

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

ARAN supported Palm Sunday as a National Day of Action for Palm Sunday again in 2023. In early February a Planning Discussion was held with representatives from local groups across Australia. There was broad agreement on Justice for Refugees as the overarching message for Palm Sunday, with a key message being Permanent Visas for ALL Refugees. ARAN collated resources and made these available on the [ARAN Palm Sunday webpage](#). Resources included a listing of local events, templates for posters, a leaflet describing the current issues for refugees and people seeking asylum, a proforma media release, video clips for social media, postcards to send to politicians and resources for Christian schools and Palm Sunday services. ARAN also did a bulk order for 40 vinyl banners – Justice for Refugees, and 26 groups bought these and used to good effect on Palm Sunday. Hopefully these banners will be used for more permanent display also.



One of 4 banners displayed in Whyalla

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MEDIA Reports

ARAN National media release prior to Palm Sunday

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ADELAIDE

People gathered in the Rundle Mall and marched to Parliament House to draw attention to issues of peace and justice for refugees. Members of the Adelaide Vigil for Manus and Nauru spoke about the current issues and need for continuing pressure for change.

See video of Anthea Falkenberg and Trevor Jones, speakers for the Adelaide speaking at the event:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ygwb46TaTi_7sZUJHz1Fy523Emw9XrNe/view?usp=drivesdk



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Adelaide

ALEXANDRA



Banner displayed at St John's Alexandra, Vic

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ALSTONVILLE



Palm Sunday rally in the village of Alstonville (far north coast between Ballina and Lismore). It was organised by the Alstonville Social Action Group and the Rector of St Bart's Anglican church and supported by Ballina Region for Refugees.

The people of Alstonville were surprised to hear the skirling of the bagpipes in Main Street on Sunday morning, and intrigued to see that the piper was Rector Desiree Snyman, playing as she led the combined churches Palm Sunday Justice for Refugees rally from St.Bart's Church to Freeborn Park. In her sermon that morning, Desiree had reminded her congregation that Jesus had been a refugee.

After the march, the enthusiastic crowd gathered in the park to hear Meg Pickup, Eoin Johnston (Deputy Mayor), and Stanley Yeo all speak of the injustice that's been handed out to refugees by successive Australian governments. Stanley Yeo, on behalf of Ballina Region for Refugees, also talked about BR4R's resettlement program, explaining that the group is about to welcome their third refugee family to the region. This family is from Venezeula, a country from which over 6 million people have fled.

He said that the most important message of the rally was to please welcome refugees to live amongst us.

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ARARAT RAR

Inaugural Palm Sunday Walk in Ararat. About 30 people attended and walked two laps around Lake Alexandra in the local public gardens, followed by friendly chats and coffees from the cafe.

Although not a huge crowd, we were pleased with the turn up. We carried our banners and as we were passing a family picnicking at a table, I overheard a child turn to his dad and ask, "What is a refugee, dad?" I didn't hear the answer but felt if we achieved nothing else on our walk, we had raised a question in a child's mind. From little things big things grow. Job done.



Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

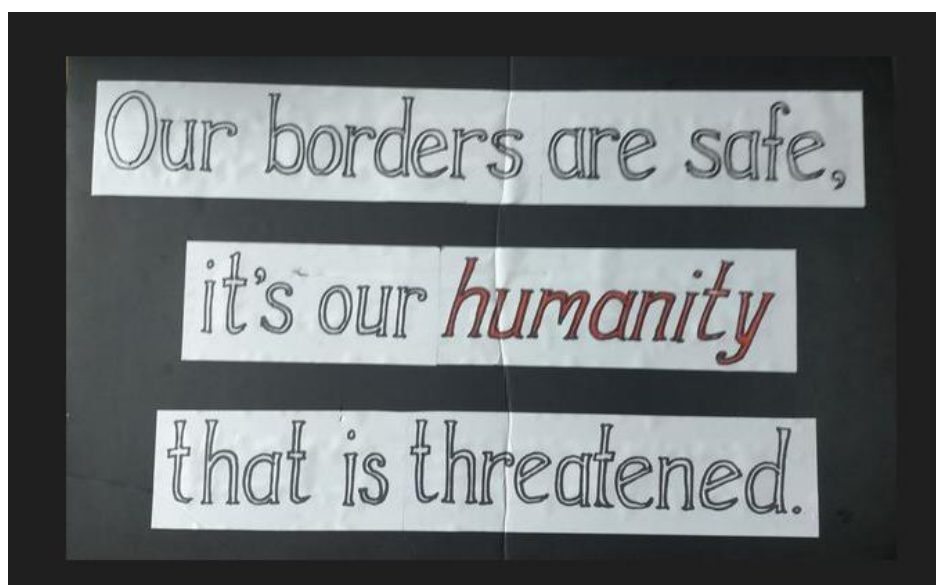
ARMIDALE

Vigil at the Judith Wright Memorial in Armidale

We also decided to write to the Members of the Parliamentary Friends of Refugees outlining our concerns for the family of Hazara-Shia Muslims on whose behalf we have been advocating since August 2021. The father of the family was a driver/guide who drove many Australian soldiers, advisers, NGO workers and visitors; his situation appeared to satisfy the criteria under which the Australian Government offered protection in the form of a visa.

The family has now received a form letter from the Department saying that their application has been unsuccessful and that they have no further avenues of appeal. They are worse than desperate because their passports expire in May and the Taliban government has announced that no further passports will be issued. Their two young children have not been out of the room where they have been hiding for many months now.

We are currently raising money for the family to relocate.



Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

BALLARAT

2023 Palm Sunday Justice for Refugees Rally on the Land of the Wadawurrung People

The #JusticeForRefugees Rally held at Lake Wendouree was organized jointly by Ballarat RAR and Amnesty International Ballarat -Branch with support from several community organisations. A pre-event notice was published in the Ballarat Courier on Friday 31 March



Group photo at View Point. The two boys, Australian boys, under the let them stay banner holding signs about family reunion are looking forward to the day they will be joined by their older brother and sister who had to be left with grandparents when their parents had to flee to seek protection.

Maureen Riches OAM, from RAR was eloquent in evoking for us the importance of Lake Wendouree as a place of ceremony and for gatherings of the Wadawurrung People. Caroline Nolan from Amnesty spoke about the history of the Palm Sunday Peace March, and we had several guest speakers. Robyn Burgess, a Refugee Nurse with Ballarat Community Health and Dimitri Dallard, Intercultural Services Officer with the City of Ballarat, talked about how they, through their work, support refugees and people seeking asylum.

Ahmad, a refugee living in Ballarat, gave us a brief history of his life since arriving in Australia 10 years ago as a 17-year-old. There were many challenges such as learning English, learning to swim and finding work. He recounted how he was once told he should change his name to help him get a job. He spoke of his family in Afghanistan and his concerns, especially for his sister who wants to be a nurse but is not permitted to study. This was the first time he had spoken publicly of his experiences.

Margaret O'Donnell from RAR pointed to the neglect and failings of Governments over many years towards refugees and people seeking asylum and went on to highlight the plight of those still awaiting consideration by Government. She said 12,000 people are still in precarious circumstances, without basic human rights, stuck on Bridging Visas or no visa at all, unable to apply for a permanent visa or family reunion. She also made special mention of Neil Para and his family, a well respected family living in Ballarat with no visas.

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Refugee rally at lake on Sunday

BALLARAT locals will unite with refugees to rally for justice this Palm Sunday - a day associated with peace marches in Australia for the past 40 years.

The Lake Wendouree rally and walk will be the third in a row for Ballarat - and coincides with a monster event that has been held in Melbourne for decades.

Rural Australians for Refugees Ballarat are organising the 2pm gathering at View Point alongside Amnesty Ballarat.

Speakers will include people with a lived experience of war, detention and the struggle for survival.

The group is calling for - among other things - the release of all refugees from detention, the end of offshore processing and permanent visas. They would also like to see family reunions, timely assessment of applications and access to healthcare.

Video, thecourier.com.au

— GABRIELLE HODSON

About 60 people attended.



RAR banner in front of one of the boat sheds along the walk.

Importantly the newly formed Union of Australian Refugees raised its banner for the first time. With banners aloft many joined in the 2 km walk, following a section of the walking track around our beautiful Lake Wendouree on a beautiful sunny afternoon. We felt buoyed to be part of a nationwide Rally stretching across Australia west to east, south to north bringing many together seeking Justice for Refugees. And we

remain committed to seeing a change in Government policy.



Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

Refugee Ahmad had everyone laughing, telling people how he learnt to swim so he could become a lifeguard. He jokingly warned people not to go in the pool when he was on duty.



Neil Para and some friends with the Union for Australian Refugees banner.



Group photo at the end of the 2km Walk.

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BENDIGO

The annual Bendigo Palm Sunday picnic on the lawn near the Town Hall is organised by refugee advocacy groups and church leaders, including Rural Australians for Refugees, Amnesty, Grandmothers for Refugees, Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services, and the Anglican, Catholic and Uniting churches.

This year, while obviously enjoying the autumn sunshine, the 100 people who gathered were more intent on social justice than sandwiches. Among them were members of the Vietnamese, Karen, Afghan, South Sudanese, and Indonesian refugee communities. A Ukrainian flag fluttered in the breeze.

Addressing the gathering, speakers celebrated the many years of successful resettlement of refugees in Bendigo, and warmly welcomed recent arrivals, two community sponsored Hazara families from Afghanistan.

The crowd enthusiastically added their voices to the national call to end offshore processing, and for permanent protection for all refugees.



Palm Sunday picnic in Bendigo

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023



Palm Sunday in Bendigo

BLUE MOUNTAINS

Palm Sunday Rally in the Blue Mountains was called off due to bad weather. We are however planning to repeat the planned programme on Sunday 25th June as the BMRSGs final event of Refugee Week

We have also been able to place on permanent display one of ARANs Justice for Refugees banners which we purchased. This now hangs at Lawson on the fence of The Good Samaritan Sisters Convent where it is visible to both road and rail traffic over the Mountains.

BRISBANE

RAC Qld, in cooperation with Just Peace, organised a rally for Peace and Refugees in Brisbane for Palm Sunday. The rally was endorsed by 11 other organisations and speakers included a Tamil Refugee, a Union Secretary, two former Senators and a member for RAC.

The rally demanded permanent visas for all refugees, an end the ban on Indonesian resettlement, a call for peace and scraping the AUKUS nuclear subs.

The rally ended with a march around the city.

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023



Brisbane



Brisbane

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023



Brisbane

CANBERRA

A great turn-out for the Palm Sunday rally with 2500 Canberrans coming out to stand together in support of refugees and to add our voices to the call for permanent visas for all refugees living in Australia. It was a great show of solidarity and support from across this city for people who have come to this country to simply find safety and somewhere to call home.

A huge thanks to everyone who came to Sunday's rally. Thanks to our speakers - Senator David Pocock, Zahra Hashemi Barat and Dr Rev Katherine Rainger; thanks to our poets - Colin Campbell, Janne Graham and Richard Scutter; and thanks to our singers - David Rovics and Kamala Emmanuel.

A resounding thanks to everyone who helped with the Palm Sunday rally - handing out leaflets, putting up posters, holding up signs, putting out road signs, getting the word out on social media and urging their family and friends to come along and, finally, helping on rally day. It was a brilliant collective effort!

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Canberrans Stand Up for Refugees at the Palm Sunday rally



Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023


DARWIN

Around 30 people rallied in Darwin on Palm Sunday. Speakers included Dr Tony Goodluck from the NT Council of Churches, Dr Sabarathinam Prathapan and were entertained by the Karen community choir.



Palm Sunday 2023

Justice for Refugees



**Permanent Protection
for all Refugees**

**5PM Sunday April 2
Nightcliff Jetty, Nightcliff
Ph: 0406 551 051
DASSAN.ORG**

#justice4refugees #PermanentVisas

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

GRIFFITH

The members of Griffith RAR decided to take advantage of the busy Easter weekend in Griffith when the Big Sidewalk Sale attracts hundreds of locals and tourists to the main street. The information leaflet prepared by ARAN was given out and refugee issues were discussed with lots of people. The local Salvation Army Church lent their Justice for Refugees banner, and this helped to attract attention. All up about 13 members of the RAR Griffith group attended.

The article below was published in The Area News on 14 April.



Group lobbies for refugees

Many 'stuck in limbo' for 10-11 years

SOCIAL JUSTICE
BY CAI HOLROYD

GRIFFITH'S chapter of Rural Australians for Refugees are pushing hard to see refugees and asylum seekers escape the 'limbo' that their visa status is in by replacing the "Fast Track" program.

Refugee support groups have been rallying to let those on Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas apply for

permanent residency and visa status, noting that many have been on temporary visas for over a decade.

Griffith's chapter met in Kooyoo Mall on April 8 to hand out flyers detailing the situation, calling for an end to the "Fast Track" system and a better, more equitable system.

RAR Griffith president Will Mead explained that while 19,000 people had been processed, there were still

12,000 refugees who hadn't heard anything.

"Some have been waiting 10-11 years to have their cases heard and are still in limbo. There is some justice for 19,000 but there are another 12,000 who we need to remember," she said.

"They can't study, some don't have Medicare.

"They can't have any reunion with their families."

The Abbott Government's "Fast Track" system replaced

funding for interpreters and legal assistance with a long application and interview process with no translators available.

Ms Mead said it was "designed to fail people who had every right to apply for refugee status".

While many refugee support and action groups take action on Palm Sunday - April 2 in 2023 - the Griffith chapter decided that Easter Saturday would work better

for a Griffith audience, tying in with the Sidewalk Sale.

"There were lots of people there, we had some pamphlets that we got from some organisations that just had information about it," Ms Mead said.

"Hopefully we got the message out to people that we need to be fair to everybody."

"It's just a matter of keeping on."



Campaigning.

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

HOBART Carol Bristow



Postcards to Parliament was organised by Amnesty's Refugee Rights Action Group in Hobart at the lawns of the State Parliament.

We asked people passing by on their way to the Salamanca market to sign the ARAN Palm Sunday postcards.

We had 60 postcards signed in the two hours.

MALENY

Welcome to Maleny (W2M), with partners Amnesty International Sunshine Coast, Noosa Welcomes Refugees and the Anglican Church in Maleny came together for a Palm Sunday Vigil for Justice for Refugees attended by about 80 people. The event was held in a small park in Maleny at a busy intersection, highly visible to passing traffic.

The Vigil began with song, followed by short speeches from the Rev. Deb Bird on the meaning of Palm Sunday and Reza Darabi, a refugee from Iran with lived experience of detention on Christmas Island. W2M member Rob Kann then read out facts about the number of refugees still on Nauru and in PNG, as well as the estimated number of refugees in limbo in Indonesia and cards were placed on the ground, symbolising a pathway from these places of despair to a country of hope - Australia. All participants were invited to lay down palm and fern fronds along the pathway.

The event ended with music by the trio Gosti and some traditional Macedonian dancing and participants were then encouraged to sign petitions and postcards to MPs asking for justice for refugees.

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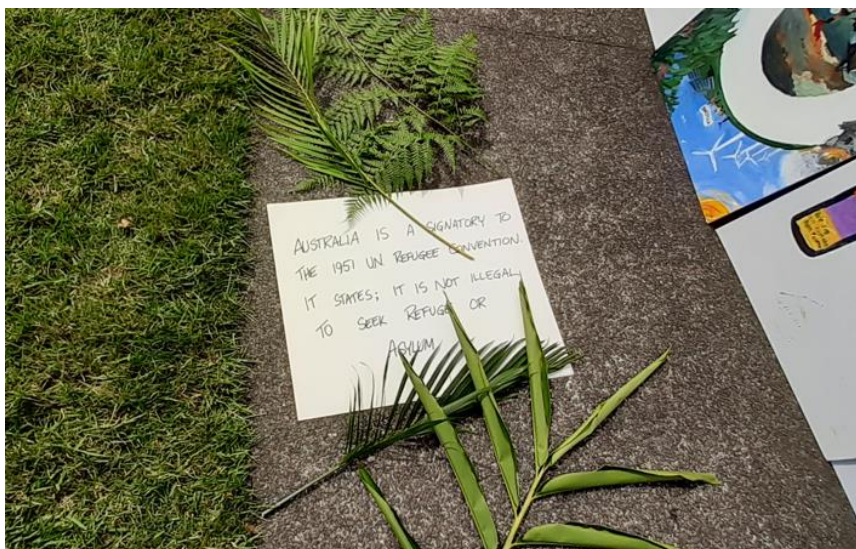
Choir performing in Maleny



Palm Sunday Refugees Welcome event in Maleny



Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023



Australis is a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention; it states: It is not illegal to seek refuge or asylum.



Welcome to Maleny tent



Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

MELBOURNE

Over 2,000 people attended the Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees on a perfect autumn day in Melbourne. Following music by Eldakatur (Ethiopian refugee and Ronak, Iranian refugee, the speakers program highlighted that while there has been some positive action by the Labor Government, there are still thousands of people in limbo, here in Australia due to the unfair fast track process, and others subject to offshore processing who are still denied permanent visas. Speakers included a refugee speaker from the Tamil community, Dr Monique Ryan MP, Sanmati Verma, Human Rights Law Centre; and faith leaders including President of the Islamic Council of Victoria, the Ukrainian Catholic Bishop, and a progressive Jewish Rabbi. At the end of the Walk Mushaq performed more music, and the final speakers Nos Hosseini (Iranian community representative) and Margaret Sinclair, who spoke about her recent visit to Indonesia to meet with refugees there. The Walk was endorsed by over 100 groups including unions, faith groups and community groups.



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MOSS VALE

We had a very successful event on the afternoon of Friday 31st March at Moss Vale with around 20 people coming to our Vigil to hold signs and the ARAN 'Justice for Refugees' banner. The spot we chose outside Leighton Gardens has a huge amount of traffic (even for a country town). We had lots of honks, waves and thumbs up from people driving past. The highlight though was one woman who drove past, then stopped her car to walk back and give each of us a hug. She said, "as a refugee, thank you!" It made our day!!

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023



The Justice for Refugees banner gave us great visibility at a key intersection in Moss Vale

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023



Members of Southern Highlands RAR also attended the rally in Canberra:

NEWCASTLE

Palm Sunday event in Newcastle raises concerns about military spending, war drums over China, refugees and human rights By Damon Cronshaw Newcastle Herald April 2 2023 - 7:00pm

Calls for peace, opposition to conflict with China and justice for refugees were highlighted at an event in Newcastle on Sunday. It was one of 20 Palm Sunday gatherings across the country that aired concerns about military spending and human rights.

Peace and refugee activist, Dr Niko Leka, said "we're opposed to AUKUS [the security pact between Australia, UK and US] and the drive to war with China". "Recklessness, greed and a lust for power will destroy every living thing on this planet," Dr Leka said. "We need many voices to stop this madness."

Hunter Peace Group secretary Lynda Forbes said Australia's \$368 billion nuclear-powered submarine deal with the US could be better spent on housing, health, education and NDIS. Ms Forbes said the federal government appeared to be "gung-ho about becoming a highly militarised and nuclearised country". She said the submarine deal and \$1.3 billion Tomahawk cruise missile contract had been arranged "without any input from the people of this land".

On the treatment of refugees, Amnesty Newcastle convenor Kevin Sweeney said there had been "huge gains" in the last couple of years, but "still a lot of injustices that need righting". Mr Sweeney was pleased about the end of "long-term detention of refugees in hotel prisons and acceptance of the New Zealand offer to resettle some refugees".

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

He added that a process had been created for "19,000 refugees who have been living in the community on temporary visas to gain permanent visas". This had provided certainty, allowing them to "build a new life in Australia".

But about 130 refugees had been trapped in PNG and Nauru for 10 years. "Holding them there is seriously harming their mental and physical health," he said. "This is a disgrace and it needs to end. The solution is straightforward - bring them here to Australia while awaiting resettlement and provide them with the medical care that they need. The only obstacle to this is Australian domestic politics."

He added that 1100 refugees previously brought to Australia from PNG and Nauru remain in limbo on three-month or six-month bridging visas.

And more than 9000 people, who had sought asylum in Australia, had been denied protection under the "seriously flawed and unjust 'fast track' assessment process".

Mr Sweeney, who is also Amnesty's NSW regional president, said "Australia can and must do better". The Australian Refugee Action Network spokesperson, Emeritus Professor John Minns, said the federal government should "abolish the fast track system and replace it with a fair and just system".



The Palm Sunday Picnic for Peace in Civic Park in Newcastle, where the spotlight was put on 'the drive to war with China' and the current situation for refugees. Picture by Marina Neil

PERTH



After three years of alternate Palm Sunday Justice for Refugees WA activities it was great to see a return to the usual gathering place, in the grounds of St George's Cathedral in Perth at 1.00pm, to hear from a range of speakers, and to once again walk to show our support for peace and justice for refugees.

During the event people had the opportunity to donate to CARAD (Centre for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees) to support people seeking asylum and refugees in Perth. There were information stalls by community groups working in the refugee space. People were also encouraged to fill out and send the postcards supplied by ARAN which had been printed prior and distributed during the event.

The media release and some photos of the Perth Palm Sunday Walk for Peace and Justice for Refugees event can be found here - <https://justice4refugeeswa.com/2023/04/03/hundreds-rally-for-peace-and-justice-for-refugees/>

SYDNEY

Sydney's Palm Sunday rally pressed Labor on refugees and war on China

The crowd gathered at Belmore Park (near Central Station) and marched to Victoria Park. Speakers were Bishop Vincent Long, Catholic Bishop of Parramatta; Zaki Haidari, Afghan Refugee advocate; Two Tamil young people, Nithurshi and Murugan; Ms Dorothy Hoddinott AO, former Holroyd High School Principal; Dr David Brophy, University of Sydney China academic; and Warren Smith, Deputy National Secretary, Maritime Union of Australia.

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Sydney Grandmothers joined Sydney's Palm Sunday Rally at Belmore Park

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ABC TV news filmed the Palm Sunday rally in Sydney and SBS covered every event nationally.

The Palm Sunday rally tradition was under attack in Sydney from a lone purist who believes that holy days should not be mixed with political issues like refugee rights.

Josephite nuns were singled out for abuse. In fact, the critic called them "Jezebels".

They remained calm and engaged in the rally. As this was held in torrential rain, the refugee sector are in awe of them.



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TOWNSVILLE

Around 150 people attended the Townsville Palm Sunday Walk for Justice and Freedom for Refugees.

More photos on the [Townsville Amnesty Facebook page](#)



At the end of Walk we gathered in the Gregory Street Amphitheatre where we listened to three speakers and were entertained by the Strum and Giggle music group.

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Those gathered unanimously supported a motion calling on the Federal Government to offer residence to the 11,500 people who came to Australia seeking asylum and who are still living on bridging visas.



Strum & Giggle



Speakers were Stephanie Naunton, Unify Intercultural Australia, Zakaria who spent 25 years living in a Kenyan refugee camp before coming to Townsville with his family in 2015, and Kate Mills, Uniting Church leader and tutor with the Vinnies Refugee Assistance Program.

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WHYALLA -

Four 'Justice for Refugees' banners were displayed around town.

A Community Radio talk about Justice for Refugees was broadcast the week before on 5YYY community radio.



Banner at St John's College – Whyalla



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WOLLONGONG



Palm Sunday – Wollongong 2023

Around 50 people attended a lively Palm Sunday rally in Wollongong.

This year the demands were: Permanent visas for all; End mandatory detention; Close Nauru and Bring Them Here.

Speakers were Mark Bloxom – Welcome to Country; Naomi Lai - General Manager The National Justice Project.; Eric Zhang - a lawyer working for Human Rights for All, a charitable law firm that specialises in getting people out of detention; and Sean McLachlan - the Wollongong University Students' Association (WUSA) Environment Officer. He is an activist for the environment and human rights and represented Students for Palestine at the Palm Sunday rally.

Participants heard about the plight of “stateless” people in detention, the legal battles involved in getting permanent visas and the need to recognise the Palestinian struggle as one where millions of refugees demand the “right of return”

The speakers were well received and there was enthusiastic chanting.

Media coverage from: The Illawarra Mercury, ABC local radio and i98FM.

WONTHAGGI

South Gippsland Rural Australians for Refugees gathered an enthusiastic crowd in Wonthaggi under the mine whistle.

Rev Wendy Elson spoke from the Uniting Church perspective and Father Darren Howie spoke from the perspective of the Catholic Church; Mathew Morgan spoke from the Greens Party view and Felicia Di Stefano from the view of a long term refugee supporter.

“.... we need to; bring the innocent prisoners from Nauru and PNG, to have family reunion and permanency for all, too many Afghans are in danger in Pakistan while their husbands are in Australia separated from wives and children, to increase numbers for Humanitarian Visas to at least 50,000, make them part of the immigration program and skill the refugees in the skills that Australia needs and we need to abandon arbitrary, indefinite detention of people who come here to find a safe place to live”.

Jessica Harrison led the march which stretched along the streets of Wonthaggi to the approval of passers-by and motorists.



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MEDIA

AAP: <https://www.countrynews.com.au/national/palm-sunday-rallies-demand-permanent-visas-for-refugees/>

Ararat local paper

Ballarat local paper

Bendigo local paper

Canberra Times

Catholic News Melbourne

Griffith local paper

The Illawarra Mercury, ABC local radio and i98FM

Manning River Times

Mirage News

Newcastle Herald

Perth Now

The Advocate (N/W Tasmania)

The Border Mail

The Examiner

SBS TV News

SBS News report – <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/political-prisoners-protesters-demand-visas-for-refugees-stuck-in-limbo/h280awsfc>

Townsville We have had good media coverage in the run-up this year - TV news, Newspaper and ABC radio.(

Peter Hanley) <https://www.facebook.com/7NEWTownsville/videos/3457158374602746>

Whyalla News

There may have been additional coverage not listed here – apologies for any omissions.

SBS News report – <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/political-prisoners-protesters-demand-visas-for-refugees-stuck-in-limbo/h280awsfc>

Political prisoners': Palm Sunday protesters demand visas for refugees stuck in limbo

Protesters gathered across Australia calling for better treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.



Hundreds of activists gathered at Palm Sunday rallies around the country calling for better treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Source: AAP / Flavio Brancalone

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KEY POINTS

- Activists gathered in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.
- Advocates say around 12,000 refugees and asylum seekers have been left on bridging or expired visas.
- Some of these refugees have no pathway to permanent residency.

Hundreds of activists have gathered at Palm Sunday rallies around the country to demand the federal government give permanent visas for refugees stuck in limbo.

Protesters in Sydney, Canberra and Melbourne held placards reading, "Permanent visas for all" and "10 years too long", and accusing the government of "using refugees as political prisoners".

Rallies were also planned for other capitals and major regional centres.

On a soggy Sunday dozens of demonstrators turned up in Sydney's CBD, including Bangladeshi refugee Bahar Uddin.

The 38-year-old escaped political persecution where his father was a victim of an extrajudicial killing and his brother was forcibly disappeared by security forces.



Protesters gathered in capital cities around Australia to call for better treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. Source: AAP / Flavio Brancalone

But they said it had left about 12,000 other refugees and asylum seekers who were rejected under the previous government's fast-track process on bridging or expired visas.

Included in the group are more than 1000 refugees who have been transferred from offshore detention camps in Nauru and Papua New Guinea to Australia with no pathway towards permanent resettlement.

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Firas Al-Kilaby, a 44-year-old Iraqi refugee, fears he will be deported with his bridging visa expiring later this month.

The son of a senior official in Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime, he was detained in a Baghdad jail for eight months after successive Shi'ite-dominated governments and militias targeted families of the former regime when it fell in 2003.

Mr Al-Kilaby fled Iraq in 2013 via Malaysia and Indonesia, arriving by boat on Christmas Island where he was detained for a couple of months then held at another detention facility in Australia for several months.

The glass repair business owner has been on a bridging visa for the last decade but has managed to build a life where his two children were born as Australian citizens.

"I have no Iraqi passport and I have no family back in Iraq so what will I do if I'm deported back and separated from my wife and children?," he told AAP.

He said if he is deported Iraqi security forces would immediately detain him.

"I'm asking Prime Minister Anthony Albanese how can you accept that I haven't been able to see my father and mother for over a decade and how can you accept me being separated from my children if I'm deported back to Iraq?," Mr Al-Kilaby said.

He said his last resort is the immigration minister granting him a permanent visa.

"We left because our homeland was not safe for us and now we belong to Australia, we pay our taxes, we work very hard ... but I haven't been given a future because of my visa situation."

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said the Albanese government had also maintained the former Liberal government's ban on accepting more than 7000 refugees from Indonesia.

"Many of the asylum seekers left on bridging visas are victims of Australia's foreign policy failures in Iraq and Afghanistan and Sri Lanka," he said.

National media release – prepared by ARAN - distributed by Amnesty

Long awaited permanency for some refugees, but thousands are still in limbo

#justice4refugees #PermanentVisas

In capital cities and country towns communities are organising Palm Sunday actions calling for justice for refugees. Although there has been some positive changes since the change of government in 2022, thousands of refugees and people seeking asylum still languish in limbo, here in Australia, and around 130 still held in PNG and on Nauru, 10 years after first seeking asylum here. The actions are listed on page 2 of this media release.

A year ago, Zahra Hashemi was happy that her daughter, Sahar, had won a scholarship to study Arts Law. But just seven weeks after starting the course, Sahar turned 18, and was disenrolled because she only has a Bridging Visa - Zahra and her parents were devastated. Sadly, this is a scenario all too familiar for many of the young people whose families have sought protection as refugees in Australia. Many of these young

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people suffered the trauma of offshore detention and were brought here in 2015 in response to the Kids Off Nauru campaign.

Australia has still not provided permanent protection for these refugees, and families like Zahra's are still in limbo. People on Bridging Visas cannot study, have no income safety net, and some are even refused the right to work.

More than 10 years after arriving here to find a safe future around 12,000 people still have no certainty. Many of these people have not seen their children, parents or spouses who remain in danger in places like Iran, Afghanistan and Myanmar. They cannot go back, and Australia is not offering resettlement.

This ongoing uncertainty for thousands of people who are seeking our protection overshadows the good news that 19,000 refugees on Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) will be allowed to apply for permanent visas.

Why are so many people seeking refugee protection still in limbo in Australia?

- Most of the 12,000 people have been waiting for years to have their refugee claims determined. Many have waited years just for their first interview and around 2,000 are still waiting for a first decision.
Under the so called 'Fast Track' system introduced by the Abbott Government in 2014, funding for interpreters and legal assistance was withdrawn, and a 60-page application in English was required. Sometimes the assessment was only a phone interview for 15 minutes – in English. The system was designed to 'fail' people rightly applying for refugee status. Nearly 9,000 are appealing a negative decision through the courts – a slow and costly process, but the only option since the more effective Refugee Review Tribunal was abolished under the 'Fast Track' system.
- Over 1,000 people, nearly all recognised as refugees, are living here in Australia with no prospects for permanent resettlement. These are families and individuals who arrived after July 2013, and were subjected to offshore detention in Nauru and PNG. These individuals and families have been brought to Australia for medical treatment, including the 192 who were brought here under the Medevac legislation. Most of these people are refugees, but Australia is refusing to provide resettlement.
- Around 130 people are still held on Nauru or in PNG. Some of these people are waiting for resettlement in the US, Canada or New Zealand, but around 60 have no resettlement options.

Spokesperson for ARAN, Emeritus Professor John Minns at ANU says, "We call on the Albanese Government to abolish the Fast Track system and replace it with a fair and just system for assessing refugee claims. Australia needs to recognise all those who are refugees and provide permanent protection visas. After 10 long years, Australia needs to find a way of providing secure futures for these people, and for those who remain offshore in PNG and on Nauru."

For comment contact John Minns

For further information on local actions: contact Marie Hapke by 5pm Sat 1st April

ACT

- **Canberra** – Palm Sunday Rally: Permanent Visas for All
Sunday 2 April **1.00pm** Garema Place, Civic
Contingents to gather at Petrie Plaza (the merry-go-round) at 12.30pm
Find out more on [Facebook Events](#) [Contact: John Minns](#)

NSW

- **Sydney** – Palm Sunday Rally – Permanent visas for refugees, Call for peace
Sunday 2 April **2.00pm** Belmore Park, near Central Station
Find out more on [Facebook Events](#) [Contact: Ian Rintoul](#)

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

- **Alstonville** – Palm Sunday Justice for Refugees
Sunday 2nd April **10.30am** Alstonville Anglicans
Walk from Alstonville Anglicans 6 The Avenue, then meet at Freeborn Park at 11am (Cnr Main and Daley, Alstonville) [Contact: Rev Desiree Snyman](#)
- **Armidale** – Palm Sunday Vigil and Open Space for Peace - poetry and meditations
Sunday 2nd April from **10.30am**
at Judith Wright Grove at the corner of Dumaresq and Faulkner Streets, Armidale
Find out more on [Facebook Events](#) [Contact: Elizabeth O'Hara](#) elizabethohara256@gmail.com
- **Griffith** – Palm Sunday Action
Saturday **8th April 10.30am – 11.30am** Kooyoo St Mall, Griffith
Organised by Rural Australians for Refugees Griffith NSW
[Enquiries](#) – [email here](#)
- **Lawson (Blue Mountains)** – Palm Sunday Justice for Refugees Vigil
Sunday 2nd April **2.00pm** outside the Catholic Church Somers St, Lawson
Bring placards, banners to display on the highway. [Contact Kathy](#)
- **Newcastle** – Palm Sunday Picnic for Peace
Sunday 2nd April **1.00pm** at Civic Park (cnr King and Auckland St)
Acting for peace and for justice for refugees.
Speakers, Music and Solidarity. [Contact Niko Leka](#)
- **Wollongong** – Palm Sunday Rally for Refugees
Sunday 2 April **2.00pm** Wollongong Town Hall
Find out more on [Facebook Events](#) [Contact Margaret Perrott](#), scatty.comrade@gmail.com

VICTORIA

- **Melbourne** – Walk for Justice for Refugees
Sunday 2 April **1.30pm – 4.00pm**
Meet at State Library Swanston Street for music and speakers & Walk to Parliament Gardens
Speakers include Dr Monique Ryan MP, refugee speakers, Sanmati Verma, Human Rights Law Centre and Nos Hussein, Iranian Women's Association
Find out more on [Facebook Events](#) [Contact: Sr Brigid Arthur](#)
- **Ararat** – Palm Sunday Walk
Sunday 2 April **2.00pm** Alexandra Gardens – meet at the cafe
Bring banner, trumpets, drums and whistles!
Organised by Grampians Gariwerd RAR [Contact Bonnie](#) 59bloss@gmail.com
- **Ballarat** – Justice for Refugees – Permanent Protection for ALL Refugees
Sunday 2 April **2.00pm** gather at View Point Lake Wendouree
Organised by Rural Australians for Refugees Ballarat and Amnesty Ballarat
[Contact Margaret](#) ljimmodonnell@gmail.com
- **Bendigo** – Put your Hands Up for Refugees
Sunday 2 April **12.30pm – 2.00pm** Bendigo Library Gardens
Palm Sunday gathering and picnic
Organised by Bendigo Churches and Bendigo RAR
[Contact: Christine Cummins](#) rarbendigo@gmail.com

Summary of Palm Sunday actions 2023

- **Wonthaggi** – Palm Sunday Walk – Justice for Refugees
Sunday 2 April **2.00pm**
Meet under the Wonthaggi Mine Whistle, Apex park
Organised by South Gippsland Rural Australians for Refugees
Find out more on [Facebook](#) Contact: [Felicia Di Stefano](#) [email](#)

QUEENSLAND

- **Brisbane** – Permanent Visas for Refugees, Peace not War
Sunday 2 April **2.00pm** King George Square
Find out more on [Facebook Events](#) Contact: rac.qld.events@gmail.com
- **Gold Coast** – Palm Sunday Community Vigil for Peace
Sunday 2 April **1.00pm** Tesch Park, Coral Street, Maleny
[Find out more info here](#)
- **Townsville** – Palm Sunday Walk for Justice and Freedom for Refugees
Sunday 2 April **4.00pm** meet at The Rockpool
then walk from there to the Gregory Street Amphitheatre
[For further detail email here](#)

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

- **Perth** – Peace and Justice for Refugees
Sunday 2 April **1.00pm** St Georges Cathedral in the city
Find out more on [Facebook Events](#) Contact [Geoff Bice](#) geoffrey.bice@wa.uca.org.au

TASMANIA

- **Hobart** – Postcards to Parliament
Saturday 1 April **11.00am – 1.00pm** on Parliament lawns, Hobart
Organised by Tasmanian Refugee Rights Action Group
Their Facebook page [is here](#) Contact [Carol](#) carolbristow@inet.net.au

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

- **Adelaide** – Palm Sunday March for Peace, Justice and Climate
Sunday 2 April **2.00pm** Mukata (Hindmarsh Square)
Gather from 1.45pm for a 2pm start. Marching at 2.15pm to Parliament House.
Find out more on [Facebook Events](#) Contact [Anthea](#) adelaidevigil@gmail.com

NORTHERN TERRITORY

- **Darwin** – Justice for Refugees
Sunday 2 April **5.00pm**
Nightcliff Jetty, Nightcliff
[For more details:](#) go to DASSAN.org