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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | L4R newsletter - keeping you informed and up to date on our current issues and challenges. | Is this email not displaying correctly? [View it in your browser](https://mailchi.mp/bb93cc5cacfb/its-been-a-very-busy-month?e=f705cf268c). | |

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| |  | | --- | | [Labor for Refugees New South Wales](https://facebook.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=09c48b6cba9909c3558998ce0&id=4a88331449&e=f705cf268c) | |
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You can read more about Madeline**[**here**](https://facebook.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=09c48b6cba9909c3558998ce0&id=7b049708ce&e=f705cf268c)**.  In July 2022 Madeline had presented by zoom to ACT Labor’s International Affairs Policy Committee (IAPC) on the International Implications of Australia’s Asylum Policies and in August 2022 at Labor for Refugees NSW’s AGM  on the same topic.  She had kindly offered to update us in a year or so.  The IAPC and L4R combined our efforts to maximise her valuable time. In advance of the presentation she provided an abstract and a generous pre-reading list, including PDFs of articles not easily found at the end of a URL!.  IAPC and L4R emailed those to participants.  Very pleasingly, 40 people registered beforehand and the majority of those attended, including members from Victoria and Queensland. Thank you everyone!  Madeline spoke to over 20 PPT slides she had prepared, providing statistical and other information that gave us a very clear picture of the significant increase since mid-2022 in the numbers of displaced people globally, the nations in which they had been displaced and where they had been forced to move to – within their home countries or across borders and into which countries. It is very clear that developing countries continue to do most of the hosting of refugees.  We were reminded that the situation of the Sudanese is very serious, yet we do not hear a lot about their circumstances in Australia.  We were also reminded of the very high proportion of Gaza-resident Palestinians which has been displaced since October 2023.  And we saw how quickly and easily the many refugees from Ukraine had been provided with safety.  We saw that many countries kept their borders open to fleeing desperate people, as is required by international refugee and other human rights law, even though those receiving countries were often themselves not well placed to provide a temporary home for the refugees. A clear example is Bangladesh, which has at Cox’s Bazaar, permitted nearly 1 million stateless Rohingya forced to leave Myanmar to cross the border to safety.  We were reminded that this is in Australia’s region and that the situation of the Rohingya needed a durable long term solution, which would involve many countries but should involve Australia.  Madeline also spoke about how the Australian ‘model’ of interception before or at the border, turn-backs, and offshore processing had been portrayed in the UK and some European countries as a successful model that should be copied, but that the picture described was inaccurate and incomplete.  In any event, no other country – despite their statements of intention – has actually yet been able to copy Australia’s system of externalising our Refugee Convention obligations.   Madeline’s third topic was the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the relevance of Australia’s support for this organisation. We learned that UNRWA predates the UNHCR and was set up to provide protection for Palestinians fleeing because of the war concerning the end of the British Palestinian Mandate and the establishment of Israel.  UNRWA is funded by contributing countries including Australia so that, if that funding stops, they can no longer provide protection.  Madeline paused after each of her 3 topics and invited questions, all of which were very thoughtful and provoked very informative answers.   There was a general Q&A at the end which covered a range of issues, including the situation of the people from the 19 July 2013 Australian decision to never settle people attempting to arrive at the sea border by boat, without visas. There remain around 1,000 not yet permanently settled anywhere, of whom around 52, plus partners and children are in PNG, of whom around 20 are not on any permanent settlement pathway.  The time passed quickly with many excellent points made and great questions asked and answered.  For me, one of the best was from Jenny Haines which was along the lines of:  after world war 2, the nations of the world, including Australia, resettled millions of people without a safe home country, so why can't the international community co-operate and do the same today?   One answer might be the ‘securitisation’ of visa granting.  One of Madeline’s suggestions that caused a lot of interest was group determinations of permanent residency of particular cohorts of refugees who clearly could never be sent back, starting from a presumption that a person was *not* a risk to Australia unless a standard check revealed that they were.  Madeline closed her presentation by noting that the international population of displaced people will not just disappear. The causes of people’s displacement and their protection require practical, humane responses from the international community, including Australia, which will reduce suffering and provide durable safety.  Lauren Honcope Member ACT Labor IAPC and Labor for Refugees NSW/ACT**   |  | | --- | | **Help sought for Afghans - sponsorship**  **On 27 November 2023, Labor for Refugees wrote to both the Immigration Minister Andrew Giles and Minister for Foreign Affairs Penny Wong.  We expressed our concern for the Afghan nationals who at that time, were being expelled from Pakistan and were in fear of being forced back to Afghanistan.  No response has been received to date from either Ministers.  This issue was discussed once again at our February meeting, with the focus being on sponsoring Afghan families from Pakistan using the partner visa system.**  **Most of these Afghans do not have any identity documents and/or passports so members felt that we should lobby the government to issue Australian travel documents to partner visa applicants/holders.  This is quite urgent as the Pakistani government is trying to push Afghans in Pakistan back to Afghanistan.  It was decided that L4R collate case studies with any relevant available documents and write to MPs about the problems being experienced by these Afghans who are trying to leave Pakistan and join their families in Australia.** | |  |   **Meeting the Immigration Minister**  **We reported in our November 2023 newsletter, that Labor for Refugees has been attempting to set up a meeting with Immigration Minister Andrew Giles.  At our October meeting, L4R members discussed a number of commitments made by the Labor Government at the August 2023 ALP National Conference and wanted an update on these issues.**  **We will continue to urge the Immigration Minister to meet with Labor for Refugees and will hold the Government accountable for the refugee policies it adopted in Labor's Platform.  Unfortunately, many of these policies, did not have time-lines for their introduction.   To mention just a couple of quite significant policies that were adopted at the National Conference last year,  the Immigration Minister committed to a Parliamentary Inquiry into Immigration Detention.  A commitment was also made to appoint a Special Envoy for Refugees.  We are still waiting for these and other policies to be implemented.  We would also like to know, how the government can justify sending refugees who recently arrived by boat, to Nauru, when the Platform states that people should not be punished for their mode of arrival.  And what about the policy that states that people cannot be held in detention for longer than 90 days.   We are still waiting for a date to meet the Minister to ask him these questions.**    **Palm Sunday Rally**  **Labor for Refugees members will attend the Palm Sunday rally this Sunday - a rally that we endorse each year.**  **The theme is "PEACE not WAR - Permanent Visas for All Refugees"**  **The details of the rally and march follow**[*PalmSundayRally2024*](https://facebook.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=09c48b6cba9909c3558998ce0&id=ce2be8089a&e=f705cf268c)    **Visa Cancellations**  **We were shocked last week when we learnt that the government had begun suspending the visas of Palestinians. Some had already left Gaza assuming they would be allowed to enter Australia, but were caught in transit when their visas were suspended.  When we first learn of this happening, Labor for Refugees Victorian President Pauline Brown, quickly sent a letter to both the Minister for Home affairs, Clare O'Neil and the Immigration Minister Andrew Giles.  Her letter dated the 15 March follows. *Dear Clare and Andrew I’m writing to express my dismay at the cancellation of visas for some people fleeing the horrors of Gaza. The fact that these visas were cancelled while people were in transit is something I would have expected of an LNP government. While the cancellations may be technically correct, surely there is room for compassion . If the Prime Minister or you cannot override decisions made by public servants, then I wonder what the point is of being in government.   I am aware that Labor in government has made some improvements in refugee policy, not least being the transfer from TPV and SHEV to the permanent ROS visas. But there other issues which remain problematic and I see this cancellation of visas for Palestinians in the midst of an horrendous war being waged against civilians as the last straw. I would remind you of Bob Hawke’s offer of asylum to Chinese residents in Australia on temporary visas after the Tiananmen Square massacre. Eventually 42,000 were granted permanent visas. When he announced this, he was immediately told “You cannot do that Prime Minister”. He replied “I just did. It is done”.   This is the time for us to show our humanity. I urge you to reverse the decisions to cancel visas and to stop the cancellation of any further visas. Sincerely Pauline Brown President Labor for Refugees Victoria*  Her letter was published in The Age the following day. We thank Pauline for her prompt action.   The man who was stuck at the airport, has since had his temporary visa reinstated and can leave Istanbul airport. At least 11 Palestinians who had their visas cancelled have had them reinstated.**    **Papua New Guinea - desperate plight for stranded refugees**  **The Australian Refugee Action Network (ARAN) is appealing for funds using the crowd-funding online platform ‘chuffed’ to fundraise for the refugees left stranded in PNG.  ARAN states that:**  ***“Over 60 people who sought our protection over 10 years ago have been held in limbo by Australia, and many have lost hope of a safe and secure future. They have suffered harm, with many now having serious physical and mental health issues, with limited health care available.  Australia is actively harming these people and it is time to bring this to an end. While some of these men may have safe resettlement options in Canada or New Zealand, it will take months, and possibly years before they can be safely resettled.  Many have no pathways to safe resettlement, as Australia is refusing to provide this option.*  *In recent months there have been reports that funding provided by Australia - for accommodation, medical care (access to doctors and hospital) and basic living expenses – has been spent, and there is no longer money being provided to these men for food and living expenses including phone credit.   They each received a letter recently telling them their accommodation would no longer be paid for.  From 22 November all food vouchers, money, security, medical, transport services have ceased. Accommodation providers are saying they cannot continue to provide accommodation. This is a very serious situation in Port Moresby – one of the most dangerous cities in the world.* *Advocates are working hard to ensure that the Australia acts quickly to enable people to come to Australia and be supported in the community here, or at the very least reinstate payment to PNG to ensure the men can have continuing accommodation, food and essential services in Port Moresby.  Informal charities relying on individual donations are not able to meet all of the demand for living expenses for the men in Port Moresby.”*  Labor for Refugees wrote to the Home Affairs Minister Clare O’Neil twice last year in July and October, about the plight of these people. The Home Affairs Minister does not see refugees in PNG as being Australia’s responsibility.  Please consider supporting these people who are in a desperate situation by going to the fundraising page and donating:**[Https://chuffed.org/project/104810-immediate-help-for-australias-refugees-still-in-png](https://facebook.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=09c48b6cba9909c3558998ce0&id=4d94ea0e17&e=f705cf268c)  **Nauru campaign**  **The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) is running a campaign about the lack of transparency re the Nauru Detention Centre. THE ASRC URGES PEOPLE TO WRITE TO THEIR LOCAL MP about the welfare of the 54 people seeking asylum who were sent to Nauru including the 39 people who arrived in WA in the last few weeks.  We need to ensure that the appalling abuses of the past on Nauru, are not repeated.**  **For the past decade, the operations of offshore processing have been shrouded in secrecy. While there has been a lack of visibility, billions of dollars have been wasted, people have lost their lives, there have been compensation payouts and taxpayers money has gone to shonky operators.**  **It appears this secrecy is set to continue with no public information about the fate of 39 people transferred to Nauru in the past week, let alone with the 15 who have been there for months. Once more, we ask the government to explain why these people who are seeking asylum, are being punished by being sent to Nauru, just because they arrived by boat, when Labor's Platform categorically states that people should not be punished for their mode of arrival.**  **Displacement and humanitarian crisis in our near north**  **The issue of the plight of internally displaced Papuans in the Papuan provinces of Indonesia gets little media attention because journalists and NGOs are not permitted into the Papuan provinces.  UNHCR and the International Committee of the Red Cross are not granted access to monitor the extent of displacement and provide assistance.   The Papuans are being forced to flee their villages because of operations by the Indonesian security forces, especially in resource rich areas.   There is ongoing retaliatory armed clashes between the Indonesian security forces and Papuan pro-independence fighters.   Church groups estimate that there may be up to 100,000 displaced persons. Some have been displaced for more than two years.   There will be a screening of a film about this crisis as part of a mini film festival on West Papua, which is being hosted by the University of Wollongong.   The link to the flyer with the details follows:**[*FlyerWestPapuanfilms2024*](https://facebook.us7.list-manage.com/track/click?u=09c48b6cba9909c3558998ce0&id=7a9251c720&e=f705cf268c)  **L4R member Elizabeth Biok will update us on the plight of these people at our meeting next week.**  **Liz is a member of the Jesuit Refugee Service Australia board. She is a retired lawyer with expertise in refugee law. She practiced in administrative law at the Legal Aid Commission of NSW for more than twenty years representing asylum seekers at all levels of the legal process.  She has been a volunteer and board member with various non-government organizations working on refugee law and policy. Her doctoral research was on refugees in the Asia Pacific region.  Dr Biok has been an active member of the International Commission of Jurists Australia since the 1009s and at present is the Secretary General. She regularly speaks on human rights issues in Southeast Asia. She worked as a legal advisor with the United Nations in Timor Leste and currently assists church groups in both Dili and remote areas. She is a fluent Indonesian speaker and has spoken to legal and civil society groups in Indonesia and Timor Leste about refugee law.  We hope you will join us at our meeting next Wednesday.**   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | | **Regards**  **Nizza Siano Secretary L4R NSW email:**[*contact@labor4refugees.com*](mailto:contact@labor4refugees.com) | |  | | |  |      |  | | --- | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | |  | | | |
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