

Attention: Education & Social Affairs Reporters

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St Albans Student Wins National Writing Competition

Local Melbourne school-girl, Dragica Dacic, has won the national 2004 UNHCR High School Writing Competition.

UNHCR Regional Representative Mr Neill Wright today presented the 17-year-old with her award at her school, St Alban Secondary College in Melbourne, where she was joined by Mina - the subject of her winning story.

The UNHCR asked students from around the country to write a short story about a refugee in their local community.

Dragica's story on the young Bosnian refugee has been published (along with the other finalists) by the UNHCR in a book *Refugees: telling their stories*. The stories can be viewed on line at www.unhcr.org.au/writingcomp.

The competition produced many touching, intelligent and perceptive articles often showing maturity, depth and insight well beyond the student's years.

"The judges had a very tough job choosing a winner from the entries which all, in some way, showed the connections we have to refugees in our everyday lives," Wright said.

The judges, including former Australian cricket captain Ian Chappell and Time Magazine Editor at Large, Tom Dusevic, were impressed with Dragica's promise as a future writer.

Tom Dusevic said "Dragica's story is brimming with details and strong observations. It is taunt, intimate and descriptive, with a balanced sense of Mina's story and events surrounding her."

Neill Wright said "the aim of this competition is simple: to encourage young Australians to reach out to a refugee in their community and listen to their story."

Wright continued, "Through talking and listening with compassion and writing with respect, we hope this competition helps to build understanding as well as forge new friendships."

Third place in the national competition has also gone to a Melbourne student, Natalie Fallaw, from year 9 at Koonung Secondary College, who wrote about a young refugee from Bosnia Herzegovina. The 2nd place has been awarded to year 11 student Ameer Maiklem from St Brigid's College Perth for her story about a former refugee from Algeria. The students will receive book vouchers kindly donated by Penguin Australia.

UNHCR also received a number of highly compelling personal stories by refugee students themselves, and will award two prizes in this category to two Sydney-based students next week.

Due to the success of the competition and the high quality of entries, UNHCR has made the writing competition an annual event. Details of the 2005 competition will be announced in the lead up to World Refugee Day in June. For more information on World Refugee Day on 20 June or the UNHCR Writing Competition visit www.unhcr.org.au.

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