



REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN CULTURAL TRANSITION



ONLINE FORUM 2020



**SHARING OUR STORIES
SHOWCASING OUR SUCCESSES**

**10:00 am - 12:00 noon
Tuesday 15 September 2020**



NSW Service for the
Treatment and
Rehabilitation of
Torture and Trauma
Survivors

PROGRAM



SHARING OUR STORIES SHOWCASING OUR SUCCESSES

Darren Mara

Reporter, Producer, Presenter,
SBS World News

Master of Ceremonies

Jorge Aroche

Chief Executive Officer, STARTTS

Welcome Address

David Ajong

CiCT Project Officer, STARTTS

Communities in Cultural
Transition Program (Video)

Chris Sidoti

International Human Rights
Consultant, Keynote Speaker

Our Stories Deserve Respect

Jawat Kabir

Secretary General, Burmese Rohingya
Community in Australia Inc. (BRCA)

Our Struggle for a Dignified
Return Home (Video)

Amadu Bah

Bantal Pulaar Community

The Road to Success
through Education, Partnership
& Unity (Video)

South Sudanese Youth Ambassador (SSYA) Group

Living in Australia, South
Sudanese Youths Tell-All (Video)

PROGRAM



SHARING OUR STORIES SHOWCASING OUR SUCCESSES

Naikbakht Wahidi

Poet & Author

Poem: Fear of Health War

Sabian Mandaean Association in Australia (SMAA)

Mandaeans: Survival of an
Ancient Civilisation (Video)

Tamil Senior Support Group

No Borders, No Barriers for our
Friendships and Hope (Video)

Sneha Chatterjee

Regional Director NSW/ACT
Department of Home Affairs

Guest Speaker

Darren Mara and Panel

Aku Makki, SS4A

Amadu Bah, Bantal Pulaar Community

Chris Sidoti, Keynote Speaker

Jawat Kabir, Secy General BRCA

Sneha Chatterjee, Dept of Home Affairs

Subadra Velayudan, FiCT Project Officer

Yassmen Yahya, SMAA

Panel discussion

Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward

Community Services Coordinator,
STARTTS

Vote of thanks

WELCOME ADDRESS



JORGE AROCHE

STARTTS Chief Executive Officer

Jorge Aroche is a clinical psychologist and the Chief Executive Officer of the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors. Jorge joined STARTTS in early 1989 and has been the Chief Executive Officer of STARTTS since 1997. As CEO of STARTTS, he led the then fledgling organisation through some of the most

challenging times for refugee services in Australia. It was also an unparalleled period of growth and development in the size of the organisation and the scope and sophistication of its services. STARTTS has assisted more than 60,000 individual clients from over 70 nationalities since 1988, and is widely recognised as a leading organisation in the field of refugee trauma recovery.

Jorge is also a co-convenor of the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, and has held the positions of Secretary General of the International Society for Health and Human Rights (ISHHR), and Vice President of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT). He is currently the President of the IRCT. Jorge has presented widely on clinical and settlement issues for traumatised refugees on national and international platforms and has been an active contributor on refereed journals and other publications on this topic.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

CHRIS SIDOTI

International Human Rights Consultant

Chris Sidoti is a human rights lawyer, advocate and teacher. He currently works from Sydney, Australia, as an international human rights consultant, specialising in the international human rights system and in national human rights institutions.



Chris was a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council's Independent International Fact Finding Mission on Myanmar from 2017 to 2019. He was also a member of the Board of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights from 2012 to 2017. He is an adjunct professor at the Australian Catholic University. He has had a long involvement with human rights non-government organisations. He is currently on the boards of the Human Rights Law Centre and the Human Rights Council of Australia.

He has been Australian Human Rights Commissioner (1995-2000), Australian Law Reform Commissioner (1992-1995) and Foundation Director of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1987-1992). He has also worked in non-government organisations, including as director of the International Service for Human Rights, based in Geneva, Switzerland, and for the Human Rights Council of Australia and the Australian Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. In 2007-08 he was the independent chair of the United Kingdom Government's Northern Ireland Bill of Rights Forum.

GUEST SPEAKER



SNEHA CHATTERJEE

Department of Home Affairs

Sneha Chatterjee is the Regional Director New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory for the Department of Home Affairs. Prior to this role Sneha was leading the Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Programs Branch.

During her time in the Department of Home Affairs, Sneha has carried out various executive roles in both the Department and the Australian Border Force (ABF). Leading Australian Trusted Trader she was responsible for the growth and national delivery of the program working in partnership with Australian businesses and industry bodies. Other roles that she has led include responsibility for the management and delivery of the Labour Agreement Program for temporary skilled workers, the student visa program and other operational roles in Western Australia. Sneha has worked within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet on the Prime Minister's National Ice Taskforce, and has previously worked with Austrade.

Sneha is Co-Chair of the Home Affairs and ABF Staff Advancing Gender Equality (SAGE) Network, a mentor in the Women in Law Enforcement Strategy (WILES) program and is committed to the promotion of a diverse and inclusive workforce throughout the public sector. She is a qualified lawyer and holds a Bachelor of Laws, a Bachelor of International Studies, and is a graduate of the Executive Masters of Public Administration through the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). She has travelled extensively and worked in Bangkok, London and in India.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES



DARREN MARA

Reporter, Producer, Presenter

SBS World News



Darren Mara is a journalist and presenter with SBS, building on considerable experience across print, digital, radio and television news. He has been deployed to cover major events including Australian federal elections, the European migrant crisis, nuclear tensions with North Korea, and the FIFA World Cup.

Domestically, Darren has also worked at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and News Limited. While abroad, he cut his teeth at German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle and Indonesia's largest English-language newspaper, The Jakarta Post.

Sincere thanks to Darren Mara and SBS for their ongoing support.



OUR STRUGGLE FOR A DIGNIFIED RETURN HOME



JAWAT KABIR, SECRETARY GENERAL, BURMESE ROHINGYA COMMUNITY IN AUSTRALIA (BRCA)



The Rohingyas are an ethnic minority inhabiting the northern Arakan State of Burma and Western Burma (now known as Myanmar). The Burmese government fails to recognise the Rohingyas as citizens of Myanmar as a result of which many Rohingyas have been rendered stateless and have been subjected to state-sponsored persecution and violence. With many nations turning their backs on Rohingya refugees, there are currently 1 million Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh Refugee camps with no future to look forward to.

Jawat Kabir is one among the few fortunate ones from the community who have had access to education in a country that denies education to Rohingyas. He arrived in Australia in the year 2009 with the help of his brother and is very conscious of his privilege to be able to come to this country where everyone is given equal opportunity and respect regardless of their religion or ethnicity. Since then, it has been his passion to support members of his community residing in Australia and other parts of the world. At present, he serves as the Secretary General of the Burmese Rohingya Community Australia Inc. (BRCA).

BRCA was established on 10 November 1999 and officially registered on 1 May 2000. It is a non-profit organisation with no affiliation to any political party. The Rohingya community is however very keen to collaborate with any other organisation that can assist with the restoration of democracy and the improvement of human rights in Burma. The organisation believes that the solution to the Rohingya crisis is not in settlement but rather in the dignified return to their native land and the homes that they have lost.

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS THROUGH EDUCATION, PARTNERSHIP, AND UNITY



AMADU BAH, BANTAL PULAAR COMMUNITY

Bantal Pulaar is a multinational community organisation which comprises Fullahs from all over the world. The meaning of Bantal in English is “Progress” and the word Pulaar is the language they speak. What binds the Fullahs together as a family is their resilience to preserve their own culture, traditions, and language alongside their age-old core value of “Jokere Endhan” which translates to “seeking each other’s interests”. As a community that strives for progress, the Banta Pulaar strongly believes in the upliftment of Fullah girls and women through education. The community’s promotion of female education has resulted in 90% female graduates in various disciplines.



The Bantal Pulaar community consists of Fullahs – a large ethnic group in various countries, however predominantly from West Africa, the Northern parts of Central Africa, Sudan, and the regions close to the Red Sea coast. Bantal Pulaar was formed in 2002 so as to advance and encourage a good relationship among all Fullah members of NSW no matter where they originally came from. One of its primary objectives is to advocate in the interest of Fullah migrants in Australia, particularly those in NSW.

As a registered community organisation with ASIC and NSW Fair Trading, it promotes tolerance, respect, love, and unity as vital tools in becoming responsible citizens of Australia. Additionally, the Bantal Pulaar community also seek opportunities for its members to experience and appreciate the diverse cultures and perspectives present in Australia. Bantal Pulaar is a democratic organisation where all office bearers are elected and allows all members to express their views, concerns, and aspirations in a respectful and diligent manner.

MANDAEANS: SURVIVAL OF AN ANCIENT CIVILISATION

SABIAN MANDAEAN ASSOCIATION IN AUSTRALIA (SMAA)



The Sabian Mandaean community is a small ethno-religious group indigenous to South Mesopotamia, which is modern day Iraq and Iran. The Mandaeans have their own ancient language, texts, traditions, and practices that date back over 2000 years. As followers of John the Baptist, their ancient holy book is called The Ginza Rba. The Mandaic language has been listed by UNESCO as an endangered language with only a little over 200 people able to speak it worldwide.

The Sabian Mandaeans have sought refuge in various countries since the 1980s to escape constant war, violence, religious persecution, and ethnic cleansing that has resulted in a worldwide diaspora of their community. With a population of just 50,000 worldwide and just over 8000 Mandaeans in NSW, this ancient civilisation currently faces a serious threat of extinction. Due to this, they have experienced trauma, PTSD, and inter-generational trauma that affects every Mandaean household.

The Sabian Mandaean Association Australia (SMAA) started initially as The Association of Mandaeans in Australia and was later incorporated as SMAA. Its focus is to provide direct assistance to Mandaean refugees in Australia and ensure all members achieve full cultural, economic, social and political participation in Australian society. SMAA provides a number of services which are critical to the community. The services help to alleviate the poverty, destitution and helplessness suffered by many Mandaean refugees in Australia, which is frequently a product of the trauma and torture they suffered prior to them fleeing from Iraq and Iran.

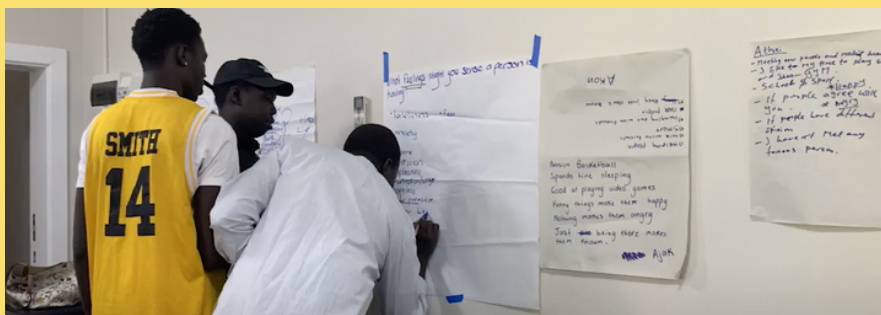
LIVING IN AUSTRALIA, SOUTH SUDANESE YOUTHS TELL-ALL

SOUTH SUDANESE YOUTH AMBASSADOR GROUP (SSYA)



The South Sudanese Youth Ambassador Group was formed in December 2019 as a result of a collaborative project between the STARTTS community development team, the Communities in Cultural Transition Team, and the South West Sydney Local Health District.

The group consists of more than 20 young South Sudanese between the ages of 15 and 25 years, most of whom were born in Australia. This group has received leadership and mental health training to become ambassadors of their community and improve the mental health and wellbeing of their peers and community.



NO BORDERS, NO BARRIERS FOR OUR FRIENDSHIPS AND HOPE



TAMIL SENIOR SUPPORT GROUP



The Tamil Senior Support Group has been supported by the STARTTS Families in Cultural Transition (FiCT) team since 2017. The participants are Tamil women and men who either came to Australia as refugees from Sri Lanka, or were sponsored by their children who are living here. This group was initiated by Susan Cunningham, who was a FiCT Senior Project Officer at STARTTS.

The group started with 15 participants and has now increased to 25, with more waiting to join. They range in age from the early sixties to the mid-eighties. Most have physical and/or mental health issues including trauma as well as very limited English. The majority have been here around 10 years but still feel very isolated. Some live with their adult children and grandchildren whilst others live alone.

The group plays an important part in their lives, helping them to connect with other Tamils. It provides a space for them to discuss and get an understanding of "how things work" in Australia, such as the aged care system which is not a Sri Lankan concept. The Tamil seniors say they support each other and have gained independent living skills after joining this group. This group helps them to regain their hope and identity as Sri Lankan Tamils.



FEAR OF HEALTH WAR



NAIKBAKHT WAHIDI, AUTHOR & POET



Naikbakh Wahidi is originally from Badakhshan, Afghanistan and came to Australia as a refugee three years ago. Prior to arriving here, she lived in Pakistan for four years as an Afghan refugee without a visa, where she struggled with understanding the local language, culture, and people along with other issues pertaining to her being an Afghan. She and her sibling had no access to education in Pakistan and on arriving in Australia, they had to begin learning English from ABC which she terms as being “so hard at the beginning”. However, her persistence to learn made her carry on and win 10 awards in her first year of schooling. She also published her first book last year.

Currently living in Sydney, Naikbakht has shared her story on refugee lives in many school shows in Sydney and also at the Australian Parliament last year. As COVID-19 gripped the world earlier this year, she spent her lockdown days by taking photography classes and won three awards. As she has already experienced lockdown early in her life, she understands how difficult it can be. But this hasn't stopped her from writing poems and stories about different cultures and people. Her next book is soon to be published.

COMMUNITY SERVICES, STARTTS

JASMINA BAJRAKTAREVIC - HA4WARD
Community Services Coordinator, STARTTS

Jasmina came to Australia in 1993 as a refugee from Bosnia-Herzegovina. She is a Social Worker (Hon 1, University Medal) and the Community Services Coordinator at STARTTS. Jasmina's involvement in the refugee field dates back to 1991, when she became involved in work with Bosnian refugees in Croatia through "Suncokret- Centre for Grassroots Relief Work", an implementing partner of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Jasmina commenced her work at STARTTS in the position of Counsellor/Project Officer (communities of former Yugoslavia) in 1994 and remained in the position until 1999 when she took on the role of a Team Leader at Singleton Safe Haven. She has been in her current role since 2000. Her knowledge and expertise range from individual trauma counselling, through group-work and community development to management and staff supervision.



COMMUNITIES IN CULTURAL TRANSITION (CiCT)

DAVID AJAK AJANG

CiCT Project Officer, STARTTS

David Ajak Ajang is a passionate advocate of social justice for refugees and has a deep understanding of refugee issues, having come to Australia as a refugee himself. David has worked in the community sector in different capacities for the last 16 years. He started at STARTTS as a Bi-cultural Counselor for African Communities in 2005, when among other roles he coordinated the Dancing in Harmony project for African Communities. For the past nine years David has coordinated the Communities in Cultural Transition program.



CiCT TEAM MEMBERS

- David Ajak Ajang - CiCT Project Officer
- Loan Bui - CiCT Project Officer

VOLUNTEERS

- Freny Tayebjee - Volunteer/Consultant
- Ishita Gambhir - Business & Education student, Western Sydney University
- Min Chen - Social Work student, Australian College of Applied Psychology
- Namrata Dhamija - Social Work student, Australian College of Applied Psychology
- Nimi Techii - Communications student, Western Sydney University

STARTTS is a specialist, non-profit organisation that for over 30 years has provided culturally relevant psychological treatment and support, and community interventions, to help people and communities heal the scars of torture and refugee trauma and rebuild their lives in Australia. STARTTS also fosters a positive recovery environment through the provision of training to services, advocacy and policy work.

Sincere thanks to the CiCT fantastic volunteers who have worked tirelessly for the 2020 forum.

Special thanks to Dr Wayne Fallon, Senior Lecturer in Management, School of Business, Western Sydney University for developing and delivering community leadership programs and his ongoing support.

Thanks to Paul Barrett, Barrett Evolution for conducting the 2020 online forum. Special thanks to Rodrigo Borquez, ICT Team Leader for his support.

The CiCT Program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs. Go to www.homeaffairs.gov.au for more information.



Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation
of Torture and Trauma Survivors
152-168 The Horsley Drive, Carramar NSW 2163
PO Box 203 Fairfield NSW 2165
Ask for CiCT Project Officer at:
Telephone: 02 9646 6700
Facsimile: 02 9794 1910
www.startts.org.au
stts-cict@health.nsw.gov.au



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