

**SPEECH BY
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S.A. REFUGEE WEEK 2008 LAUNCH
MONDAY 16 JUNE 2008
MIGRANT RESOURCE CENTRE, KING WILLIAM STREET, ADELAIDE**

SPEECH

I am very pleased to be here with you today to launch Refugee Week which has been celebrated in Australia since 1986.

Each year we set aside the week from the 15th to the 21st of June to acknowledge the amazing contributions that refugees make to Australian society and draw attention to international refugee concerns.

It encourages Australians to think about our common obligations to people who have no secure home, as well as to acknowledge the 700,000 refugees and humanitarian migrants over the past 60 years who have made Australia their home.

This year the theme for Refugee Week 2008 in Australia is "A Place to Call Home".

From post World War II to today, Australia has assisted refugees from all over the world, including from Poland, Germany, Hungary, Ukraine, Vietnam, Latin America, Bosnia, Croatia, the Middle East, South Asia, and the continent of Africa.

Australia and South Australia has truly become "home" to so many new arrivals and their subsequent generations.

South Australia is home to people from more than 200 different countries, who speak more than 200 languages.

All have become a part of the Australian whole, and Australian society has become richer – in every sense of the word – inclusive, enterprising, and full of vitality and prosperity.

Within every South Australian – Indigenous, descendant of early European settlers, migrant and refugee – there is a precious repository of culture, language and history, and a legacy of customs and traditions.

Refugee Week is a time for us all to reflect on our collective journey to this place, to this time, to today. A time to share our stories, remember and honour our past, and forge ahead with our lives.

Refugees face many challenges when arriving in their new, and to them, strange, country.

I myself, thirty years ago, fled the devastation of the Vietnam War with my wife to build a new life in Australia.

I know from personal experience that it is not easy being a refugee.

Earlier this year Multicultural SA held a youth breakfast where many refugees came together with the heads of key service provider organisations. Three young people spoke about their time in Australia and about their successes; and the common thread was that in each case they said the one key factor in achieving success was to have a positive outlook.

I can see around me lots of people who have a positive outlook and who encourage others to have a positive outlook.

When I came to Adelaide I was fortunate to receive help, guidance, acceptance and understanding from caring people during the first weeks, months and years after my arrival.

Providing the best level of support services for refugees in those first important months can help to encourage participation in the community as soon as possible.

And it is through the many government and non government agencies, and through the personal efforts of thousands of volunteers that we respond effectively to the changing composition of the refugee intake.

With such social diversity it is vital that we continue to live and work together, regardless of colour, religion or cultural background, to create the best opportunities for all South Australians.

By your example, you are emphasising the nature of multiculturalism as a force for community unity, harmony and renewal and I thank you all for supporting multiculturalism so strongly and actively.

Thank you.