

February Newsletter

Hong Kong
Refugee Advice
Centre

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GUNG HEI

FATT CHOY!!

CASEWORK UPDATE

HKRAC is pleased to report a fantastic start to 2011 with 6 refugee recognitions in the month of January.

- On 12 January 2011 UNHCR recognized 2 Middle-Eastern refugees who were represented by HKRAC volunteer caseworker Eileen Clarke, and Lindsay Ernst.
- On 14 January 2011 UNHCR granted a Pakistani client's appeal application and recognized him as a refugee. HKRAC Summer 2010 Legal Intern, Dave Hattendorf from Brooklyn Law School (BLS) and Christine Lin provided representation.
- On 14 January 2011 a Sri Lankan client was recognized as a refugee after his claim had been pending for over 3 years. Congratulations to Matthew Bersani, Paul Strecker, Su-Ann Cheah, and Minsoo Kwon of Shearman & Sterling and Thai MacDonald of Freshfields Bruckhaus and Deringer for their excellent representation on this case!
- On 26 January 2011 a Pakistani client was granted refugee status after UNHCR re-opened his claim. Thanks to HKRAC's Legal Interns Megan Rodgers and Tal Gory for their hard work on this case.
- On 31 January 2011 UNHCR granted refugee status to an African client on appeal. This was the result of excellent representation and collaborative teamwork from CUHK students Petrina Chan and Cathy Lee under the supervision of Lindsay Ernst; and from BLS students Lindsay Ryder, Stephanie Staal, Rachel Lerner, Andrei Takhteyev, Deirdre McGuigan, and Patrick Taurel who participated in the HKRAC-BLS Spring 2010 Directed Study team led by BLS Professors Stacy Caplow, Maryellen Fullerton and Jean Davis.

Thank you to all the volunteer caseworkers and interpreters who have dedicated countless hours to HKRAC. Our work would not be possible without you!

DEVELOPMENT NEWS

HKRAC has kicked off 2011 with a great start. We had a very successful Chinese New Year Social in January, and have commenced planning for this year's World Refugee Day, which incidentally coincides with the 60th anniversary of the Refugee Convention.

Since the start of the year, HKRAC has submitted 4 grant applications (keep your fingers crossed!), and has been invited to present to United World College HK, South Island School, and International College HK.

HKRAC is also happy to announce the formation of a new student action for refugees group. As reported in the December edition of the HKRAC newsletter, a group of Chinese International School students had organized a Student Refugee Aid Week at their school to help raise awareness and funds for HKRAC. These same students are now working alongside students from South Island School, West Island School, and United World College to organize a fund-raising inter-school concert in aid of refugees here in Hong Kong.

HKRAC would like to thank Ann Marden and the Marden Foundation, Katie Bodell and family, Andrew and Katherine Chiu, the students of Chinese International School, and Toby Cooper for their donations to HKRAC in January.

The number of fans on HKRAC's Facebook page has been steadily increasing. Please do 'like' us if you have a Facebook profile, and feel free to start discussions and post queries on the page.

Finally, HKRAC would like to announce that we are currently seeking funding to organize a refugee mental health training for service providers and concerned individuals in Hong Kong. Refugees are often victims of torture (including physical assaults, maiming, raping and/or killing of family members in front of the victim and vice versa, sensory deprivation, and food deprivation), and whilst in HK suffer from conditions such as depression, hyper-vigilance, cognitive difficulties, and loss of control over bodily functions. Their trauma is then exacerbated by cultural/linguistic isolation, and having no access to worthwhile activity during the long asylum-processing period. Some local NGOs provide ad hoc counseling for refugees, however many frontline staff have not been fully trained to deal with traumatized people. Additionally, there are few mechanisms in place to help such staff cope with the associated emotional fatigue and strain of working with victims of torture and traumatized individuals. The proposed training would serve the dual purpose of equipping service providers with the skills necessary to work with traumatized persons, and of raising awareness for the refugee plight.

Please contact Laura at lee@hkrac.org or 3109 7359 if you would like to sponsor this training, or know of people who would be interested sponsoring this.

CHINESE NEW YEAR SOCIAL



GUNG HEI FATT CHOY!!

HKRAC ushered in the Year of the Rabbit by holding our first Social Night of 2011 at The Globe on Graham Street on Wednesday 26th January.

It was arguably one of HKRAC's most successful Socials to date: Over 110 people came out to support us and drink for charity! A massive thank you to everyone who attended and brought friends and family along. We had a great time and hope that you did too.



HKRAC's next Social Night will take place at Wagyu Lounge on Old Bailey Street, SoHo, Central , on Wednesday 16th March. As always, please feel free to invite your friends, colleagues and partners along – the more, the merrier! 30% of the revenue generated that night will be donated back to HKRAC, so come and join us for an evening of drinks and chatter from 7.30pm onwards.

See you there!

TEAM NEWS

HKRAC is pleased to announce that new Staff Attorneys Stephanie Jones and Angela Edman have joined our team. Stephanie hails from Canada and has worked with refugees in Vancouver and Montreal as well as Cairo and Bangkok. Angela is from the U.S. and has extensive experience in refugee, human rights, and international criminal law. Welcome to the HKRAC family Stephanie and Angela!

The HKRAC Refugee Legal Assistance Clinic has also started a new semester. Congratulations to Andres Mora, Guo Cai, Steven Lee and Crystal Lai from the University of Hong Kong, and Junfeng Zhou, Sanyi Shum, Yvonne Ho and Jonny Chen from the Chinese University of Hong Kong for being selected as this semester's clinical programme students.

We would also like to extend a big welcome to new Development volunteers Amy Doffegnies and Diane Mars, and also to new Legal Intern Gabrielle Curtis.

Sadly, this month HKRAC has to bid farewell to our Australian Summer Clinic Students from the University of New South Wales Anita Wise, Maria Nawaz, Mandy Lam and Tristan Harley, and also to Casework Intern Brian Fung. Cheers guys, keep in touch!

REFLECTIONS

"Before leaving Sydney for Hong Kong, my university sent me the course outline for the HKRAC clinical program. Looking through it, I was excited and a little dubious – was I really going to be interviewing clients, preparing intake reports and legal briefs, and writing testimonies? By the end of my first day at HKRAC, it was clear that the course outline was accurate. Lindsay and Christine gave me an intake report for a client HKRAC planned to represent, and whose case I would work. Within my first few days at HKRAC, I had read through client briefs and testimonies, and observed client interviews. Within the week I was conducting my own client interviews. Needless to say, the practical experience has been invaluable.

Working with asylum seekers, hearing their stories and helping them to navigate the legal process has been a truly amazing and humbling experience. The enthusiasm at HKRAC is infectious, and the high quality of work produced in the office something to aspire to. I returned to university to study law because I wanted to pursue a career in human rights; my internship at HKRAC has renewed my excitement in this field in general, and instilled in me a serious enthusiasm for refugee law in particular."

Anita Wise, University of New South Wales

"During my internship, HKRAC has given me the opportunity to work directly with several asylum seekers in Hong Kong. They have allowed me to attend interviews at the UNHCR, work on refugee applications and appeals for several clients, and conduct interviews with the use of interpreters in several languages. I never thought I would feel such a tangible sense of reward for the work that I have done at HKRAC. When working with asylum seekers the stakes are always high. One client told me, as I worked my hardest to prepare his appeal to submit to the UNHCR, that his life was in my hands. If he was unsuccessful at appeal, he could be deported back to his country of origin at any time. Throughout this process, the staff at HKRAC provided me with full support and supervision. I truly believe that this guidance enabled me to assist this client with his appeal, and hopefully make a difference in his life."

- Tristan Harley, University of New South Wales.

"This winter, I took part in the clinical program at HKRAC. Before participating in this program, I was worried about the job duties I would be tasked with as I had never worked in a legal environment before. However, the staff at HKRAC were really supportive, and after speaking with my supervisors, my concerns were understood and taken into consideration. Furthermore, I was given plenty of opportunities to work on tasks that I had never done before, such as doing Country of Origin research, drafting interview questions for asylum seekers, and so forth. The staff at HKRAC provided me with valuable feedback, and it really is a different experience when you work with live clients. After hearing about their stories, I really valued the opportunity I had in helping them to attain refugee status and change their lives."

- Mandy Lam, University of New South Wales

"Interning at HKRAC over the past two months proved to be an educational and inspirational experience. As a legal intern, I was given tasks which allowed me to represent clients before the UNHCR, conduct client interviews and complete case research. This internship at HKRAC was invaluable in allowing me to develop my understanding of refugee law in a practical environment. The amount of responsibility HKRAC gives to their student interns is incomparable to any other internship I have undertaken - I was pleasantly surprised when we were treated as valuable members of the HKRAC team. It was a privilege to work with the HKRAC staff and our refugee clients. The dedication of HKRAC staff to their clients is admirable, and this internship allowed me to make a small contribution to the amazing work that HKRAC does to protect one of the most vulnerable groups in society."

- Maria Nawaz, University of New South Wales

TRAINING WEEKEND

HKRAC would like to thank our law firm partner Mallesons Stephen Jaques for hosting our Refugee Legal Aid Training weekend on the 15th and 16th of January 2011. We received more than sixty applications for the forty available spaces. We appreciate the overwhelming interest among the legal community to learn more about refugee rights and to volunteer their services. We look forward to including the many applicants who we could not accommodate in this past training weekend in our next training weekend.

Caseworker training weekends are designed to prepare casework volunteers to represent asylum-seekers filing for Refugee Status Determination before the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Hong Kong. Attendance is mandatory for all new casework volunteers. Please note that we require casework volunteers to commit 5 – 10 hours per week over a six-month period.

Our next training session will be held in the beginning of June 2011. To apply for a place in the training please email your CV and Statement of Interest to info@hkrac.org. Please include relevant language skills, experience and your Hong Kong immigration status.

OTHER NEWS

We would like to take this opportunity once again to highlight the fact that HKRAC has moved to new office premises at:

Flat B, 10th Floor, Comfort Building

86-88A Nathan Road, Tsim Sha Tsui

Kowloon, Hong Kong

VACANCIES

HKRAC seeks Interpreters

The Hong Kong Refugee Advice Centre (“HKRAC”) recruits, trains, and supervises volunteer lawyers, caseworkers, and interpreters in the provision of pro-bono legal representation to refugees putting forward claims for asylum before the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (“UNHCR”). HKRAC strives to ensure that all refugees in Hong Kong have access to high-quality pro bono legal aid, fair refugee status determination procedures, and human rights so that they can begin to rebuild their lives.

HKRAC is in need of Amharic, Arabic, French, Ewe, Pashto, Punjabi, Somali, Singhalese, Tamil, Tigrinya and Urdu interpreters.

Interpreters must possess the following qualifications:

- Oral fluency in both English and the language of interpretation
- Sensitivity towards working with asylum seekers and victims of trauma and torture
- Ability to interpret in an impartial manner
- Ability to maintain all interpretations confidential
- Availability weekdays between 9:00 am – 6:00 pm
- Proof of work authorization or permission to volunteer in Hong Kong

Please send your statement of interest and CV to info@hkrac.org.

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ASSISTANCE NEEDED

HKRAC is seeking assistance in translating our self-help kits. Our self-representation kits will 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 written Tamil, Sinhalese, Punjabi, Somali, Pashto, Arabic, and Nepali. The translations of these self-help kits will increase HKRAC's capacity to help more refugees. Please contact Christine Lin at clin@hkrac.org if you are able to assist.