

Immigration Matters

CAII • THE CHURCHES' AGENCY ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES: RESOURCING CHURCHES AND CONGREGATIONS ON GLOBAL CONCERNS

Seeking Refuge in a Strange Land – the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers

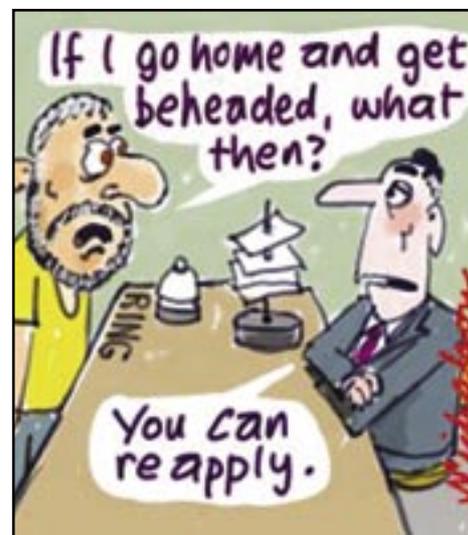
Throughout history innocent people have been forced from their homes to seek safety and refuge in the face of violence. Despite the United Nations (UN) agreeing in 1951 to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, civilians continue to be caught up in horrifying wars, whole communities are displaced within their own countries and many live or are “warehoused” in makeshift refugee camps relying on humanitarian aid for their very survival. Displacement has become a strategy of war. Some, especially those with more resources, have sought refuge in developed countries but many more have entered neighbouring developing countries where often they are competing for limited resources with those living in the host country. The human cost has been very high.

While the highest priority is to prevent the conflict and disempowerment that creates displacement, Christians share a responsibility to protect those who are most vulnerable, including refugees and asylum seekers. The UN specifically referred to the responsibility of individual members to protect the needs and rights of civilian populations in its 60th Anniversary statement. In the same document the international community, through the UN, accepted the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic

cleansing and crimes against humanity. The Responsibility to Protect is becoming an important issue for collective discussion and action when states and the international community have failed to prevent catastrophe.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) currently recognises some 14 million refugees. In addition, an estimated 24.5 million people are displaced within their own countries. With the large numbers of displaced people and increasing insecurity, there is a lot of pressure on governments, the international community, the churches, and concerned people to uphold the Responsibility to Protect. Facing these challenges as a faith community is part of the continuing Christian commitment to help those made vulnerable by circumstances beyond their control.

People have sought refuge in Aotearoa New Zealand since the mid nineteenth century. This Hot Topic examines some of the key areas of concern relating to resettlement and the hurdles that refugees and asylum seekers face, how a host country such as New Zealand can learn from the experiences of refugees in ever-growing multicultural societies, and how churches can continue to engage in the debates central to a theology of kindness, hospitality and justice toward the strangers seeking refuge.



This Hot Topic explores:

- » Definitions and Statistics
- » The Responsibility to Protect
- » Refugee Resettlement in New Zealand
- » Refugee stories
- » What the churches are saying internationally.



The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia



The Salvation Army in New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga



The Methodist Church of New Zealand



The Religious Society of Friends



Christian World Service

Definitions:

Refugee: The 1951 UN Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who: “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

The Convention places certain obligations upon States which are party to it, the most fundamental of which is the principle of ‘non-refoulement’. This concerns the obligation of countries of asylum not to return people forcibly to situations where they have a well-founded fear of persecution. The primary responsibility for protecting and assisting refugees lies with States, particularly the countries of asylum to which refugees flee. UNHCR promotes and monitors States’ adherence to the Convention to enable them to offer adequate protection to the refugees in their territory.

It is not easy for a person to be recognised by the UNHCR. To reach a UNHCR office to register can be extremely difficult, particularly in conflict situations. The process is bureaucratic and refugees do not always have the means to prove their status. Some are labelled as ‘economic

migrants’ seeking an improved or even an adequate livelihood when they see no future at home. The definition does not allow for economic or environmental refugees - those who flee because they can no longer survive in their own land. Receiving countries sometimes accept refugees for political reasons, for example refugees from Cuba find it easier to gain asylum in the USA than those fleeing repressive regimes from Central America. Sadly, those facing persecution on the basis of sexual orientation, health status or gender often find it difficult to receive protection.

Asylum seeker: Someone who is a foreign national seeking the right to reside as a refugee in another country, and to be protected by that country, but who has not yet been formally recognised as a refugee.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs): People forced to flee their home, often for the same reasons as a refugee, but who have not crossed an internationally recognised border. Many IDPs are in refugee-like situations and face the same problems as refugees but are subject to the laws of their home state rather than international law.

Stateless person: Someone who because of their ethnicity or history is denied the right to a nationality. For them “going home” may not depend on a peace accord and repatriation, but rather, on overcoming bureaucratic obstacles and securing an official identity. The estimate of stateless people worldwide has risen to nearly six million from some 60 countries.

Uprooted People: Overarching term that includes communities who flee because of persecution and war, people who are forcibly displaced because of environmental devastation and are compelled to seek sustenance in a city or abroad because they cannot survive at home.

Warehoused refugees: Typically, but not always, confined to camps or segregated settlements where they are virtually dependent on humanitarian assistance. Even refugees who are free to move are still ‘warehoused’ if they are not allowed their rights to work, practice professions, run businesses, and own property. These are people for whom the international community has not been able to find a solution. It is too dangerous to return home but they have not been able to resettle in a third country.

PERSPECTIVES

“New Zealand was the only option, however, saving my life was more important than choosing where to go.”

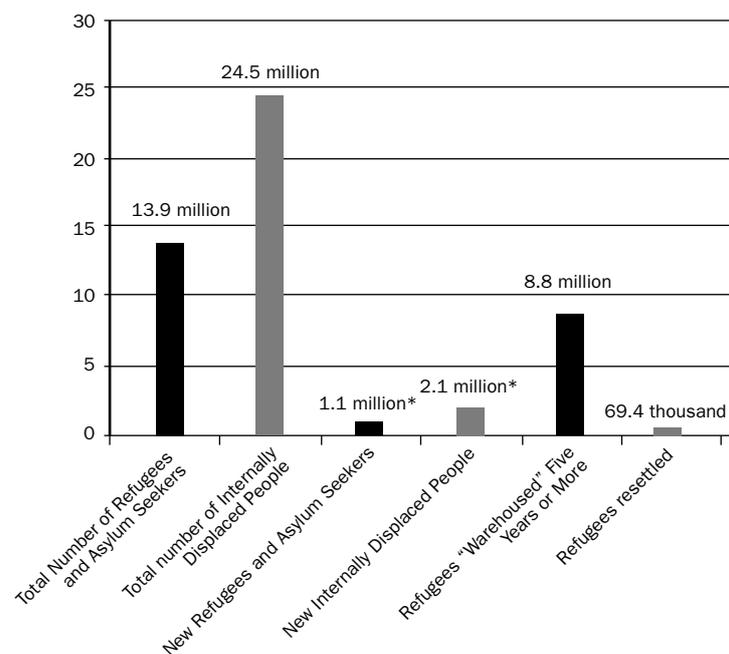
Iranian Convention refugee, six months in NZ

Hot Topics

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Statistics on Uprooted People



* Represents persons who fled their homes during 2006, including those who fled and returned within the year.

(from World Refugee Survey 2007 (www.refugees.org) and Internal Displacement Global Overview 2007 (www.internal-displacement.org))

Who decides who is a refugee?

The UNHCR and individual governments have separate procedures for deciding whether a person is a recognised refugee. Those who are documented as refugees by the UNHCR are allowed to remain in the country of asylum, often in a refugee camp, until such time as they are resettled or they choose to return home - this can take many years. Resettlement is an option for less than 1% of the world's refugees. Some women have been granted refugee protection on the basis of their need for protection from cruel or inhumane treatment. Those who do not receive refugee documentation may be deported, although UNHCR does recommend that people whose applications for asylum have been declined are granted the right of a review and that they be offered some protection if coming from countries facing armed conflict.

For more information refer to www.unhcr.org

Q: Where do most refugees come from?*

Afghanistan	3,260,300
Former Palestine	3,036,400
Iraq	1,687,800
Burma (Myanmar)	693,300
Sudan	648,000
Colombia	453,300
Democratic Republic of Congo	412,300
Somalia	410,300
Burundi	393,700
Vietnam	308,000
Eritrea	255,400
Angola	195,000
China	158,700
Liberia	141,100

*Numbers are for refugees and asylum seekers as of December 31, 2006, and do not include persons granted permanent status in other countries.

Q: What countries and territories host most of the world's refugees?

Host Country	# of Refugees
Pakistan	2,161,500
Syria	1,329,300
Iran	1,025,000
Gaza Strip	1,017,000
Jordan	862,700
West Bank	722,000
Tanzania	485,700
India	435,900
Thailand	408,400

Note: All statistics from <http://www.refugees.org/article.aspx?id=1941>

All at Sea – the story of the Tampa Refugees

Many Afghani refugees have lived in refugee camps all their lives. In an attempt to improve their prospects they often go to extraordinary lengths to find a new future in other countries.

The so-called Tampa refugees fled south by boat seeking refuge in Australia via Indonesia. Many disappeared en route but 438 were rescued from a sinking boat by the Norwegian freighter, MV Tampa, off the Australian coast in August 2001. The Australian government refused them entry as 'queue jumpers'. After a stand off which attracted international attention and concern, they devised what was called the 'Pacific Solution'. In total the Australian authorities detained some 1500 refugees on Nauru and Papua New Guinea. The 'Pacific Solution' soon became a 'Pacific Nightmare' as many of the Tampa refugees began a hunger strike in protest at the handling of their case and their living conditions on Nauru.

International agencies condemned Australia's handling of the Tampa refugees. In response the New Zealand government

accepted 133 young men who were taken into care by Child Youth and Family. In 2005, 76 of the 'Tampa Boys' were granted citizenship, Prime Minister Helen Clark said that they had demonstrated their commitment to New Zealand since their arrival here. "Today, they can proudly proclaim themselves citizens of New Zealand."

Azizullah Mussa, the youngest of the Tampa Boys, said that the Prime Minister's good deed would be repaid by the young men who were determined to become good citizens to show their appreciation for the opportunities New Zealand had given them.

In March 2008, Abbas Nazari, a 'Tampa Boy' came third in New Zealand's national schools spelling competition. He has only learnt English for 6 years. Now 12, he says "Australia didn't want us because they thought we were terrorists ... but New Zealand listened to us and they thought we weren't terrorist."

The Refugee and Migrant Service engaged volunteers to help the Tampa Boys adjust to

life in New Zealand. Director Peter Cotton says that the onus is on the community to accept new arrivals if the process is to work. "Whilst you may view resettlement as some kind of process, in fact belonging is not a process but a feeling...and you need people to make you belong, and you can't belong unless you're accepted."

By 2004, all but 11 of the Tampa Afghans had been granted refugee status.

For discussion:

- How do New Zealanders respond to refugees and asylum seekers?
- Have you had any direct experience of helping people resettle? What were some of the difficulties you encountered? What did you learn from the experience?

Responsibility to Protect

In response to continued widespread atrocities, members of the United Nations have considered from time to time whether or not they have a 'right to intervene' in the affairs of a member state where there is systematic and widespread attacks on civilian populations such as occurred in Kosovo or Rwanda. At the December 2001 meeting of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty the discussion was reformulated on the 'responsibility to protect' people in need of assistance rather than focusing attention on whether countries should intervene. Included in the Outcome statement of the 60th Anniversary Summit of the United Nations are the following paragraphs (138-139):

Responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

138. Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it. The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability.

139. The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other



peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In this context, we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, ... should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. ... We also intend to commit ourselves, as necessary and appropriate, to helping States build capacity to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and to assisting those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break out.

Did you know?

- Developing countries host the largest number of refugees, but with the least resources to adequately to do so.
- Africa has historically hosted on average 25% of all the world's refugees, Europe 18%, the Americas 10%, and Oceania 9%.
- Europe collectively hosts the world's largest number of asylum seekers, (particularly in Germany and the UK).
- Afghanistan has the largest number of displaced people scattered through-out the world, there are 3.2 million Afghans located in 71 different countries; 15% of the global refugee population.
- Kosovo has seen the largest and fastest voluntary repatriation of refugees since the end of the Second World War.

PERSPECTIVES

“Resettlement is a journey, a process of learning, adapting and understanding. Coming to a new country with a different culture, language, religion, and traditions, is a challenging venture into the unknown.”

Voices of Refugees – A journey of resettlement in New Zealand NZIS survey, 2004

Refugee settlement in New Zealand

While many refugees have resettled in New Zealand they have not always been made welcome.

There is often a stigma attached to being a refugee. Refugees usually lack English language skills, may be experiencing persecution and suffering trauma, and have qualifications that are not recognised in New Zealand. Not all refugees arrive in groups or as family units as part of the official refugee quota. Some may first enter New Zealand seeking asylum in order to be granted refugee status. Without proof from the UNHCR who assign refugee status they face significant obstacles especially when they may be reliant on false documents and lack proof of their identity.

Although New Zealand has been one of the countries to take a lead in recognising the importance of family units staying together; individual family members are often very worried about the safety and health of other family members who may still be in refugee camps or on the move. The family reunification process can be quite lengthy. Now that border controls are tighter than ever, it is more difficult for those who are not part of the government managed refugee quota system to enter the country and gain asylum.

Migrants have made New Zealand what it is today. Over many generations Maori made Aotearoa their home and their land. Subsequent settlers have added to the increasing cultural diversity of our growing multicultural society. Like other migrants, refugee families take time to adjust to life in a new country where much may be unfamiliar. Many have quickly adapted despite the very limited resources and support networks available to them. Initially they are very dependent on government-provided support services, particularly in areas of housing, education, employment, health and income. They seek opportunities to make friends, establish networks and where appropriate participate in ceremonies appropriate to their faith.

In a survey of newly arrived refugees and those who had been here for two or more years conducted in 2004 the NZIS "Refugee Voices - A journey to resettlement", observed that:

- In general, teenagers felt it was easier for them than their parents to settle - within the first six months most had



interpreted or translated for their parents. Some of the freedoms young people had here were sometimes seen as disrespectful towards parents and outside traditional family and cultural practices.

- Making friends was very important for extending social networks; to learn about the 'Kiwi' lifestyle; to improve English; to help each other; to be part of a wider community; and exchanging cultures.
- 36% of participants met friends through an ethnic group or association. 33% met friends through a religious group (such as a church).
- The most common expectations that recently arrived refugees expressed were the need to find work, be safe and secure and to have a peaceful life in New Zealand.

"What participants liked about New Zealand reflected what most did not have in their former countries - freedom and democracy, safety and security, and peace and quiet. These are probably the most important mitigating factors for refugees when dealing with the challenges of resettlement, in particular their ability to become self-supporting." To view a copy of the report see: <http://www.immigration.govt.nz/community/general/generalinformation/research/generalresearch/refugees/Refugee+Voices/>

PERSPECTIVES

"I loved Afghanistan, but now I have come here and they have supported me and made a new life for me, now I love New Zealand. It is very good for me."

Tampa Refugee - Rajab Ali Merzaie, July, 2002.

PERSPECTIVES

"Former refugees can now be found in every walk of life and they continue to make a valued contribution to the social, cultural and economic fabric of our increasingly multicultural society."

Refugee Resettlement, NZ.

How does Refugee settlement happen in New Zealand?

Quota Refugees: New Zealand is one of 16 countries participating in the UNHCR refugee quota system. The Immigration Service accepts 750 UNHCR-prioritised refugees per year under three categories: persecution, women-at-risk, and medical or disabled. This arrangement was originally formalised in 1987 for 800 refugees and altered in 1997 to 750 refugees when the government agreed to meet their travel costs. They are refugees who cannot safely return to their home country or be integrated into the country where they have temporarily found refuge. In 2006/7 the majority of refugees were resettled from Myanmar (Burma) and Afghanistan.

Refugee Resettlement (formerly known as the Refugee and Migrant Service -RMS): is a national non-profit organization established in 1976, with branches in Auckland, Hamilton, the Hutt Valley, Wellington, Napier and Christchurch. Its staff and volunteers have assisted more than 40,000 refugees to settle and build a future in New Zealand. Refugee Resettlement has a contract with the New Zealand Immigration Service (NZIS) to resettle refugees under the UNHCR quota system. Refugees coming to New Zealand spend their first 6 weeks at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre where they receive health screening, health care, English lessons and are given a basic orientation to life in New Zealand. Housing New Zealand then finds homes for them usually in the following areas: Auckland, Hamilton, Napier,

Palmerston North, Wellington, Nelson and Christchurch

Volunteer workers assist refugees with ongoing settlement needs and with accessing services. The sponsors make a six month commitment to a family to help them find accommodation, obtain furniture and household effects, to introduce them to WINZ, to teach them how to use the supermarket, to access health care services, to access education services and the use of public transport. There may be up to 4 sponsors working with any one family to help them make the necessary adjustments to life in New Zealand.

The Refugees as Survivors Centre (RAS): provides a trauma counselling service as well as therapeutic activities for adults and children. Social services are provided as well as training programmes for volunteer support.

Family re-unification: Many refugees arriving in New Zealand remain anxious about the health and safety of family members elsewhere. In recognition of the importance of family to the long term well-being of refugees the government allocates places for 300 sponsored migrants under the Family Support Category. A refugee is able to sponsor one other family member who may bring their partner and children. There are more applicants each year than places available.

Convention Refugees: In addition to the Quota refugees New Zealand accepts approximately 200-500 refugees who seek asylum at the border each year. They are currently processed through the Refugee Status Branch of the New Zealand Immigration Service. The Refugee Status Appeal Authority hears and determines appeals against decisions of the Refugee Status Branch. The government introduced new regulations and laws allowing for the faster removal of people from New Zealand and allowing for the detention of asylum seekers while their cases are assessed. In recent years the numbers of asylum seekers have been declining. In the year 2006/7 244 people applied for refuge (down from a high of 2037 in the year 2000/01) of which 62

applications were approved (down from a high of 2001/02 when 631 applications were approved affecting 650 people). In 2006/7 most of the accepted asylum seekers came from Iraq and China. (<http://www.refugee.org.nz/Stats/stats.htm>)

In 2007 Parliament introduced an Immigration Bill that is a complete reform of the law relating to immigration. It is currently before the Transport and Industrial Relations Select Committee who are due to report to the Parliament by 30 June 2008.

For discussion:

- You or your church community may have been involved in resettling refugees or other migrants. How do refugees fare in Aotearoa New Zealand?
- Do you think New Zealand adequately fulfils its international obligations to refugees?
- Refugee communities may often 'stick together' because of language difficulties and the need to maintain cultural values and a sense of connectedness. However, the perception held by the wider community can be one of separatism. What do you think?

PERSPECTIVES

"I like everything about being in New Zealand: school, going shopping, being at home with my family, playing outdoors with my friends, especially playing rugby."

Iraqi Quota refugee, five years in NZ

PERSPECTIVES

"I believed it was multicultural and as my relatives said, New Zealand people are friendly and kind, and the Halal food is available."

Somali Quota refugee, six months in NZ

"Here in New Zealand, both father and child seem to be like friends, so the style of dealing with children has had to change."

Burmese Quota refugee

THE STORY OF AHMED ZAOUÏ

On 4 December 2002, Algerian national Ahmed Zaoui arrived at Auckland airport after almost a decade in exile. He sought political asylum under the United Nations Refugee Convention. Like many others in similar circumstances, Ahmed Zaoui had a false passport which is allowed for in the UN Convention. Ahmed Zaoui had every reason to expect fair treatment as New Zealand is a signatory to that Convention.

A Muslim, university lecturer and mosque teacher, Ahmed Zaoui was elected to the new Algerian National Assembly on the winning Front Islamic du Salut (FIS) ticket in the initial round of the country's first ever democratic elections in December 1991. Unhappy with the results of the election the military staged a violent coup and the president dissolved the Assembly. Ahmed Zaoui was tortured and fearing for his life fled into exile with his family. Accused of supporting the more militant Armed Islamic Group in Algeria (GIA) which reportedly has links to Al Qaeda, he was deported from Belgium, France, Switzerland, Burkina Faso and Malaysia before finally landing in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Immigration Service referred him to the Security Intelligence Service (SIS). On arrival the SIS interviewed and videoed him for 7 hours without his consent. His application for refugee status was declined and he was detained in prison, firstly at Paremoremo and then in the Auckland Remand Prison, including 10 months in solitary confinement. In March 2003, the SIS issued a 'security risk certificate' allowing his continued detention.

The Refugee Status Appeal Authority (RSAA) granted Ahmed Zaoui refugee status in August 2003, stating that there was no credible evidence to suggest his involvement in terrorism or serious crime. On the basis of this decision his lawyers argued that the SIS was relying on second-hand information against a recognised refugee and that not disclosing this evidence to Ahmed Zaoui was a grave disregard of his human rights. The Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops released a joint statement in October

2003 calling for his release and protection under the UN Convention on Refugees. In December 2003 the High Court ruled that the SIS should provide a 'summary of allegations' against Ahmed Zaoui and that the Inspector General of the SIS should consider his human rights in this case.

Ahmed Zaoui's case is a test case for the New Zealand justice system. Since 1996 the SIS powers have been increased, leaving the Inspector General as the only avenue for appeal. It raises important questions about the human rights of a recognised refugee, including information supplied by third parties. His lawyers campaigned for his release from detention, full freedom, and re-unification with his family, as well as changes to ensure that refugees will no longer be unfairly detained without fair process. They also noted that many more people have been held in detention without charge around the world since 11 September 2001.

Ahmed Zaoui was released from prison in March 2005 to the care of the Catholic Friars at the Dominican Priory in Auckland with strict bail conditions including a curfew. In a press conference he said, "The first days of coming out of prison will always remain in my memory. It is almost indescribable how I felt at this time. After so long, I could feel the air on my face and see your beautiful country." In his 2006 Christmas message to supporters Ahmed wrote, "I thank you for supporting my struggle for freedom and re-unification with my family...it is the friendship which I have received from the Catholic Friars and so many of you which helps me to endure this long wait for justice."

Almost five years after he first arrived in New Zealand, the new head of the SIS, Dr Warren Tucker, revisited the decision of his predecessor, and withdrew the security risk certificate on September 13th, allowing him to live in New Zealand as a genuine refugee.



Ahmed Zaoui

The culture of hope

During his time in prison he wrote a collection of poems, in one entitled "The culture of hope" he writes,

"I imagine I live in a black room and the darkness has spread. A pinprick of light captures my attention, and I contemplate this light. And live for it. I desire to expand the light. If I continuously contemplate the dark, I will die. Through this light, I declare my existence and my victory. My joys and disappointments. And my existence arrives. I am a tear, under restraint. I am a tear, crystallising in the eye of the sufferer. I am a sigh, intruding inside a lover."

For discussion:

- As a signatory to the UN treaties protecting refugees, what level of assistance should New Zealand offer to those seeking asylum?
- How can the public, government officials, or media fairly assess the likelihood of an individual from a different context participating in terrorism?
- How do you balance the fear of terrorism and the need to uphold human rights?
- Should the NZ government make the evidence against someone seeking asylum available to them?
- What can we learn from the case of Ahmed Zaoui?

A history of refugee settlement in New Zealand

Some of the earliest refugee groups to resettle in Aotearoa New Zealand were Danes fleeing the suppression of their language and culture under German occupation in the 1870s and Jews escaping persecution in Tsarist Russia from the 1880. In the 1930s it was difficult for people fleeing Nazi Germany to enter New Zealand. The 1931 Immigration Restriction Act excluded 'aliens' unless they had guaranteed employment, substantial capital, or particular knowledge or skills. Up to 1,100 mainly Jewish refugees came from Europe in the lead up to World War II.

Formal refugee resettlement is seen to have begun with an intake of about 800 Polish refugees in 1944. They were to stay for the duration of the war but with difficult conditions in post war Poland; all were able to remain in the country. New Zealand accepted 5000 European refugees (including Jews and Slavs) after the Second World War and later 1,100 Hungarian refugees in 1956 after the revolution. During the 1960s New Zealand accepted Chinese orphans and families from Hong Kong and Indonesia, Russian Christians and Czech refugees. In the 1970s Asian refugees expelled from Idi Amin's Uganda and Chileans fleeing the army's overthrow of the Allende government in 1973 were resettled.

From 1974-91 New Zealand accepted:

PERSPECTIVES

"You, as an island nation seem to understand well that "No man is an island," and that we are all diminished by political injustice against our fellow human beings – whomever and wherever they are. And, by the same token, we are also all increased by acts of kindness, and acts of justice, tolerance and by standing together in peace and friendship."

Ahmed Zaoui, on release from Prison, 22 March, 2005

Soviet Jews, East Europeans, Baha'i refugees from Iran, Assyrian Christians from Iraq, Iraqi deserters from the 1991 Gulf war and South-East Asian refugees including Vietnamese boat people. The first significant population resettled from Africa was in 1992 and 1994 when New Zealand accepted refugees from Somalia fleeing civil war, drought and famine.

In the late 1990s New Zealand accepted refugees from the former Yugoslavia including 600 displaced people from Kosovo as well as refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Iran, Afghanistan and the Sudan.

Churches have played a crucial role in the settlement of refugees in New Zealand. The National Council of Churches (NCC) worked closely with the government to find families and churches that would sponsor refugees until the 1980s when government agencies took on a greater role in providing housing and meeting basic living needs of refugees. Taking a lead from the World Council of Churches, the NCC worked with representatives from the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church and Jewish communities under the umbrella of the Inter-Church Council on Public and Social Affairs.

The Inter-Church Commission on Immigration and Refugee Resettlement (ICCI) was formed in 1975 by

representatives from the National Council of Churches, the Catholic Bishops Conference, HIAS (Hebrew Immigration Aid Society) and the United Synagogues of New Zealand. The Commission largely focussed on refugee matters, but it also actively assisted other migrants and people applying for political asylum. In 1986 the governance of ICCI was assumed by the Conference of Churches of Aotearoa New Zealand (CCANZ). CCANZ continued its governance role until 1990 when the agency became an officially incorporated society and its name was changed to the Refugee and Migrant Commission-Aotearoa New Zealand Inc. The membership was expanded to include representatives from other faiths, refugee communities and refugee-related agencies. Today the RMS Refugee Resettlement (formerly known as the Refugee and Migrant Service) is governed by a board.

Special Residence Policy for Zimbabwean Nationals

In July 2005 the Minister of Immigration announced a special policy to allow Zimbabweans who had fled the turmoil of Mugabe's regime to be granted residence in New Zealand. This was in recognition of the unique circumstances of their home country and the need to provide people with some certainty about their immediate future. The policy acknowledged people were in a refugee-like situation and it was not safe for them to return home. The policy applied to any Zimbabwe nationals who arrived in New Zealand on or before 23 September 2004, and who did not meet the requirements for approval under any other residence policy. This was later amended to exempt them from the normal health standards, including HIV and AIDS status and was undertaken as a humanitarian action. Over 900 people have been approved for residence under the special policy.

The UNHCR welcomed the decision. "Obtaining permanent residence is an important step towards attaining citizenship, and allowing displaced people to rebuild their lives." Many Zimbabweans have now settled in New Zealand and have taken up opportunities for further education or retrained for work in areas like nursing where there are staff shortages.

For more information on the Zimbabwe Crisis see Hot Topic 1 and updates: <http://www.cws.org.nz/Resources/international.asp>.

PERSPECTIVES

"There are cultural clashes, we parents expect them to stick with our culture without understanding the new culture in hand, and as a result they get confused. Parents need parent education for the sake of their children."

Ethiopian Quota refugee, two years in NZ

Fasting for his faith - the story of Ali Panah

Ali Panah arrived in New Zealand in 2002 from Iran. After overstaying his visa he requested asylum fearing persecution based on his conversion to Christianity. This was declined. He refused to sign the deportation documents from the Refugee Status Appeals Authority and was held in Mt Eden Prison for 20 months. In a last bid to be recognised as a political refugee from Islamic Iran, Ali Panah spent 53 days fasting before he was finally released on humanitarian grounds and given bail in early September 2007. He is one of five Iranian Christians whose applications for refugee status have been rejected by New Zealand authorities in the past two years.

Ali Panah has received much support from within the Christian community, in particular the Anglican Church. The Church has provided care and legal support since his release from prison. When Archbishop Moxon and Anglican Social Justice

Commissioner Anthony Dancer visited Ali Panah in prison prior to his release, they found him lucid and calm though in poor health, reporting that he had told them that as his body wasted away, his spirit and faith in God grew stronger.

For discussion:

- Should New Zealand follow Australia's lead and accept more asylum seekers who claim persecution in Islamic states because of their own conversion to Christianity?
- How can Christians respond to those seeking political asylum and held in captivity?
- How can we increase our knowledge and understanding of the situations in Islamic countries?

PERSPECTIVES

"Protection itself has been the story of a constant evolution over many centuries, but today's climate is particularly challenging and complex. Current global migration patterns, in a world rapidly shrinking because of improved communications, involve not only refugees and asylum seekers, but also the often interlinking movements of millions of economic migrants seeking a better way of life, as well as human traffickers and their multi-billion dollar business."

UNHCR 2007

A Brief History of the UNHCR

In 1921, the League of Nations appointed Fridtjof Nansen of Norway as High Commissioner for Refugees. Nansen persuaded 53 nations to agree to offer protection to passport holders. These arrangements became the foundation for the Refugee Convention in 1933 and the international laws recognising the rights of refugees. The International Office for Refugees was later re-established as the Office for the High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly.

Initially the UNHCR was set up for three years to resettle 1.2 million European refugees, but as further refugee crises mushroomed around the globe, its mandate was extended every five years. UNHCR has to date assisted 50 million people in over 120 countries. By the mid 1990s UNHCR was providing programmes and aid to assist 27 million refugees worldwide each year. UNHCR was awarded

the Nobel Peace Prize twice, in 1954 and 1981.

To learn more about the work of the UNHCR refer to www.unhcr.org

For discussion:

Increased migration has significantly changed the nature of the global community. Millions of people live outside the country of their birth. You may like to discuss some of the following questions:

- Why do people migrate? Poor people? Rich people?
- Should people be able to move more easily between countries?
- What are some of the consequences of increased migration on a global scale?
- Are there other groups that you

think that should be able to find refuge eg on the basis of religious belief?

- What are the benefits and costs of increasing migration, in New Zealand for example?
- Does New Zealand have a special responsibility to our Pacific neighbours?
- Should New Zealand allow more skilled workers to enter the country?
- Should New Zealand do more to stop skilled New Zealanders leaving the country?



What are the Churches saying?

Churches are concerned that the global trend towards criminalising refugees, asylum seekers and migrants through tightened borders and increased detention results in decreased security for uprooted people and heightened vulnerability to exploitation, by smugglers and human traffickers along their journeys and by unscrupulous employers in the host country. Such a response does nothing to address the root causes of forced migration, which include regional conflicts, climate change and sea level rise, and loss of livelihood due to corporate globalization and free trade agreements that disadvantage countries of the South. (WCC, 2005)

Protection for the most vulnerable

In a statement made to the UNHCR in October 2005, the World Council of Churches (WCC) urged the UNHCR to:

- challenge governments not to introduce ever more restrictionist entry policies and to challenge the trend toward using security concerns to justify detention of all undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers;
- press governments not to pursue actions to criminalise migrants or those who seek to protect them and to encourage governments to do more to create and facilitate welcoming societies and to foster integration;
- insist, as a matter of principle, that undocumented migrants and asylum-seekers are detained only in exceptional circumstances and detained for only a limited time, and that people can avail themselves of judicial review and legal advice. Under no circumstances should conditions of detention for migrants and asylum-seekers be lower than that for convicted criminals.
- to lend its support to this request by churches for access to detention centres.

At its 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil in February 2006 the WCC adopted a statement on "Vulnerable Populations at Risk - the Responsibility to Protect". The statement distinguishes between prevention and intervention but also says that churches have a ministry of reconciliation and healing. Furthermore churches have a responsibility to care for each other and creation under God's sovereignty.

Our primary concern: Prevention

To be faithful to that responsibility to protect people means above all prevention – prevention of the kinds of catastrophic assaults on individuals and communities that the world has witnessed in Burundi, Cambodia, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other

instances and locations of human-made crises. WCC studies showed that although churches have different views on the use of force for human protection purposes, they agree on the essential role of preventive efforts to avoid and, if possible, tackle the crisis before it reaches serious stages.

The prevention of catastrophic human insecurity requires attention to the root causes of insecurity as well as to more immediate or direct causes of insecurity. Broadly stated, the long-term agenda is to pursue human security and the transformation of life according to the vision of God's Kingdom. The key elements of human security are economic development (meeting basic needs), universal education, respect for human rights, good governance, political inclusion and power-sharing, fair trade, control over the instruments of violence (small arms in particular), the rule of law through law-biding and accountable security institutions, and promoting confidence in public institutions.

Climate change refugees

In a statement from the 9th Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) held in September 2007, reference was given to the plight of those Pacific Nations facing increasing sea levels that threaten their existence and what the future might hold for prospective environmental refugees from the Pacific. Current refugee conventions do not allow for environmental factors in forcing people to flee their homelands. The PCC called for:

- Solidarity with the people of Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Island and for the churches of the Pacific to be welcoming and compassionate churches to people from these islands wishing to resettle.
- Advocacy for a regional immigration policy giving citizens of countries most affected by climate change, especially sea-level rise, rights to resettlement in other Pacific Island nations or Pacific

regional countries of their choice.

- Advocacy for an inter-regional sea level rise financial assistance scheme to finance the cost of mitigation, adaptation and resettlement.
- Churches to help prepare intending immigrants, to welcome and help resettle them into their new homelands.

Welcoming the stranger is not optional, Says WCC

Around the world, people are leaving their home countries in search of safety, freedom or a better life. These migration flows are a challenge to churches as migrants bring their own traditions and values into local parishes or create their own religious communities. At the same time, churches need to live up to their mandate to act and speak out in favour of the weak where migrants and refugees are being victimized

A statement from participants said: "Migration is a fact of life. It is as much an instinct to survive as it is an inevitable consequence of globalization. We can neither turn our backs on it, nor control it. Migrants are not commodities, illegal aliens or mere victims, they are human beings. Migration is a courageous expression of an individual's will to overcome adversity and live a better life."

Full text of the statement by the public hearing on "The Changing Ecclesial Context: Impact of Migration on Living Together" <http://www.oikoumene.org/index.php?id=5779>

For discussion:

- Should New Zealand churches mobilise more resources to assist with refugees overseas and in New Zealand or should the focus be on prevention?
- In what way can churches urge the New Zealand government to fulfil its Responsibility to Protect?
- How can New Zealand churches take effective action to prevent climate change and work together with the Pacific churches to prepare for the likelihood of accommodating environmental refugees from the Pacific?

Reflection:

The following edited extract is taken from a biblical reflection by Dr Bahagt Saman of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt, presented to the World Student Christian Federation Executive Committee meeting in June 2007, Alexandria, Egypt:

All Christians owe their salvation to a refugee – Jesus was born in Bethlehem, to which his parents had travelled because of the taxation decree. Born in a manger, like the children of many of today's migrants, who are born along the road as their parents seek work and a place to call home.

Throughout his life Jesus moved around. He called his disciples to leave what they were doing and to follow him. In fact, if Jesus and the twelve disciples tried to enter the United States today, they would either be the victims of expedited removal, which means they would be immediately returned to their point of origin, or they would most probably, be put in immigration detention. They were Middle Eastern men. They had no specific home. They moved from place to place and often interacted with stigmatised communities. They went away into the mountains and across the lakes. They were suspected of trying to mobilize the masses against the government. It is not known how they supported themselves, and at times, they met in rented rooms. Large crowds followed them and both the religious and political communities thought they were

instigating the uprising of the masses of the poorest of the poor. On arriving in the U.S today, they would be part of the targets list of high-level suspicion of terrorism, primarily because of their place of birth and physical appearance.

The most compelling argument Christ gave for caring for the stranger can be found in Matthew 25:35-6. In it he gives the inheritance of the kingdom to those who cared for him by stating;

“for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me...truly I tell you, just as you did to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

This is a mandate to offer hospitality to the stranger: food to the refugees, here and abroad; water to the migrants crossing the desert; an open church door to the stranger with nowhere to turn; clothing to the migrant newly arrived or the refugee being resettled in your town; medical care for the migrant workers, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers prison visits to detained asylum seekers and immigrants. Responding to these needs can be the foundation of a ministry to the strangers in our communities and our land and are ways to practice inclusive hospitality. Jesus was not only a refugee and a migrant; he was also undocumented both as a child and at the end of his life. We know that Jesus was crucified “outside the gates” of the city because he was not a citizen (Hebrews 13:12).

As Christians, we know that he died for the sins of the world, but at that time the theological implications of his death were not considered in handing down his sentence. Jesus was crucified because he was one with the oppressed and marginalised people of the time, and the religious and political powers feared he was instigating an uprising of the poor. He was one with the day labourer, the least, the last and the lost. He did not have the rights of a citizen; he was one with each and every undocumented migrant in the world. Because he did not have these rights, his crucifixion had to be outside the gates and it was in the garbage dump of the city. He suffered, so others would not have to do the same.

Prayer:

Psalm 31

**Shelter me, Lord
Save me from shame.**

**Let there be justice:
Save me!**

**Help me! Listen!
Be quick to the rescue!
Be my fortress, my refuge.**

**You, my rock and fortress,
Prove your good name.
Guide me, lead me,
Free me from this trap.**

**You are my shelter;
I put myself in your hands,
Knowing you will save me,
Lord God of truth.**

**You hate the slaves of idols,
But I trust in you.
I dance for joy at your constant love.**

**You saw me suffer, you know my pain.
You let no enemy cage me,
But set my feet on open ground.**

**Glory to God, Source of all being,
Eternal Word and Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now
And shall be for ever.**

Amen.

PERSPECTIVES

“We commit ourselves anew to listen, learn, and be challenged by the voices of our sisters and brothers of every faith, race, nationality, class, and age in detention. May we ourselves be faithful travelers on a journey whose destination is a world of life, love and liberation. We seek the active support of the UNHCR and other United Nations’ bodies in this noble goal.”

WCC, 2005

Resources:

World Refugee Day is recognised each year on 21st June. The UNHCR provides information about global events. In New Zealand, Christian World Service encourages churches to observe this day on the closest Sunday. To download worship resources from CWS go to: www.cws.org.nz/. To find out more about World Refugee Day refer to: www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/events?id=3e7f46e04

NZ Immigration Service - www.immigration.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/60E7836A-D2B6-4628-BC63-4EFBAB2825DF/0/Refugees.pdf

“The Stranger within our Gates – Uprooted people in the world today.” Jacques, A. WCC, 1986

“The Treaty of Waitangi and Immigration Policy” The Joint Public Questions Committee paper, 1997

“Thinking through Immigration” prepared by the Churches Agency on Social Issues (CASI) available - www.casi.org.nz/publications/immigration%202004.pdf

“Voices of Refugees – A journey of Re-settlement in New Zealand”, NZIS, 2005, www.immigration.govt.nz/community/general/generalinformation/research/generalresearch/refugees/Refugee+Voices/

“Welcoming the Stranger” by Caritas, 2002, available to download from www.caritas.org.nz/?sid=86

Useful Websites:

New Zealand:

Refugee Resettlement (RMS) www.rms.org.nz

Refugee Law in NZ www.refugee.org.nz

Refugee Council of New Zealand www.rc.org.nz/

Refugee Voices: www.immigration.govt.nz/community/general/generalinformation/research/generalresearch/refugees/Refugee+Voices/

International:

Amnesty International - <http://web.amnesty.org/pages/refugees-index-eng>

Commission on the Rights of Refugee Women - www.womenscommission.org/ Human Rights Watch - www.hrw.org/

International Organization on Migration - www.iom.int/jahia/jsp/index.jsp

Refugees International - www.refugeesinternational.org

United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) - www.unhcr.org

World Council of Churches - www.oikoumene.org

World Refugee Survey <http://www.refugees.org/article.aspx?id=1941>

Worldwide Refugee News - www.worldrefugee.com

For information about the case studies refer to:

www.freezaoui.org.nz/

www.amnesty.org.nz/zaoui

www.scoop.co.nz/features/nauru.html

www.nzherald.co.nz/feature/story.cfm?c_id=549&objectid=10458208

<http://www.crikey.com.au/Politics/20080326-From-Tampa-refugee-to-Kiwi-spelling-bee-whiz.html>

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