



World Refugee Day



*Waitakere,
a place to call home.*



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A World Refugee Day Message from Bob Harvey, Mayor of Waitakere City

I am delighted to be writing the introduction to this special booklet published to mark a special day - World Refugee Day. And I am very proud in general of Waitakere's warm welcome and commitment to new migrants.

The west has always been this way. Many years ago we welcomed the Croatians, the Dutch and our Pacific neighbours. Today we continue with that warm welcome to our new migrants from Somalia, Asia and many other nations, indeed from around the world.

We in the west have always embraced the global family of humanity. New migrants and refugees enhance the social fabric of this community and their unique skills, experiences and perspectives help make our city a more dynamic and energetic place to live. With Waitakere's help many refugees have come to call the west home.

Attending our very regular and auspicious citizenship ceremonies is one of the highlights of my job as mayor and it is just so good to see people happy to be part of a new community that has truly embraced them.

Waitakere City Council has some very real and tangible initiatives in place in this regard. One of our Calls to Action is that "every migrant or refugee settles successfully". We have a very important partnership with the Waitakere Ethnic Board, expressed in a Memorandum of Understanding and we proudly display, and are committed to, the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We are also a City for Peace and we have been a key participant in the establishment of New Out West, a collaborative settlement network for service providers. We have been the lead agency for the local provision of Settlement Support Services and we collaborate with key refugee support organisations.

These are just a few of our initiatives. There are many more and they work.

Lastly, I would like to say that our new migrants and refugees contribute to Waitakere's essence, its character, its unique soul and its ancient immortal spirit. They make Waitakere a place with personality and humour and a place that displays verve and panache.

A place where I and many others - old and new - are pleased to call home.

Bob Harvey, Mayor of Waitakere City

A World Refugee Day Message from Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – the UN Refugee Agency

Every year on the 20 June, the world honours the courage, resilience and strength of refugees. On this anniversary of the UN-designated World Refugee Day, thousands of organisations in hundreds of countries will come together to focus global attention on the plight of refugees and the causes of their exile, their determination and will to survive and on the contributions they make to their host communities.

Refugees flee their country not for economic gain but to escape persecution, the threat of imprisonment and even threats to their lives. They need a safe haven where they can recover from mental and physical trauma and rebuild their hopes for a better future.

The intolerance that is often at the root of internal displacement and refugee flows is also present in some of the countries that refugees flee to. Instead of finding empathy and understanding, they are often met with mistrust or scorn. On World Refugee Day, let's not forget that some day in the future any one of us could be knocking at a stranger's door hoping to find a safe and friendly shelter. We should extend refugees the same kind of welcome we would like to receive if we were in their position.

While many refugees want to go home, some cannot safely return. But wherever they are, refugees will always strive to pick up the pieces and start over. The courage and determination demonstrated during their darkest hours will serve them well in rebuilding a new life. On World Refugee Day, let us honour them for these qualities and recognise the richness and diversity they bring to our societies.

Antonio Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Refugees in New Zealand

New Zealand has been accepting refugees for resettlement since the end of the Second World War. In 1987, the Government established a formal annual quota for the resettlement of refugees. Over time, New Zealand's refugee policy has evolved in response to changing global circumstances and needs. In recent years, a focus on refugees in need of protection - identified by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - has resulted in the resettlement of a diverse range of nationalities, for example, from East Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

New Zealand's refugee policy reflects the Government's commitment to fulfilling its international humanitarian obligations and responsibilities. Through refugee policy, New Zealand contributes to the global community's efforts to assist refugees in need of resettlement.

The size and composition of the refugee resettlement quota is set annually by the Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, after consultation with the UNHCR, relevant Government departments, nongovernmental organisations, existing refugee communities and other stakeholders. In recent years, New Zealand's annual resettlement quota has been maintained at 750 places with a focus on the needs and priorities identified by the UNHCR. The Government aims to ensure that the quota remains targeted to refugees in greatest need of resettlement, while also balancing this with New Zealand's capacity to provide good settlement outcomes to those accepted under the programme.

The Refugee Quota Branch (RQB) of Immigration New Zealand, Department of Labour is responsible for managing New Zealand's annual refugee quota programme. All refugees considered for resettlement under New Zealand's annual Refugee Quota Programme (except certain applicants who are nuclear or dependent family members of the principle applicant) must be recognised as a refugee under the UNHCR's mandate and referred by the UNHCR according to prescribed resettlement guidelines

After selection and travel to New Zealand, quota refugees undergo a six week orientation course at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre. During this time, the refugees receive coordinated cross agency support from education, physical and mental health, and social work service providers in preparation for their transition into their new community.

Family reunification is recognised as an important part of New Zealand's refugee resettlement activities. However, it is acknowledged that there is a consistently high level of demand for family reunification from resettled refugees that cannot be met through the Refugee Quota programme alone.

In cases where the family members of refugees resettled in New Zealand are themselves recognised as refugees by the UNHCR and the case is considered to meet UNHCR resettlement guidelines, it will usually be referred to RQB for consideration by the UNHCR. In the case of separated members of the immediate family, the RQB may waive the requirement of a formal UNHCR submission, provided the relationship was originally declared to the RQB.

Such cases may include nuclear family members in their country of origin. Generally, refugees who have relatives in New Zealand and who do not qualify for resettlement in accordance with the UNHCR resettlement criteria must apply for residence under standard immigration categories.

In recognition of the fact that it is often difficult for family members of refugees to meet the eligibility requirements of normal immigration policy, Immigration New Zealand also has a special policy that allows extended family members of refugees in New Zealand to apply for Permanent Residence without the restriction of normal criteria. This immigration category is currently limited to 300 places per year.

Source – Office of the National Refugee Resettlement Coordinator, New Zealand Immigration Service, Department of Labour

Refugees live in a divided world, between countries in which they cannot live, and countries which they may not enter.

Elie Wiesel

World Refugee Day – Our Stories

Aimee

I am Chin Burmese and fled Burma on foot, making my way to Thailand where an agent (or smuggler) was waiting. Along with a small group of Burmese we walked for about 15 days through the jungle, mostly at night to avoid being seen. From Thailand we made our way to Malaysia, sometimes by bus, other times by walking. We were scared and worried about being caught all of the time.

On our first day in Malaysia, we camped in a jungle near Kuala Lumpur. We kept the fire small to avoid being noticed and had a sleepless night with fear, cold and mosquitoes keeping us awake.

We were a bit more fortunate than many refugees living in the jungle and our group managed to find a small flat in Kuala Lumpur. A cramped space was shared by about twenty people and men and women all slept on the floor in the one room.

I found a job in a restaurant with very low pay and an employer who knew about my unlawful status. I couldn't speak English or Malay at the time but learned English while I was working there. During this time I was still scared and worried every day because I regularly heard reports of refugees being arrested and sent to jail or even worse (some refugees were found dead in a trailer).

My stay in Kuala Lumpur lasted two and a half years before I got the chance to have an interview with the UNHCR. Although I didn't have family in New Zealand, my husband, who I met in Malaysia, and I decided it would be the best option for us.

Arriving at the airport in Auckland I didn't have a clue where I was and I was terrified when I saw the refugee centre in Mangere, thinking it was a jail. But after a warm welcome by the people from RMS I felt safe and enjoyed the six weeks training there. I learned about shopping at the supermarket (and having to queue!) and how to use kitchen facilities. I was unfamiliar with some of the food, such as bread and cereals, but I'm okay with them now. I still can't eat lamb.

My memory of our first home is very clear and an RMS worker gave me the key and I opened the door. RMS had been furnishing our home before we moved in. Some furniture and equipment was new, some was donated and everything we needed was there. I was so excited and overwhelmed because it was very much like a rich person's house in Burma.

I still miss my family in Burma. This was especially so when we heard about the cyclone, with all communication down and not being able to contact anyone for over a week. It was a huge relief to hear that they were safe and that damage was minimal.

Having started a new life in Auckland, everything is better than ever. My beautiful daughter just had her first birthday and we appreciate all of the opportunities that are in front of her, my husband and me. My husband is studying English at Unitec and I've been offered a job that I'm looking forward to starting. With my English skills I've helped many Burmese in Waitakere and my job offer came from recognition of my ability to work in the community.

Khan

I left my home city of Jalalabad in Afghanistan in 2001. I had worked as a manager on engineering projects for two non-government organisations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Building for the Rehabilitation of Afghanistan (BRA) and the situation had become very tense.

Due to the dangers and circumstances I was not able to travel in my own name and after making my way to Pakistan I contacted an agent and managed to get to Bangkok, Thailand. There I applied to the UNHCR for refugee status but the lengthy delays in processing my application meant I was constantly at risk of arrest and deportation. Without the proper documentation it was extremely hard to move around. In one place I stayed I didn't even open the curtains for two weeks in case people became suspicious of me. The political atmosphere at the time was highly charged as this was shortly after the September 11 terror attacks in the United States.

After 3 ½ months waiting, the UNHCR accepted me as a refugee and with the proper documentation I felt much safer. The next step was to try and get to New Zealand where my elder brother lived. But still I had to wait. After being interviewed in Bangkok by three people from the New Zealand Immigration Service I received my residency approval and identity documents.

In 2002 I arrived in New Zealand. I was only able to meet my brother for a few minutes at Auckland International Airport. After that representatives from RMS Refugee Resettlement greeted me and I was taken to the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre. This was a bit hard but it was okay and after a few days I was able to go out. I received health checks and took English lessons – I didn't speak much English in Afghanistan.

When I left the Mangere centre my major motivation was to reunite my family – my wife, three sons and three daughters. My absence had been hard on them and as the head of the family I was responsible for everything. It wasn't until I got to New Zealand that I was able to properly communicate with them. In 2004 our family was finally reunited and we now live in Waitakere City. I am extremely grateful to the people at RMS Refugee Resettlement who have helped us so much. Our Afghan culture and heritage is also maintained through the local Afghan Association which is open to people from all over Afghanistan.

Our extended family often gathers for celebrations and I was pleased that my close friend from Afghanistan who now lives in Australia was able to join us for my daughter's wedding in January of this year. When we go on holidays together it can be a bit difficult finding accommodation in tourist areas for such a large group but we manage.

These days I work as a cross-cultural worker for RMS and I also drive taxis. My sons have a construction business and I'm very proud of the achievements of all of my children.

Jean Pierre

It doesn't take too long to become a refugee. It may be a matter of courage to leave family and friends to cross the border of your troubled country which can no longer protect the rights of its citizens. It may also be a matter of chance to be alive when many have died from a repressive military regime. The only valuable luggage is your brain. However, settling in a new country is a challenging process for social readjustment, especially when unfamiliar names block the path to successful employment. When we talk about valuing diversity what does this mean in practice?

I come from Burundi, a landlocked country in Central Africa. The political instability in my country contributed to my professional and humanitarian international experience. I have been working in rural development projects in Burundi, Rwanda and Cameroon for 27 years. Joining my family after years of separation in the aftermath of the 1993 military coup against democracy, I arrived in New Zealand on October 31, 2000 where I am trying to re-start a new life. During my exile time, although local communities were sympathetic, we had to face political alliances between ruling regimes against refugees and we were subject to a permanent destabilisation process. Even the right of freedom of peaceful assembly and association was denied to refugees.

Coming from French speaking countries, part of the new learning process was the use of English as a new vital language. I combined acquiring this language skill with gaining other technical skills in accounting and management. I made the decision to go back to university while working to feed the family (nuclear and extended). I still wonder how to get the cheerful work life balance when a 28-hour day is needed. In such instances, enjoying weekends as other Kiwis do is a dream. Recreation also costs money, an expense that may not be a priority when you live on a limited disposable income.

Nevertheless, being a refugee is an ending status. I am grateful to New Zealand, my new homeland, for providing me with the opportunity to enjoy human rights which were denied for too long.

I have met many people and luckily made many new friends. As with all new settlers, other challenges and new opportunities are ahead to building an inclusive, culturally diverse and vibrant society. As the United Nations Development Programme (2004) suggested, meeting such a challenge is not merely a matter of legislative and policy changes, but requires the acknowledgment of diversity and meaningful inclusion of immigrants by changing the political culture.

Courage is a two way process. Succeeding in this objective presents challenges for not only new settlers but also the country's first settlers (or their descendents), the host community, to show courage to focus on the future of a nation such as New Zealand that truly values immigration. I feel there are many forces contributing to this end. Together we can make a positive difference in the world.

Boman

Very early one morning we were woken up to say goodbye to my brother, Lyghat, who was leaving us to go to a safer place - a place where he could go to school, a place where he didn't have to hide from the extremists and a place where he could have freedom.

He was fleeing because of the Taliban, who were violent fighters, and who had taken control of our country, Afghanistan. They made peoples' lives extremely difficult in the country. Imagine, having no freedom and every part of your life is being controlled by someone else. Well that was what we, as Hazara people were facing at that time. Our freedoms were taken away from us and almost every aspect of our lives was being controlled by the cruel Taliban. Nobody was safe under the control of these extremists. At this time Lyghat was in great danger due to his age and the young men were the main target of the Taliban. The Taliban forced men as young as 14 years old to fight for them. Lyghat was at this age and therefore was not safe!

That was when Lyghat thought of fleeing! It was extremely dangerous travelling on the main roads at the time, especially with the Taliban holding checkpoints on your way. He told my dad about his idea of fleeing Afghanistan before the cruel Taliban could do any harm to him. My dad had agreed and he found some other young teenagers and three adults who were also planning to flee the extremists. My father must have put a great deal of both trust and hope in Lyghat and the others arriving somewhere safely, although my father did not know the exact place where he was going.

Here is Lyghat's story as told to me after we were reunited.

"We left Afghanistan with tears and pain! We hid in the back of a truck; some behind the almonds that were sent for export and the rest of us hiding under sheets of clothes. The Taliban were extremely cruel. If they caught us I can't imagine what they could have done to us!

However, we passed the Afghan border without the Taliban detecting us. We arrived in Peshawar, in Pakistan on our third day. There, all of us got split up, because we wanted to go to different places. My friends left me in Peshawar and I was very depressed and felt lonely and homesick.

After few weeks in Peshawar I met some families and ten young men. After five weeks in Peshawar with my new friends we took a plane to Malaysia and then we caught another plane to Indonesia.

From Indonesia in August 2001 we boarded a wooden fishing boat called the Palapa, out on the Indian Ocean. We were heading for Christmas Island which is the closest island to Australian territory. The boat was about 25 metres long. The railing was a metre high. The passengers were packed in tightly above and below deck. When the wooden fishing boat left port, it was had four crew and 434 passengers. They had no radio or any other emergency equipment.

We took our own food and drinks onto the boat - nothing that needed cooking. The boat was very crowded and we were seasick. After one day at sea the wooden fishing boat stopped working and it started to drift. I thought we were not going to survive or be rescued.

Another day had passed and we were still desperate for help. We saw an aeroplane fly over us. The captain saw it through his binoculars and said that it was from Australia. It was a sign of hope for us and for a while we thought that the plane would soon bring help, but it went away again! That night the people were screaming and crying. We thought that our boat would sink and that we would drown.

We didn't know that the Australian patrol aircraft had spotted us and had requested help. As it went away and never came back, we thought it might have missed us. But instead, it had directed Captain Arne Rinnan, Master of the Norwegian freighter MV Tampa to rescue us aboard the Palapa. The MV Tampa was leaving the Western Australian port of Fremantle and was travelling to Singapore, but had turned aside to rescue us in the Indian Ocean.

As the MV Tampa was on course towards our boat, it's crew wondered whether we could be a pirate ambush. However, once they were close to us they could tell that we were passengers, not pirates.

On Sunday, 26 of August 2001, the vast, 10 metre-high hull of the MV Tampa loomed above our stricken boat and desperate passengers. The boat was nearly sinking with its stern disintegrating and its superstructure badly damaged and our plight could not have been more precarious.

We were transferred from the Palapa onto the MV Tampa, which is one of the world's largest roll-on, roll-off vessels.

As we approached Christmas Island, the Captain radioed ahead to the Australian territory. The Captain asked them “Can we come into your waters?” but the Australian government refused and said no!

After about six or seven days of waiting and circling Christmas Island without proper food and diseases starting to rise, the Captain was out of patience so he told us “We will just go into the Australian waters without any permission!” But the patrol ships of the Australian Navy came out to the MV Tampa and prevented us from going any further.

After a couple of days another ship, the HMAS Monoora, from Australia, took us to Papua New Guinea. After that we were transferred to Nauru. With the situation as it was, several countries including New Zealand and Germany were prepared to take some of us. The New Zealand Prime Minister, Helen Clark said that they felt for the children and the families. After our fourteen days journey to Nauru one hundred of us, children and families, came to New Zealand. We were all extremely happy and couldn't imagine how we got here!”

In New Zealand they started new lives and had their freedom back. They would go to school and had nobody to control them except themselves. In 2004 my whole family came to settle in New Zealand and we reunited again.

Here in New Zealand, we enjoy our lives and learning. We especially thank Arne Rinnan for his extreme bravery and the New Zealand government for their help and accepting the Tampa people. I personally cannot imagine such an amazing and dramatic journey the Tampa people have been through and the experiences they have lived through under such terrible regimes.



Photo courtesy of author

The MV Tampa looms above the Palapa before rescuing 434 people.

Libraries

Your place of discovery

Multicultural and Migrant Services

What Multicultural and Migrant Services are available?

- Multicultural and migrant services are provided to enable those who are newly arrived in New Zealand, or are non-English speaking members of the community to gain access to the library and to library services and facilities. IN addition, migrant services exist to provide information, or access to information to assist new migrants and refugees to effectively settle in Waitakere City.

Multicultural Collections

- International Languages Collections for adults and children
- Bilingual books for children
- CDs, tapes and videos in many languages
- International newspapers and magazines

Resources for Learning English

- English language study books and videos
- New Readers Collection (graded reading materials)
- Dictionaries
- Kit sets (Book and CD/cassette)

Multicultural and Migrant Programmes and Services

- Multicultural storytelling
- Reading Incentive Programme and library-based English language courses
- Multilingual information about libraries
- New Settlers' Guide (available in English, Simplified Chinese, Korean and Arabic)
- Presentations and introductory library tours for groups and individuals can be arranged

Learning Centres

- Free internet and email
- Free access to Microsoft applications
- Beginner's computer classes and bilingual learning programmes
- Online international newspapers
- Printing and scanning
- Help with your job search
- After school homework help
- School holiday classes

Other services and organisations in Waitakere

- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for free confidential advice and information.
Interpreter assistance is available. You can find a CAB at Henderson, New Lynn, Massey and Glen Eden
- Settlement Support (a specialised information and referral service for migrants and refugees)
- Language Line (provided by Waitakere City Council)
- Waitakere Ethnic Board
- Waitakere Pacific Board

Phone (09) 839 2260

Email: info@waitakere.govt.nz

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