

June Newsletter

Hong Kong
Refugee Advice
Centre

CONTENT

- Team News
- World Refugee Day
- Community Interpretation Training in August 2011
- Casework Update
- Development Update
- Network News
- Vacancies

TEAM NEWS

It is a time of comings and goings at HKRAC!

We are sad to announce that **Brian Barbour**, our Executive Director since November 2008, will be leaving HKRAC on 17 June 2011. Brian's contribution to HKRAC has been immeasurable and we will miss him. Most notably, under Brian's leadership, HKRAC has maintained consistent and sustained growth in organizational capacity; provided excellent service to our refugee clients and seen increasing refugee recognition rates among those represented by HKRAC; fostered links with local, regional, and global refugee protection networks; and assisted with the capacity building of other service providers through training and advocacy activities. We wish Brian and his wife Hanako all the best as they embark on the next chapter of their life.

Raquel Amador, the original co-founder of HKRAC, will relinquish her position as a Member of HKRAC's Board of Directors and take over as the interim Executive Director on the same date. Please see the vacancy announcement for the permanent Executive Director position.

We are happy to announce that **Christal Chan** has joined us as Interpretation, Training, and Outreach Officer. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Christal received her BA in International Development Studies at McGill University. She started volunteering at the HKRAC in 2008 as a French interpreter and later interned at the UNHCR Hong Kong Sub-office, before completing an LLM in Human Rights Law at Hong Kong University. She is also a graduate of the HKRAC clinical programme.

We would also like to welcome new Legal Interns **Kevin Burke** and **Dorothy DiPascali** from Brooklyn Law School (BLS) in the United States, and new Refugee Legal Assistance Clinic students **Hokki Chan** and **Gigi Ng** from the University of Hong Kong.

Finally, we are pleased that **Heather Li** and **Thai MacDonald** will be joining us as our newest Board members later this month.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

World Refugee Day was established as June 20 in 2001 to mark the 50th anniversary of the Refugee Convention. This year coincides with the 60th anniversary of the Convention, which still does not apply to Hong Kong. UNHCR and NGOs have organized a full program of events:

June 17, 7:00pm – f:ml, a multi-cultural platform for fusion of ethnic music experiences and local lifestyles, presents “Seek Refuge”, featuring various music performances, at Makumba in cooperation with Christian Action. Tickets: \$170. Details: <http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=213470755350877>.

June 18, 10:00am – HKRAC has scheduled a Refugee Run in cooperation with Crossroads Foundation – report to follow!

UNHCR events:

http://www.unhcr.org.hk/unhcr/en/news_and_updates/news_list/news_details.html?id=652.

June 18-29 – UNHCR 60 Years Photo Exhibition at Central Oasis, Central Market (reception and opening ceremony June 20, 6:00pm)

June 19, 10:00am – UNHCR “Be a Refugee” exercise. Cost: \$50.

June 19-23 – UNHCR 4th Refugee Film Festival at Broadway Cinematheque. Tickets: \$55. Details: http://www2.cinema.com.hk/revamp/html/movie_upcoming.php?lang=e&mode=upcoming.

June 20, 1:00pm – UNHCR “Bring Hope to Refugee Children” event with Honorary Patron for China Yao Chen at Atrium II, Harbour City.

June 20-22 – Amnesty International “Exiled to Nowhere – Burma’s Rohingya” Photo Exhibition at Exhibition Gallery 1, Hong Kong Central Library. Details: <http://www.amnesty.org.hk/html/node/10933>.

COMMUNITY INTERPRETATION TRAINING IN AUGUST 2011

HKRAC, in collaboration with the Centre for Comparative and Public Law at Hong Kong University, will be holding two intensive training courses for community interpreters in the refugee aid context in the month of August. We are excited to have Alice Johnson from the Cairo Community Interpreter Project at the American University of Cairo return to Hong Kong to lead these courses. More information can be found at www.hkrac.org/interpretertraining.

CASEWORK UPDATE

HKRAC is excited to report that UNHCR has recognized 12 HKRAC clients as refugees since our last newsletter!

- On 31 March, a client from a south-central Asian country, who arrived in Hong Kong as an unaccompanied minor, was granted refugee status. Volunteer Caseworker Eileen Clarke and former Head of Clinical Programmes, Lindsay Ernst, provided representation.
- On 5 April, UNHCR granted refugee status to 4 Somali clients. The following individuals provided legal representation in at least one of the cases: Matthew Bersani and Simon Dunbar from Shearman & Sterling; Volunteer Caseworkers, Clare Man and Eileen Clarke; HKRAC Spring 2010 Legal Intern, Megan Rodgers; Executive Director, Brian Barbour; Legal Director, Christine Lin; and Lindsay Ernst.
- On 12 April, UNHCR granted refugee status to a Somali client represented by Kate Madgwick, Ruth Chen, and Gary Loh of Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer.
- On 13 April, UNHCR recognized an African client as a refugee. Former HKRAC Staff Attorney Andrew Lillis provided legal representation.
- On 19 April, UNHCR recognized a Somali refugee represented by HKRAC Fall 2010 Legal Intern, Tal Gory.
- On 12 May, UNHCR granted refugee status to a client from a south-central Asian country. Jae Lemin of Latham & Watkins and Tal Gory represented the client.
- On 16 May, UNHCR granted refugee status to an African client represented by Andrew Lillis and HKRAC Volunteer Caseworker Gabrielle Curtis. Special thanks to interpreter, Claudia Gonzalez de Petri, for serving as a communication liaison for the client.
- On 26 May, UNHCR recognized a South Asian woman with a compelling gender-based claim as a refugee. Legal representation was provided by HKRAC Co-Founder, Raquel Amador, Katherine Moore and Megan Rodgers.
- On 27 May, UNHCR granted refugee status to a Somali client represented by Teresa Chen of Shearman & Sterling and Lindsay Ernst.

HKRAC would like to express its deepest gratitude to Dr. Susan Mistler and Dr. Sarah Borwein of Central Health Medical Practice for providing pro bono psychological and medical evaluations of several of the clients recognized in April and May.

Thanks to all the interpreters, volunteer caseworkers, and pro bono lawyers for all of your assistance and support. Our work would not be possible without you!

DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

- **Community TeamWorks Event:** Employees from our valued supporter Goldman Sachs worked with HKRAC on a Community TeamWorks (CTW) project on Saturday 9th May. HKRAC constantly works at engaging the public and challenging negative preconceptions about refugees, and this CTW project served the dual purpose of raising awareness for the refugee plight and gathering information on current perceptions among the general population about refugees in Hong Kong. Our thanks go out to the team at Goldman Sachs, and especially to HKRAC's constant supporter Amy Lee for facilitating this project.
- **R11 Student Action Group:** HKRAC's student refugee aid action group (comprised of students from Chinese International School, West Island School (WIS), South Island School, United World College and Canadian International School (CDNIS)) successfully organized and held the **R11 student talent show** in support of HKRAC. The incredible concert took place on the 4th of June where students exhibited exceptional talent, attendees learned about the plight of refugees in Hong Kong, and an impressive amount of money was raised through ticket sales and donations to support refugee legal aid in Hong Kong. Please visit R11 on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/refugeeaction2011?sk=wall#!/refugeeaction2011>



Our appreciation goes out to CDNIS for helping us to arrange the venue, WIS for funding support, and a massive THANK YOU to students Sook-Mun Wong, Dominic Chiu, Miruka Arai, Rachel Li, Charis Kong, Munglok Wong, Pei Jing Chung, Kristina Li, Sharon Lam, Adrian Lo, Ella Morrisone, Kyle Bryce-Borthwick and Joyce Au for all your hard work and support.

- HKRAC is continuing to organize Hong Kong's first **Refugee Mental Health Sensitivity Training**, in conjunction with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Social Services (ISS), Christian Action Chungking Mansions Service Centre, Vision First, and Society for Community Organization (SoCO). The training will be open to different service providers in Hong Kong and across the region, and will serve to equip aid workers with the skills necessary to assist traumatized individuals. The training will take place in November this year alongside an **Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network East Asia Working Group Symposium** on the subject of 'Livelihoods'. Members of the public are cordially invited to attend the Symposium, and full details of the joint event will be publicized later in the year.

Thanks go out to the Taiwan Foundation for Democracy and the Japan Association for Refugees, both of whom are supporting the events. We continue to seek sponsorship, so please wish us luck! Please do contact the HKRAC office if you would like to sponsor this event or know of people who would be interested in funding this project.

HKRAC has also been invited to present to a number of organizations recently, including South Island School, the R11 Student Talent Show, Caritas Hong Kong, and the European Union Meeting with Human Rights Defenders.

Our thanks go out to all those who have recently made donations to our organization. We continue to increase the number of clients we represent, and as many of you know we have moved to a new larger office to accommodate our growing needs. We cannot emphasize enough our appreciation for any and all donations which are critical to keeping our doors open. The contributions of our supporters and partners will enable HKRAC to continue providing life-saving aid, and we pledge to stretch every cent and make every dollar count! Donations by cheque should be made out to "Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre Ltd" and posted to HKRAC, 10B Comfort Building, 86-88A Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui, Kowloon; and donations can be made via bank transfer to HKRAC's HSBC account: 808-340434-838. Further details on how you can donate to HKRAC can be found on our website at http://www.hkrac.org/?page_id=81.

NETWORK NEWS

Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN): 94 Refugees Released from Immigration Detention Centre in Bangkok

(Reprinted from <http://refugeerightsasiapacific.org/2011/06/06/press-release-94-refugees-and-2-asylum-seekers-release-from-immigration-detention-centre-in-bangkok/>)

On Monday, June 6, 94 refugees and 2 asylum seekers were released on bail from the Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) in Bangkok. This was achieved in cooperation with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Thailand and the Immigration Detention Centre authorities, while the Thai Committee for Refugees (TCR) has facilitated this process through its newly launched Refugee Freedom Fund.

[...]

The release represents a historic development as it is the first time ever, that such a large number of detainees have been released and particularly that this was achieved by Thai civil society taking the lead in resolving of the refugee problem in Thailand. The 94 refugees include 34 children below the age of 12, among them is also one infant who was born in detention. All of them belong to the Ahmadiyya faith and their persecution has been particularly severe and systematic in Pakistan, which is the only state to have officially declared the Ahmadis to be non-Muslims and where they are persecuted for professing their religion.

The refugees were arrested in December 2010, in pre dawn raids at the residences of the refugees in Bangkok. Except two cases, all of the released detainees have been officially recognized as refugees by the UNHCR. Refugees fleeing persecution in their countries of origin are internationally recognized to be in need for protection from countries where they flee to, even if it is a transit country. However Thailand does not recognize their refugee status and UNHCR recognition offers no protection against arrest and detention by Thai authorities. Refugees and asylum seekers are governed by the same Immigration Act and as such considered to be illegal aliens. In Thailand, the lack of distinction between refugees, asylum seekers and other immigration offenders contributes to the further victimization of those seeking protection from persecution.

Conditions in the detention centre have been variously described as overcrowded, inhumane and unhygienic. Over 150 people have to share cells separated by gender which is meant for 30 to 40 people. Cells are so crowded that there is often no place for the detainees to sleep and families are separated from each other. It is often a situation of despair as the only way out of it is resettlement to a third country or return back to their country of origin. For refugees fleeing from persecution, returning to their country of origin is not an option, and waiting for resettlement to a third country is often long and uncertain and so the majority of them remain in detention for lengthy periods of time.

The release of the 96 can be traced back to a statement, coordinated by the Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN), demanding the release of the Ahmadi Pakistanis in January 2011. The National Human Rights Commission of Thailand took immediate cognizance of the issue and formed a committee headed by a Human Rights Commissioner which along with members from APRRN and others conducted a fact finding mission to the Immigration Detention Centre. At a later point TCR and APRRN also arranged a meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to resolve the issue. As a response TCR created the Refugee Freedom Fund to bail the most vulnerable refugees who are in detention centre indefinitely.

[...]

The 94 refugees will continue to stay in Bangkok until they get resettled to a third country, where they get a chance to start a new life in freedom and security.

TRAINING WEEKEND

HKRAC would like to thank our law firm partner Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom for hosting our Refugee Legal Aid Training weekend on 4-5 June 2011. We appreciate the interest from the legal community in learning more about international refugee law and assisting asylum seekers and refugees in Hong Kong.

Training weekends are designed to provide an overview of international refugee law and to prepare casework volunteers to provide advice and representation for asylum seekers applying for refugee status to UNHCR in Hong Kong. All new casework volunteers are required to attend the training weekend, and to commit to 5-10 hours per week for a 6-month period. Some weekday daytime availability is an asset.

Our next training weekend is scheduled for September 2011. To apply, please e-mail your CV and Statement of Interest to sjones@hkrac.org. Please include relevant experience, language skills, and Hong Kong immigration status.

VACANCIES

Executive Director

The Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre (HKRAC) is looking for a dynamic Executive Director to spearhead the continued growth of this important independent, non-profit human rights organisation and to provide leadership to a small, devoted team of employees.

HKRAC was founded 4 years ago and is the only charitable organisation dedicated to the provision of pro bono legal assistance to refugees in Hong Kong. In this time, HKRAC has not only assisted over 800 refugees and their families, but has also established several innovative legal clinical programmes with universities in Hong Kong, successfully advocated fairer procedures at UNHCR and recruited and trained volunteers.

We are looking for an individual who has a good understanding of human rights issues, who can think strategically, possesses excellent communication skills, a proven track record of fundraising, and is an effective manager who enjoys being part of a team as much as leading it.

The successful applicant will take a high profile role carrying great responsibility. He or she will report to the Board of Directors of HKRAC.

Key Strengths

- Solid experience in human rights work
- Previous or equivalent experience of leading an NGO or other organisation
- Proven record in fundraising and building key relationships with existing and potential donors
- Sound grasp of organisational, financial and budgeting processes
- Ability to motivate professional staff to accomplish projects and goals
- Excellent public speaking abilities
- Sensitivity to cultural and diversity issues

Overview of Key Responsibilities

The ED is responsible, with the Board of Directors, for agreeing the organisation's vision, setting and implementing the strategy to achieve this vision and develop the organisation's culture. The ED oversees the organisation's operations including human resources, finance, fundraising, communications and marketing.

Includes:

- Provide strategic leadership of and guidance to all HKRAC programmes and (its) staff
- Promote the HKRAC's mission and programmes
- Set fundraising strategy and oversee its implementation

- Represent the HKRAC in policy discussions and in advocacy with external organisations and networks
- Build strategic partnerships with all stakeholders including educational institutions, community groups, legal community and the media/press
- Provide financial, fiscal and operational oversight and ensure integrity of the HKRAC's financial management systems
- Act as principal staff liaison to Board of Directors

For more information, visit www.hkrac.org. Please send your CV and Statement of Interest by 24 June 2011 to info@hkrac.org with the subject line "Executive Director Position".

Interpreters

HKRAC would not be able to perform its vital service to refugees without the committed work of our interpreters. To meet current demands of a diverse caseload, HKRAC is actively looking to recruit speakers of the following languages to join our dedicated team of interpreters: Sinhalese, Pashto, Dari, Farsi, Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya, Arabic, French, Lingala, Swahili, Ewe.

If you know of anyone who is fluent in both English and the language of interpretation, please refer them to Christal Chan at cchan@hkrac.org. Continued training and remuneration will be provided. For more information, please visit: www.hkrac.org/interpreters.

Translators

HKRAC is seeking assistance in translating our self-help representation kits to increase our capacity to help refugees. These kits provide detailed guidance on writing a testimony, appealing the rejection of an application for refugee status, and re-opening a closed case. Translation is needed from English into Tamil, Sinhalese, Urdu, Punjabi, Somali, Pashto and Arabic. Please contact Christal Chan at cchan@hkrac.org if you are able to assist.

HAPPY WORLD REFUGEE DAY EVERYBODY!