

SPEECH TO WORLD REFUGEE DAY EVENT AUCKLAND 24 JUNE 2010

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Tena Koutou, Tena Koutou, Tena Koutou katoa!
Salaam! And Greetings to you all!

I am speaking here today as a representative of the New Zealand National Refugee Network. I'll tell you more about the Network. But first I have a very important message that I want to share with you.

Right now it is taking much too long for refugees to settle in New Zealand. It is taking nearly all our lifetimes. Some of our children manage extremely well within their new society. Others have huge struggles. But along the way there is so much waste of human lives, so much waste of human potential, so much waste of government dollars, so much negative impact on New Zealand society.

I am here today to talk about why this is and what we can do about it.

1. World Refugee Day theme – home

But first a few words about why we have World Refugee Day. It's the one day on the international calendar when the world turns its attention to the world's refugees. The world has at least 43.3 million refugees – people fleeing from dangerous situations – situations that they cannot survive. They end up in a foreign country, stranded, with no legal status. Most end up in refugee camps. And stay there for the rest of their lives if the situation in their country does not change. Only 1% of the world's refugees get homes in countries such as New Zealand!

That's why the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has chosen 'HOME' as the theme for this year's World Refugee Day.

Those of us who arrive in New Zealand become NZ citizens. That gives us the right to call New Zealand home. This is our home. It gives us a right and a duty to contribute as NZ citizens. We are no longer refugees. That's why we want to make an outstanding contribution. We came



here not to sit in your welfare system but to start our lives again – to work hard.

I am really surprised that a lot of farming people are put in the middle of Wellington and the engineers are driving taxis or doing dirty, difficult dangerous jobs – wasting their skills. Those jobs need doing but don't waste the skills we bring with us. This country cannot afford to waste these skills.

Look at the contribution refugees have made in our country since they came here. The Jewish and Polish refugees of the 1940s, the Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees of the 70s, then Eastern Europe, Africans and now south Asians. These people are making an immense contribution in every aspect of our society. Many of these people are now our business leaders, church leaders, government leaders, hard determined workers who are making outstanding contributions.

And we more recent immigrants want to do the same. We look for every opportunity to make a contribution. Because of what refugees have been through we become very resilient and very hard workers. But there are many adjustments we need to make and we need NZ

to make some adjustments for us too.

That's why we set up the National Refugee Network – to find ways for these adjustments to happen so we can take full part in this new society of ours.

2. The NZ National Refugee Network
NZNRN is collective voice of former refugees in NZ. There has never been a collective voice before. Politicians, everyone has been saying it's hard to engage with the communities, there are so many of them. We don't have reliable information. It costs too much to engage with lots of different communities. So the communities also are saying that we are now able to articulate our issues and that there is not enough listening in the sector so our voices are not yet informing policy.

We know as leaders that our voice has not been heard enough. We are not included enough. So our long standing issues are not being addressed strategically. There are issues that cannot be solved in a short term, ad hoc way. They need long term engagement, understanding and open and transparent and respectful engagement.

Now you have no excuse - we have local, regional and national voices. You just need to engage with us. They are leading themselves – and have leaders who are absolutely capable to stand up on their feet and name their issues.

The issues for us are – what we are facing – is a refugee agency that hasn't moved on. Much time and resource is being wasted because engagement is not happening up front and with elected or selected leaders.

The government policy makers have no excuse now. They cannot justify endless consultations, setting up all their own advisory groups ... They can come straight to our local, regional and national refugee led organisations. This is the way to deal with those issues that hold back our communities from integrating, that cost us a lot as a country.

Unless we hear the real voice of the community and what the national network and the regional forums are offering then our resettlement

process will be as it is – fragmented, unknown outcomes, a long endless expensive process – nobody knows how people are integrating into our society – there is no monitoring, no tracking.

So why did we create the National Refugee Network and the regional organisations? The first thing is we created it to get the real issues from the communities - to use the skills and knowledge within the communities so that they can come up with their own possible solutions. These outstanding issues cannot be solved by the government on its own, or the refugee agencies on their own or all the communities on their own.

To solve these issues we have to work together differently – we need a new collaboration where the communities are playing a new role – where they have the resource and information to take a proper role.

We also created it as a point of contact, buried under many small groups so it makes it easier to get to the essence of the issues – very easily. And cheaply!!

And we created it to make resettlement shorter and easier for the taxpayers. We want our new arrivals to integrate as quickly as they can. Unless they can play their role it's not going to happen. It costs a lot.

Unemployment is a huge issue. People are in the welfare system a long time because their genuine voice has not been heard in policy making. What we have now is very small. We have

- 6 weeks of orientation at Mangere
- Housing and WINZ support
- 12 months social support mainly from volunteers
- English classes
- Limited mental health services
- Other services – but not systematically.

3. One national resettlement plan

To understand why we want one national resettlement plan, let's look at what happens now.

Everyone is doing these things in their own way. They are not connected. This makes it harder to see any outcomes. And that's where the overlaps and gaps in services come out. We know all about these. They affect every aspect of our lives.

The key issue behind is a lack of real understanding of refugee needs. There is not enough listening, not enough dialogue, and not with the right people. When people are listened to, government and NGOs are picking individuals out rather than talking to those elected or selected by their communities to speak for them.

The results are that services often do not meet the need and that people remain on benefits long term and in state housing – and develop mental health issues, and all the socioeconomic problems that go with this.

In this time of recession and funding constraints, NZ cannot afford this.

- Funds are wasted
- Skills and knowledge of former refugees are wasted
- High costs in keeping people on benefits and in state housing
- Social costs e.g. mental health issues that arise from societal exclusion
- People remain refugees

This call for a national plan is not new. In fact, there is quite a lot of agreement. At the National Refugee Wellbeing Conference in Auckland last year, participants looked back over the last 20 years to see what had changed. The outcome of the conference was a submission to government calling for one national refugee resettlement plan.

And in Wellington, the regional refugee-led forum that I Chair – ChangeMakers – worked with 50 government agencies and NGOs to make a regional plan. The players meet regularly to report on progress and to review where to next. And ChangeMakers prepared a document called 'standards of engagement' which you can get off the ChangeMakers website.

To have a national plan that works in practice we need

- All key players round a table to develop a shared vision and a shared understanding of the vision – locally, regionally, nationally
- To take stock of what is happening now
- To take into account the strengths of individuals and communities are and what's stopping them contributing these strengths to NZ society
- To find goals that are achievable – not ones that look good but that we can't do
- To design ways of removing the blocks to integration
- To work together to develop and do solutions – the top down approach from government and NGOs is not working. It holds us back – it stops us integrating
- To change current concepts such as partnership, collaboration and community development. These come from the 70s and 80s – they don't work now – and I would argue that they never did

The only way ahead to save the whole country as well as former refugees is to listen to the communities. This economic crisis tells us that we need to spend wisely and creatively what we've got rather than running projects and programmes that sound great but that don't make any difference. This is what creates ghettos of disadvantaged areas.

NZ is a small country. We can't afford to leave anyone behind. We have seen what's happening in France, the gangs in Australia, the problems in Britain – and other places. NZ cannot afford these massive social issues. But we are going down the same old tracks that lead to very unhealthy societies.

4. COLLABORATION

The sort of collaboration we are seeking that will make a national plan effective is one where we:

- Use leaders elected or selected by their communities and the refugee-led forums and networks to find out what the real needs are
- LISTEN

- Engage in dialogue to develop in depth understanding and to test solutions in dialogue
- ALLOCATE FUNDS and time to this collaborative process

keep this. Let's honour our commitment to be a good global citizen by going the next step and ensuring successful resettlement for the good of us all.

Let's work together for a great future.

There is a lot to be done. But already there are some government departments and some NGOs coming on board – in a genuine way. We are delighted about this. It was funding from one government department that allowed us to form our collective voices – it was small funding but it had a big impact.

There also needs to be real collaboration amongst the agencies. They need to dialogue with each other to avoid gaps and overlaps and to ensure they complement each other. And they need a holistic approach – what is available has to leave the person and their community feeling like one person – not a whole lot of separate bits.

A successful plan based on a new collaboration will shorten the resettlement process. It will get people into jobs and able to cope with life in NZ much faster. This will greatly reduce the costs to NZ society and the social problems that inevitably arise if we continue on our present path.

We want to improve the quality of the current system and bring the system together. We want to create better knowledge of refugee resettlement in NZ society – what works, and what doesn't. We need standards and indicators so we know what works. We want greater transparency. Where is the evaluation? How do we know what works and what doesn't? We need to restore the refugee communities and the public trust in resettlement services.

When it comes to the international stage our country stands tall because of the quota it has taken for the last two decades. Right now our National Refugee Network Chairperson, Kafeba Mundele, is in Geneva representing us at the UNHCR annual consultations. Last year, he was the ONLY voice from a national refugee led organisation there!

Although NZ is a very small country our heart, our generosity, is as big as any country. Let's