



# UNHCR

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Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

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Attention: Education & Social Affairs Reporters

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## **Former Afghan refugees win prizes in national writing competition**

Two former Afghan refugees and current Year 11 Holroyd High students have won prizes in the UN Refugee Agency's National High School Writing Competition. The competition aims to build understanding about refugee issues through the telling of personal stories.

UNHCR's Mr Neill Wright today presented Razia Zahidi with the Regional Representative's Prize for a Personal Story and Najeeba Wazefadost the High Commended Award in a special assembly at Holroyd High.

Mr Wright said the stories tell the incredible tales of the girls' journeys with their families from war-torn Afghanistan to seek asylum in Australia, and their experiences once they arrived.

"These compelling tales help to humanise a group of people too often cited as mere statistics or an abstract political problem," he said.

Razia was only 12 when she left Afghanistan. Her story recalls confusion and pain at leaving behind her grandparents. It describes a terrifying boat journey from Indonesia, a rescue by an Australian navy ship, a stay in detention until her refugee status was recognised, and a new start at school where she made new friends.

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

"This is a compelling personal story, simply told and with a quiet dignity. The story has immediacy, with telling descriptions and memorable episodes. It provides a strong sense of Razia's journey and reflections on her life in Australia," Tom Dusevic said.

Dusevic also describes Najeeba's story as "emotionally compelling, with terrific insights into the refugee condition".

"It's a testament to the courage and resilience of Razia and Najeeba that after all they've been through, they are now doing well at school and have won places in a national writing competition," Wright said.

"This courage is a common trait of refugees all over the world and is what UNHCR will celebrate on World Refugee Day, 20 June, with our global campaign *It takes courage to be a refugee*," he said.

The two stories have been published (along with the other finalists) by the UNHCR in a book *Refugees: telling their stories*. The stories can be viewed at [www.unhcr.org.au](http://www.unhcr.org.au). Both students will receive book vouchers kindly donated by Gleebooks.

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