

# LISTEN TO OUR STORIES

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On Monday, November 9, Sr Rosemary Graham rsm and the Social Justice Group of Sacred Heart Mildura organised an evening for some of the many refugees living in our midst to tell us how they came to Australia. It was organised as part of our response to the recent Statement from the Australian Catholic Bishops Social Justice Statement **“For those who have come across the Seas”**

Approximately fifty people attended the evening when we heard from a young lad from the Hazara minority in Irak, who told the story of his father’s struggle, after the Taliban came and bombed the petrol station which was his father’s business, to leave his family, his country and to be recognised as a refugee. He was finally able to bring his wife, three sons and a daughter to Australia.

Another man from Afghanistan, who came by boat, spoke of the difficulties of being an Hazar and his struggle to be recognised as a refugee, the hardships of being separated from loved one and how trying it is to learn English.

Our third speaker was from Burundi. The genocide in his home land forced his parents and ten children to flee to a refugee camp in Tanzania. He grew up from the age of two in a refugee camp – it was the only life he knew but as a teenager he also had to cope with outsiders from the camp trying to recruit child soldiers and he recalls finding himself out in the bush with a machete in his hand and being urged to kill another human being.

They are all grateful to be in Australia, despite the difficulties of learning English and it was an eye-opener to many in the audience as they spoke of horrific hardships of poverty, death, war and destruction which are difficult for many of us to comprehend. It is also difficult for many Australians to comprehend some of the statistics concerning the displacement of people throughout our world.

1 in every 122 humans in the world today is either a refugee, is internally displaced in their own country or is



seeking asylum in another country. In 2005 (10 years ago) there were 37.5 million refugees. Last year in 2014 there were 59.5 million. The estimated population of Australia is 23.9 million so about 3 times the population of Australia are the numbers of people who are displaced around the world.

Currently in the world there are **15 conflicts** which are major causes of displacement **8 in Africa** – Ivory Coast, Central African Republic; Libya; Mali; North Eastern Nigeria; Congo; South Sudan; and Burundi. **3 in the Middle East** – Syria; Iraq; Yemen **3 in Asia** – Kyrgyzstan; Myanmar; parts of Pakistan.

To set the scene before we listened to the stories of these brave people we reflected on the cry of the poor in the words of the Kenyan-born Somali-British poet Warsan Shire:

**'No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.  
You only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well.  
You only leave home when home won't let you stay.  
You have to understand, that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land.  
No one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck  
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled  
means something more than journey.  
No one crawls under fences, no one wants to be beaten, pitied.  
No one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your body is left aching  
or prison,  
because prison is safer than a city of fire.  
I want to go home, but home is the mouth of a shark.  
Home is the barrel of the gun  
and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the shore.'**

*Fr Michael McKinnon – Parish Priest*

