



Embargoed until 20 June

**Time to hear the refugee voices behind the statistics**

To mark World Refugee Day, UNHCR is launching a new project today to help refugees tell their own stories and for other Australians to hear them.

The *UNHCR Refugee Speakers' Bureau* is being launched this World Refugee Day (20 June) by Australian actor and veteran storyteller Jack Thompson in Melbourne.

World Refugee Day is the occasion to remember the tens of millions of refugees and others who have been forcibly displaced, and to recall what makes them different.

Refugees are ordinary people who leave their countries against their will. Chased out of their villages and towns and separated from their families by conflict or persecution, refugees move in search of safety.

"Today is a time to honour the courage, resilience and strength of refugees and to give a human face and voice to the people behind the statistics and a debate too-often politicised," said UNHCR Regional Representative Mr Richard Towle.

UNHCR estimates there are 40 million displaced people around the world today, including refugees, the internally displaced, stateless people and asylum-seekers.

"Behind every statistic is an amazing story of survival and hope," he said.

The focus of the first phase of the Speakers' Bureau is on *young refugee voices*, to coincide with the theme for World Refugee Day 2007. It's a call to listen to refugee young people themselves, their challenges and their triumphs.

"In today's world of increased anxiety about terrorism and global movements of people, we need to be vigilant against stereotypes, xenophobia and intolerance. That's why projects which help refugees tell their own stories, in their own voices, are so important," said Mr Towle.

**The launch of the Speakers' Bureau will take place at the State Library of Victoria Conference Centre, Entry 3, La Trobe Street, Melbourne, 20 June, at 12.30pm. Media are invited to attend.**

More about UNHCR's new report *2006 Global Trends* and information about World Refugee Day is available at [unhcr.org.au](http://unhcr.org.au) Find out how to book a refugee speaker at [unhcr.org.au/speaker](http://unhcr.org.au/speaker).

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