



**UNHCR kicks off training programme for Fiji officials**

The UN Refugee Agency is in Suva this week training immigration, customs, Navy and human rights officers on key principles of international refugee law.

The training, conducted at the invitation of the Government of Fiji, coincides with the coming into effect of the part 5 of the 2003 Immigration Act (on 23 November 2005) and the expected coming into force of part 6 of the Act regarding refugee status determination procedures early next year.

As the first stage in an ongoing process to support the Government develop procedures and train operational staff, the focus of this week's programme is to share experience. The trainers include Mr Rodger Haines, an expert and adjudicator in refugee law from New Zealand, and UNHCR legal officer Ms Natasha Yacoub -- whom together have some 3 decades of experience in making refugee status decisions and training others.

"The focus of this training is to explain some of the key legal principles in the Refugee Convention and to provide practical guidance on interviewing asylum-seekers and decision making in the Fiji context," said Ms Yacoub.

"The next step will be to develop procedures so that when asylum-seekers turn up in Fiji, they have access to a fair and efficient procedure to determine if they meet the refugee criteria and so that there's a system in place to handle them," she said.

UNHCR's training programme will continue in 2006 and will include a public awareness component for NGOs, churches, the media, other stakeholders and the broader community.

"With increasing concerns about security and the movement of people across borders, it's important that people understand that bona fide refugees are survivors of persecution and violence, not causes of it. Having rigorous and fair procedures in place to deal with refugee claims will assist governments in managing this issue," said Ms Yacoub.

Fiji became a party to the Refugee Convention in 1972 through succession. Domestic legislation to implement the Convention is included in the 2003 Immigration Act. Part 6 of that Act which includes refugee status determination procedures is expected to come into force on 23 November 2005.

**Contacts:** Fiji Government: Marika Ravula 9920263,  
UNHCR: +61 2 6120 1104, +61 (0)409 501 355

UNHCR Regional Office  
15 Hunter St  
Yarralumla,  
ACT 2600  
Australia

Tel: (+61) 2 61201104  
Mob: (+61) 409501355  
Fax: (+61) 62736822  
[www.unhcr.org.au](http://www.unhcr.org.au)

