



## The African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP)

The Hon Kevin Andrews MP  
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
5 October 2007

Dear Mr Andrews

Our members are very concerned with the impact that your remarks on African immigrants, especially refugees from the Sudan, may have on the cohesion of Australian society and on Australia's reputation abroad.

We are an association of scholars of Africa, with a membership drawn from universities, non-government organisations and the public and private sectors more generally, and our members conduct research on African societies and cultures and contribute to programs of community development throughout the country. We have supported the government's African policies in a number of ways, relating for example to its humanitarian programs for the Zimbabwean people, but we feel that we must record our considered view that your reported remarks will have negative consequences and should be re-thought.

We make the following summary points and would be glad to expand them:

- \* Australia has clear responsibilities for refugees through a series of international agreements
- \* In recent years, the number of African migrants the government has taken in is not large compared with other OECD countries
- \* The circumstance of refugees (conflict, trauma, residence in refugee camps for long periods) call for special attention from countries of the first world like Australia
- \* The war in Darfur will not quickly be resolved, and singling out refugees from this region for discriminatory attention will solve nothing
- \* The difficulties of adjustment are exacerbated by a lack of government support for targeted health care and language courses and call for better policies rather than sweeping statements that target a few rogue elements.

We concede that there is insufficient peer-reviewed research on African migration, but this is changing. Members of the former African Research Institute at La Trobe University have done excellent work on African communities in Victoria, and a number of our members are currently developing public health research on refugee health issues and needs in the South Brisbane/Logan area. We would be glad to provide you and your officials with details of this and other work that may give a better understanding of the position of African migrants in Australia and ways that their position can be improved, with beneficial social results.

We note that your statements were not supported by any factual material, and we would be like to give you information that shows that settlement is in fact proceeding well in a number of areas, specifically in the Goulburn Valley in Victoria.

Our membership operates with good collaboration between our older established members and the recent addition of young African intellectuals who would be rejected for settlement under the new policy that you suggest - at great loss to Australian society.

Our hope is that you, as minister for both immigration and citizenship, will give a lead in showing Australia to be a caring society that understands the difficulties that many migrants, especially refugees, have in establishing themselves in our country. We have had sufficient experience of immigration to know that time and understanding is needed for migrants to make the essential contributions that our society needs so much.

Yours sincerely

Dr Geoffrey Hawker  
President

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