

Union of Australian Women

Newsletter

SEPTEMBER -WHAT'S ON

Monday 1 September
12 noon

UAW Darebin Group
Peacock Hotel, opposite Northcote Town Hall
Clare: 9481 2704

Wednesday 3 September
12 noon

UAW Pub Lunch
Royal Oak Hotel
444 Nicholson St North Fitzroy
Tram 96 Bourke St Stop 18

Saturday 6 September 2pm

**Rally and Launch: Grandmothers Against
Detention of Refugee Children**
Steps of St Paul's Cathedral
Wear a purple scarf

Monday 8 September
10.00 – 12.00noon

UAW Organising Committee meeting
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

Thursday 11 September
10.30 – 12.30

UAW Book Group
2nd floor meeting room Ross House

Monday 15 September
10.30 – 12.30

UAW letter-writing campaign
2nd floor meeting room Ross House
Seize the chance to have your say!
Come in to Ross House and together we can
write letters re asylum seeker policy; Peter
Greste; other issues. We will supply paper,
pens, stamps – you supply the words.

Vale Irena Higgins.

***A member of the UAW for a very long time, Irena died peacefully in her sleep
Wednesday 20 August. She celebrated her 100th birthday with the UAW-Seniors
Network earlier this year. She was a scientist and a celebrated community activist.
She made a difference.***

SOUTHERN BRANCH REPORT AUGUST: GRANDMOTHERS AGAINST DETENTION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

By Mairi Neil

On Saturday, August 16, Mordialloc Neighbourhood House was chilly outside, but a bundle of warmth and compassion inside, when the branch met to hear Marg Darcy speak about the formation of the group **Grandmothers Against Children In Detention**.

As Amy commented when she introduced Marg and her friend Judy, there seem to be so many issues to protest about with Abbott Government decisions, however, getting children released from detention is the most urgent. Marg (Kooyong) and Judy (Goldstein) have already written to their members of parliament and suggest we organise electorate by electorate to fight for change and write to our various members of parliament.

Marg explained the history of the group when about 70 friends networked and gathered at an initial meeting in Fairfield (one lady even attended from Frankston). The women, from fields of childhood education, or those affecting the development of children, were versed in the appropriate environments which allow children to flourish. Outraged at children being detained; aware of how harmful mandatory detention is for adults, and appalled at children being locked away indefinitely with no idea of what decision could be made about their status, motivated the group to action. The commonality was the horror at children being mistreated. Her group now numbers 200.

Marg asked us to think if it were our children and grandchildren — what would you do? How would they react to being locked up? How would they behave? Survive, or perish? What lasting social and psychological damages are being done in our name? How must they feel after the Prime Minister's announcement that they will never be settled here? The children in many cases have lost hope because they have come from backgrounds where they have already witnessed extreme trauma and conflict. The women who came together at the inaugural meeting were concerned about the impact on brain and social development of traumatised and detained children knowing **development impaired can be repaired**, but children in detention have no access to appropriate facilities. Instead they are crammed into confined and bleak living quarters. Margo cited the Darwin detention centre where there were not even safety rails on bunk beds used by young children. No attention is paid to the welfare of children in the unseemly rush to imprison those seeking asylum.

Recent figures revealed 1000 children detained, 1500 in community detention and 2000 families on bridging visas with limited government support. Without the rights we take for granted how are refugees going to get the opportunity to recover from trauma?

All refugees must be treated with respect, but Marg's group hope that by focusing on the children those advocating change of policy and humanitarian action may have more impact. Volunteers with a small planning group of 12, they want to harness the outrage they know many people feel to achieve their objective of freeing refugees, and in particular freeing the children.

Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children cont.

By highlighting the inhumanity of mandatory detention they hope to influence Australian citizens and politicians to action and avoid creating a generation of children with terror and hate in their heart.

Grandmothers Against Children In Detention formed an alliance with leadership Victoria, a group looking for projects aiming to initiate change in the community. Savvy about using technology, the media and social media, their input illuminating and helpful to create this website: <https://sites.google.com/site/grandmothersadrc/>

Churches have been supportive allowing their premises to be used free of charge for meetings. The Uniting Church in Fairfield offered their hall. **Please email St Paul's commending them for their *Refugees are Welcome* sign because they get many letters of protest each week and their congregation need to know it is important to keep the sign.**

The group welcomes everyone who is concerned about this issue and hopes other groups mushroom and make the issue personal. They are aware many groups care and work around this issue but hope their uniqueness will garner publicity and support. The children of women who commit a crime and find themselves in prison have better conditions and are better catered for than those imprisoned by mandatory detention, yet their only "crime" is to seek asylum! They have said: **As grandmothers we are in a unique position to bring intergenerational insight into the very special needs of children. We believe that for Australia to incarcerate refugee and asylum seeker children is unconscionable. We.. find it imperative to stand up and be counted in defence of these vulnerable children.**

They will produce a newsletter detailing future actions because it is an ongoing campaign but hope many people will attend their launch on **September 6th at 2pm on the Steps of St. Paul's in Melbourne**. Aware of the demographics of their group the launch has been scheduled to last no longer than an hour!

And while Scott Morrison announced the release of some children from detention here is a link explaining the inadequacy of that decision

<http://www.asrc.org.au/2014/08/20/government-needs-to-release-remaining-745-children-from-detention/>

Two letters on the issue were signed by those present: one to Scott Morrison, the other to Richard Marles. We also had copies of the petition on climate from the Victorian Women's Trust to sign and postcards for the PM regarding retaining the Renewable Energy Targets.

The meeting ended with the usual array of refreshments and catching up on each other's news with best wishes going to Sarah MacQuarrie to recover quickly from her stay in hospital.

INFORMATIVE SPEAKERS AT THE AUGUST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF VICTORIA.**By Carmen Green**

The National Council of Women of Victoria (NCWV) was established in Victorian 1902 and is one of the oldest women's organisations in Victoria. The UAW is one of many women's organisations affiliated to the NCWV. As such, we are entitled to send two members to their monthly meetings. Their August meeting was attended by Carmen Green and Jenny Stewart and the following report on the meeting was given to the August UAW's Organising Committee meeting.

There were two highly interesting speakers at the August NCWV meeting. They were:

- **Erin Wicking, Girl Guides Vic, Community Development Office and**
- **Christine Carolan, Project Officer, Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans**

Erin explained that the Girl Guides is the largest women's group in the world –it's in 145 different countries and has 10 million members. They work on issues such as forced marriage, domestic violence and status of women. Erin was a great spokesperson for the Guides -had wide experience from travelling to Rwanda as well as representing the Girl Guides at the UN.

She visited Rwanda to learn about ways to tackle violence and promote gender equality. Rwanda now has one of the highest numbers of female politicians in the world and violence against women there is very much in the public eye. They are determined to learn from the horror of what happened during the genocide.

The delegation from the Guides at the UN Status of Women in New York this year spread their message "World we want for Girls post 2015". They managed through their efforts to change the UN document to give more emphasis to girls –emphasising their "I'm a girl campaign" about capacity building for girls.

Christine spoke about the work being done by her organisation to combat global trafficking of women and forced marriage using the theme "Caring for women, Caring for the World". They have taken these issues to the UN and using the CEDAW Agreement (Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination against Women) they managed to get a UN resolution passed on forced marriage which they were then able to use to put pressure on the Australian Government. She praised both Tanya Plibersek (then Minister for Women) and Nicola Roxon (then Attorney General). In 2013 Nicola Roxon put through a law making forced marriage illegal and said that she hoped that, while it would never need to be used, it would strengthen any young women in this situation to oppose the practice.

Christine said they have been working with the Attorney-General's Department for the last 6 years and her organisation has now received \$61,000 from the current Federal Government to do a pilot scheme on girls and young women in vulnerable situations. They use social media and local papers to spread information about the rights of young women.

They also network with a Muslim Women's Human Rights Group. Their aim is to empower young women, their slogan is "... the choice is yours".

PREGNANCY DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE IS RIFE by Cath Morrison

A recent study by the Human Rights Commission found that discrimination against pregnant workers was widespread in Australia and consequences are keenly felt, with 84 per cent of women reporting mental and physical stress, and damage to their finances and career.

Almost 50 per cent of mothers have experienced discrimination in the workplace, both in the corporate world and the public service, at some point during pregnancy, parental leave or when they returned to work, a new study shows. The report found 49 per cent of pregnant women and working mothers experienced discrimination. The commission surveyed hundreds of parents, employers and business groups and found cases where maternity leave was denied, job contracts were torn up, careers were stunted, while demotions and resignations were commonplace. One woman was advised by her boss to consider an abortion, while another was told to choose between her baby and her job. The report also found when it came to discrimination, it did not make a difference whether the boss was female or male. Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, said the findings were deeply disturbing for women and that fixing this problem would boost Australia's economy. *"What we do know is that men's workforce participation rate is about 12 per cent above women's. If we could close that gap by lifting women's participation just 6 per cent, we would add around \$25 billion annually to Australia's GDP. This has got significant productivity benefits for Australia."*

The ACTU argues that return to work for new mothers is made even more difficult as there is currently no obligation on an employer to accommodate an employee's request for flexible work arrangements. For women hoping or needing to return to work after having a child, flexible work arrangements are essential in the early years of the child's life

According to an ACTU media release dated July 25, 2014, *the ACTU and unions requested the review by Elizabeth Brodrick because growing numbers of our members tell us they are being discriminated against at work during pregnancy, when they return to work from parental leave, or when they need to care for a family member,"* said ACTU President Ged Kearney.

Ms Kearney said. *"The fact that one third of mothers and one quarter of partners either resigned from their job or looked for other work highlights the unacceptable cost of this discrimination on women, their families and the economy... As the Human Rights Commission review shows, the pressures of balancing work and family is unfairly borne by employees - mostly women. Not only is this unfair, it is unsustainable.....unions are calling on the Government to improve the right to request flexible work arrangements in the Fair Work Act."*

The current legislation does not go far enough and must be amended to include measures that assist women to return to work such as flexible hours arrangements which will meet the needs of families and the workplace.

As well as a human rights issue for women this is an economic issue. The billions which will be wasted in funding the Government's proposed Paid Parental Leave scheme would be much better directed to assist with child care costs and to make employers meet their obligations regarding their pregnant employees.

JUSTICE FOR PETER GRESTE**By Morag Loh**

Peter Greste is an Australian journalist presently serving a seven year prison sentence in Egypt. He is an experienced reporter who worked for the BBC and Reuters before becoming a correspondent for Al Jazeera English in Africa. Highly respected by his peers – he won a Peabody Award while at the BBC for a documentary about Somalia – his harsh sentence, which he shares with two colleagues, shocked political and journalistic circles throughout the western world.

Peter and other Al Jazeera journalists were arrested late in December last year and charged with falsifying news, and writing reports which damaged Egypt's national security and reputation. Peter was accused of having an association with the Muslim Brotherhood. They were held in jail until their trial in June this year. There was no evidence presented at the trial to back up the charges against them and it was expected therefore that they would be released. Amid the international outcry which greeted the unexpected and severe verdict the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights called for their prompt release but to no avail. Peter clearly and objectively reported events as they unfolded around him. The Egyptian government has chosen to believe that reporting what is happening is the same as agreeing with what is happening.

I am a member of PEN International and regularly write to support writers who are punished for doing their job – in China, Vietnam, Turkey, Cambodia, Eritrea, Mexico – but Peter is the first Australian we have needed to defend. I urge UAW members to join in calling for his release. You can sign an online petition – just Google it up – but you can also write or email. There is a movement underway to ensure that Egyptian and Australian authorities are regularly reminded that we want a fine journalist released. People are writing to the Ambassador for Egypt and emailing copies to Julie Bishop MP, our Minister for Foreign Affairs, to their local Federal MP and to me, so that I can let the Greste family know that Peter is not forgotten, that every week or so a letter of support for him keeps his name and cause alive in Canberra and Cairo.

I am willing to help anyone who would like to participate but would like some assistance. Some people have already been assisted with ideas about what to say in the letter, addresses etc. Please contact me by phone at 9804 8485 or by email at morag.loh@bigpond.com I'm looking forward to hearing from you.

Or come to our letter writing campaign day Monday 15 September – see What's On (Ed)

UAW-Seniors Network**From Mary Owen**

A recent meeting expressed concern about deteriorating government support for adequate education, health and disability (including age) care needs (see June Newsletter).

Members also asked: What support does government provide for the children of single mothers who must go out to work in order to support their family? If teenagers are left home alone for whatever reason, the mother could be gaoled for 3 months or fined over \$2000. But if she doesn't go out to work she'll be a bludger and not eligible for unemployment benefits. Surely government should spend our taxes on training and providing counseling and supervision...

Members asked political parties: *What policies does your party have in mind to prevent crime rather than punish it? Or to distribute welfare to the needy commensurate with that distributed to the wealthy via tax concessions for private superannuation, private health insurance and private education?*

NOTES FROM THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE SEPTEMBER 2014 By Anne Sgro

Letters were sent to the Minister for Immigration, Scott Morrison, with a copy to Shadow Minister Richard Marles from both the UAW office and Southern Branch re the **government proposal to send asylum seekers to Cambodia from Manus Island and Nauru**:

I wish to strongly protest this policy on behalf of my members. Cambodia is a very poor country – over 45% of its people live in poverty; almost half Cambodian children are malnourished; people are still recovering from brutal civil strife and a decimation of the population; Australia has, in the recent past, expressed concern about the country's poor human rights record; there is endemic government corruption; and there is no support for asylum seekers.

One would be entitled to ask: What are you thinking? Australia is surely better than this. The Union of Australian Women condemns this proposal and seeks humane treatment of asylum seekers from your government.

Letters were also sent to the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott and the Israeli Ambassador re the **violence in Gaza**. To Tony Abbott:

I write on behalf of the Union of Australian Women to request urgent action from the Australian Government to resolve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Australia has used its position on the United Nations Security Council to initiate action about the shooting down of the Malaysian civilian plane over Ukraine. We would like to see that kind of leadership repeated to resolve the tragedy in Gaza.

The United Nations Office for the Co-Ordination of Humanitarian Affairs states that at least 1965 Palestinians have been killed since the current Israeli operation began – most of them women and children. It seems to us to be a totally disproportionate response to Hamas aggression, and one that deliberately targets civilians. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. We ask that the Australian Government use its position and resources to obtain a lasting peace process, one that involves the voices of women. We want the killing stopped and a path to peace.

MONSTER PETITION FOR CLIMATE CHANGE

The Victorian Women's Trust has initiated a petition to support action for climate change. Members were inspired by the example of Victorian women who gathered a huge number of signatures to a petition (known now as the Monster Petition) in 1891 as part of their campaign for the right to vote. It will provide a mechanism for enormous numbers of women, men and children to express concern about the almost total lack of national leadership on securing a safe climate. It is called the Monster Climate Petition and can be found at www.monsterclimatepetition.com.au

The lead petitioner is Dr Fiona Stanley AC. It is available in 7 languages and is aimed at everyone, including children. You can download copies, or contact the VWT at 9642 0422 and they will send copies to you. It asks the House of Representatives "to respect the science and build a safe climate future for our children and grandchildren and generations to come..."

What a great initiative!

NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER: VOICES FOR NEGOTIATION AND PEACE**By Anne Sgro**

With so much violence, death and destruction in the world, we are being increasingly polarized into “goodies and baddies” (to paraphrase Tony Abbott), into evil-doers and defenders of freedom and democracy. The “Team Australia” rhetoric covers about anything that the Abbott government wants to promote, including greater restrictions on citizens and fomenting suspicion and distrust. It borders on the obviously ridiculous when even the Scots come in for criticism for campaigning for independence. But there is a serious side. Extreme fundamentalists ISIS are undoubtedly bloodthirsty and committing crimes against humanity in the Middle East. But the United States has been quietly dropping bombs from unmanned drones for years – into Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere. A recent ABC Foreign Correspondent program (15.7.14) showed the devastating effects still today of the secret US bombing of neutral Laos 40 years ago. Cluster bombs that carpeted the area then are still killing and maiming Laotians today. Cutting off heads is ghastly: so is remote control bombing.

Can we put a brake on the momentum of the armaments industry? Can we urge our governments to stop the violence and seek peaceful negotiation – in Gaza, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere? Now more than ever we need strong voices for peace and non-violence.

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