

J4RSA AGM 2022

Chairperson's Report

I also acknowledge we meet on Kaurna land, and welcome our special guests, Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP and Mr Mobin Achakzai.

At the last Annual General Meeting, we presented our “Priorities for Change” document, setting out our policy priorities for the period ahead. A copy is in your papers, but for those of you who haven’t had time to read them or commit them to heart these priorities were:

1. Replacing Temporary Protection Visas with a pathway to permanency.
2. Improving access to tertiary education for refugees and people seeking asylum.
3. Increasing Australia’s humanitarian, family reunion and refugee intake overall, as well as increasing the intake from Afghanistan to 20,000.
4. Ending indefinite offshore and onshore detention for refugees and people seeking asylum.

These four policy priorities have guided our advocacy and campaigning work over the last year and have formed the basis of our engagement with politicians, partner agencies and the media.

We remain fully committed to campaigning to replace Temporary Protection Visas with a pathway to permanency.

The current system of Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) do not provide a clear pathway to permanency. This prolongs uncertainty, psychological distress and financial insecurity for refugees and people seeking asylum. Temporary visas make all aspects of life more difficult – security of employment, accessing social security and health support and access to further education. A more effective pathway to permanency will provide refugees with the means to rebuild their lives and contribute as members of the Australian community. The new Albanese administration has a policy to recognise pathways to permanence but we must keep up the pressure to have this recognition apply to the full range of temporary visa holders – the distinctions still being made between maritime arrivals and other methods of arrival are blocking more productive outcomes.

We have continued our campaign in support of improving access to tertiary and further education for refugees and people seeking asylum, including by engaging policy makers, briefing journalists, and directly seeking assistance from educational institutions including South Australia’s universities. Tertiary education is of particular importance for the life prospects of refugees, for their short and long term mental health, and their sense of hope and purpose in the future. We have had some successes and found some scholarships, but more is needed.

The capturing of Kabul by the Taliban in mid-August ‘21 meant that the long-running Afghanistan war gave way to an accelerating human rights and humanitarian crisis, and sparked a chaotic flight and evacuation of refugees and internally displaced Afghans seeking

protection from the new regime. According to the Refugee Council of Australia, since 2013, more than 23,000 Afghans have come to Australia – or sought to do so – to escape the Taliban's insurgency and ultimate takeover of the country. They point out that the treatment of these people in and by Australia has varied greatly, depending on how the Government has viewed their mode and date of arrival. The Refugee Council reports that there were 4,927 Afghan nationals evacuated to Australia on Temporary Humanitarian Stay visas as at 11 February 2022. We continue to call for an increase in Australia's humanitarian, family reunion and refugee intake overall, as well joining our voice to the widespread calls for our governments to do more and better to provide protection for Afghan refugees.

Our biggest campaigning effort by far coincided with the Federal election on the 21 May. Our previous election campaigns focussed on taking the issue to the general voting public, but our focus this election was to engage with as many South Australian candidates as we could, particularly in the marginal seat of Boothby, and in the Senate.

Groups of members reached out and sought meetings with candidates for election in both houses. We wanted to build relationships with all parties and to begin discussions with them on refugee and asylum seeker issues. We wanted to share our priorities for change in the coming parliament, and ask what we could do to support them in changing the way refugee issues are debated in parliament and in the broader political discussion. In addition, we recognised that whichever party won government, the Senate would continue to be critical to achieving these priorities and for providing scrutiny and accountability through the Senate Committee system. We therefore reached out in a similar fashion to all major candidates for the Senate in South Australia.

We are happy to record that Louise Miller-Frost was a most responsive and welcoming participant in that dialogue, and we congratulate her on her election as the Member for Boothby, and as a member of the new Albanese Government.

We are grateful for your presence tonight and we very much look forward to developing a constructive relationship with you over coming years.

Going forward the issues are so numerous and complex we have developed a trio of working groups which are focussed on three issues:

1. Transitioning to Permanency (Meredith Edwards)
2. Ending detention (Gary Wilson)
3. Establishing a pathway to permanence for those who arrived after Rudd's 2013 Declaration (Meredith Evans)

Please speak to the nominated co-ordinator if you would be interested in getting involved – it's very satisfying getting down to the brass tacks!

I would like to thank my fellow members of the Management Committee, who have been great contributors over the last year. I make a special mention of the co-opted members of the Committee who have been an invaluable addition, and I take this opportunity to remind the meeting that nominations may have closed for this AGM, but the opportunity to join the Committee is never closed! Committee members all lead busy lives but continue to work

hard for our campaigning and advocacy. We are very lucky to have had the additional efforts of many general members throughout the election period, both in planning for and visiting candidates, and providing the information and research support to help us engage fruitfully with candidates.

I feel I should also mention that both myself and other members of the group have dealt with a variety of health challenges over the last year, (along with the rest of the globe, of course) and I would particularly like to thank Chris Keating for stepping into the breach and taking on the Chairperson's mantle along the way.

I also want to offer particular thanks to Judith Adams for her work as our part-time Coordinator, including keeping members informed of campaigns through emails, keeping the website up to date, and providing a link with some of our partner organisations. Thank you, Jude, for your excellent work.

I also want to thank Pilgrim Uniting Church and the Sisters of Mercy for providing spaces for us to meet each month, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide for their generous financial and in-kind support. The congregational leaders (that is the heads of the various Catholic Orders) have also provided generous financial support going forward, which is sustaining us after the Archdiocese has currently ended their longer-term financial support.

Finally, thank you very much to you -- as members for your continued support and advocacy. I know many of you have been deeply involved in providing practical assistance to asylum seekers and refugees, and we hope to build on these efforts and to achieve community support for a just and compassionate approach to refugees, which should, in turn translate into new, effective commitments from our political leaders.