did they come to Australia? How could you help welcome a new student who came from a war zone?

#### **ACTION IDEAS FOR YOU:**

1. Help rebuild Timor Leste and learn about and support food security projects - East Timor is the *Project of the Year* for *forceten*, a program of Christian World Service and Caritas Australia. See [www.forceten.org.au](http://www.forceten.org.au) and click on "Our Projects". What could your class, your school or you do to raise money for Timor Leste? The "Simply Sharing Week" kit has many ideas and the kit can be used at any time.  
Order a kit via email: [forceten@ncca.org.au](mailto:forceten@ncca.org.au)
2. Learn about the disagreement between Australia and Timor Leste over oil in the Timor Sea north of Australia. See these websites:
  - [www.forceten.org.au/Sharing2004/pdfs/Timor\\_Gap\\_oil.pdf](http://www.forceten.org.au/Sharing2004/pdfs/Timor_Gap_oil.pdf)
  - [www.timorseaoffice.gov.tl/enindex.htm](http://www.timorseaoffice.gov.tl/enindex.htm)  
[www.TimorSeaJustice.org](http://www.TimorSeaJustice.org)





#### 4). SHAYAN: A CHILD IN DETENTION

Six year-old Shayan lay in his fathers arms. He stared into space as his father rocked him back and forth. His skin was pale and the room small and dull.<sup>1</sup> Shayan's parents had fled from Iran to Australia a year before in April 2000. They fled in fear of being persecuted and hoped that Australia would provide protection for them. However, like all refugee children arriving without visas, Shayan and his family were automatically placed in a detention centre while their refugee claim was processed.

Detention had a terrible impact on Shayan. In late 2000, protests and unrest broke out in Woomera detention centre as the despair and tension grew among refugees who had been unfairly locked up. In June, 480 detainees broke out of Woomera. In August, there were three days of riots and fires, involving 60-80 detainees. Tear gas and water cannons were used. In November, 30 detainees went on hunger strikes. During this time, Shayan's mother and father were unable to prevent Shayan being effected by the despair, the protests, the violence and the suicide attempts going on around him. In November, he saw a man slashing himself with pieces of glass and then try to kill himself by jumping from a tree. One day, he stopped talking. As the impact of this trauma worsened, he stopped eating and drinking, began biting his nails and crying under his blanket. At night he wet the bed and would wake up repeatedly, gripping his chest and screaming "They are going to kill us".

Despite repeated recommendations from psychologists to relocate or release Shayan, he was kept in detention. After stopping drinking, Shayan was hospitalised suffering from dehydration. At Westmead hospital he was diagnosed as being acutely traumatised and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. As soon as he was better, Shayan was sent back to Villawood detention centre

in Sydney. There his condition again declined and he was hospitalised for 8 weeks. He was hospitalised another 6 times, and every time he got better, he was re-detained. Then he would stop eating and drinking, become silent and withdrawn and would be hospitalised again, suffering dehydration. Medical staff saw Shayan 70 times between March and August 2001 and hospital and detention staff wrote to the Minister for Immigration 13 times asking for his release to prevent further harm.

Finally, Shayan's story reached the media in August 2001, and after images of his suffering were broadcast around Australia, public pressure grew and he was released in 2002.

#### QUESTIONS:

Under Australian law, every man, woman and child arriving without a visa in Australia must be detained. It is called mandatory detention. However, under the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Australia has signed, children are only meant to be detained as a last resort. Shayan's story illustrates why children should not be detained.

1. Do you think anyone meant to harm Shayan?
2. If not, then why did he suffer?
3. Do you think children should be automatically detained for not having a visa?

Since Shayan was released, Woomera, one of Australia's most infamous detention centres, has been closed. However, Australia's mandatory detention laws have not changed. There are still 163 children in detention in Australia and on Nauru.

4. Do you think other children will (now and in the future) suffer like Shayan?
5. What is it like for children and their families in Australia's detention centres?

Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, which Australia has signed, refugees are allowed to cross borders without visas. This recognises that refugees are forced to flee their home countries in fear of being persecuted. Nor are they meant to be penalised for doing so.

Get the Teachers Kit from the Human Rights Commission's Children in Detention Inquiry: [www.ncca.org.au/christian\\_world\\_service/at\\_work\\_with\\_refugees/articles](http://www.ncca.org.au/christian_world_service/at_work_with_refugees/articles) [www.humanrights.gov.au/human\\_rights/children\\_detention\\_report/](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/human_rights/children_detention_report/) To find out about alternatives to detention, see the "Better Way": [www.thebetterway.info](http://www.thebetterway.info)

<sup>1</sup> This was the image broadcast around the nation on an ABC TV 4 *comers* documentary (13-8-01) after being filmed with a hidden camera inside Villawood detention centre in Sydney.

**NATIONAL PROGRAM ON REFUGEES & DISPLACED PEOPLE**  
CHRISTIAN WORLD SERVICE COMMISSION  
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN AUSTRALIA

**National Office:**

Locked Bag 199, SYDNEY NSW 1230.  
Phone: (02) 9299 2215 Fax: (02) 9262 4514

**Contacts:**

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Mr John Ball, National Manager (based in the Victorian office), email: [jball@ncca.org.au](mailto:jball@ncca.org.au)

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