

Address at International Day of Peace Event

by Moones Mansoubi

Marrickville Peace Park - Saturday 16th September 2017

Good morning every one and thanks for coming today.

It's such an honor for me to be one of the speakers today.

First I would like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to their Elders both past and present.

My name is Moones and I am the Refugee Welcome Centre's co-ordinator which is located in Callan Park, Rozelle.

I would like to talk briefly about the Centre's history, our vision and our program of services and activities.

History

As I'm sure that you are all aware, Callan Park has a critical legacy as Sydney's premier site for mental health and support services. The Refugee Welcome Centre (the Centre) was an initiative of Leichhardt Council and was established in a renovated building in the park. Its aim is to welcome refugees within Inner West following the Federal Government's announcement that Australia would resettle 12,000 refugees from the Syrian and Iraq conflicts as part of its humanitarian intake.

Following that, Inner West Council (IWC), the Justice and Peace Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney and Settlement Services International (SSI) signed a memorandum of understanding and jointly agreed to ensure that refugees residing across Sydney are welcome at Callan Park. The Centre was officially opened on 17th June last year.

Vision

Our vision is to promote the health and wellbeing of refugees and we strongly believe that Callan Park is a beautiful site and an ideal environment that can have a positive impact on every single person who visits there.

Services

In the future we hope to develop the following services:

- *Family support* – to ensure that refugees feel welcome and are provided with accessible and relevant support services, as well as leisure activities such as cooking, gardening, sport, school holiday programs and family picnics.
- *Community building* – to ensure adequate community inclusion and support through volunteering and local community participation.
- *Partnerships* – to ensure adequate collaboration and sustainable access to existing support infrastructure. This includes access to education and employment.

Since the opening of the Refugee Welcome Centre, newly arrived refugees have been able to interact with various agencies and service providers that facilitate their settlement. These include TAFE NSW, University of Western Sydney, NSW Police, Uniting Care, Refugee Health, Inner West Council youth workers, E-safety and SSI Employment Team.

At the beginning of some of our events, young members of the local Indigenous community performed a traditional dance, and elders offered a formal welcome to their land, followed by a smoking ceremony.

So far nearly one thousand refugees have visited Callan Park and participated in various activities and information sessions including:

- Welcome to Country ceremonies;
- Youth events;
- Family picnics;
- Information sessions on Australian law, culture, education and employment.

These refugees were from different countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nepal and Sudan. All have been in Australia for less than six months and they have expressed their interest in frequently visiting the Centre.

Future Program

We still have a long way to go. We would like to expand our activities, engage more refugees in the Centre in order to promote their social inclusion, prevent them from experiencing isolation and assist them to reach their potential in a new environment.

Refugees did have jobs in their countries. They also had their own homes and many of them are well educated and experts in their field. They have come to Australia not only for their safety and wellbeing, but also to contribute to this society, work shoulder to shoulder with all members of this country and are keen to make a positive change.

It is our collective responsibility to support refugees during this journey, assist them to find their path, and to facilitate a smooth settlement of these people. With our support they will achieve a sustainable growth in their new country. This kind of support will help them to become one of us – contributing members of this society.

What we want to achieve is to foster community cohesion and to help people become connected and engaged. The Centre's program and activities will definitely enable shared identities, acceptance, respect and dignity for all, free from all forms of discrimination.

Acknowledgments

I would also like to express my thanks to the Justice and Peace Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, Inner West Council and the Inner West community, all of you, that warmly and enthusiastically welcome refugees and support me in my role as co-ordinator at Callan Park. Without your assistance, we would not have been able to do this important work.

As Peter Thomson, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, noted:

Sustaining peace is based on the premise that it will not be possible to achieve lasting peace in the long-term without sustainable development, equitable economic opportunity, and human rights protections for all.

Our work is dedicated to protecting the human rights of refugees, assisting them to achieve equitable economic opportunity and to facilitate their sustainable development in order to help them achieve their full potential as soon as possible.

Thank you for your time and patience.

