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REFUGEE TRANSITIONS

A Publication of the *Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors*

Issue 37

Ukraine, the Longest Year

Afghanistan: A Human Rights Disaster

The Fight for Myanmar's Future

The Science of the Smart Heart

The Istanbul Protocol

REFUGEE TRANSITIONS

Refugee Transitions reports on a broad range of human rights issues, focusing attention on the impact of organised violence on health. It provides a forum for discussion and analysis of current conflicts around the world and the initiatives that support the settlement of refugees and their stories of survival.

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CEO's Message

Welcome to the 37th edition of *Refugee Transitions*,

Much has happened in the world since STARTTS last published *Refugee Transitions*. War returned to Europe with Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The situation in countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Yemen, where conflicts have been raging for years, remains desperate and new conflicts in Sudan and Ethiopia are causing displacement and untold suffering to people.

In today's world 32 million people are currently refugees, meaning they fled their homeland because of violence and persecution, while the internally displaced population has increased to 100 million – 13 million more than at the end of 2021, equivalent to half the population of Australia.

Apart from human rights crises, the world now faces a daunting array of challenges associated with the growing impact of climate change, mass migration and the economic uncertainties caused by the current conflicts.

In this issue of *Refugee Transitions* we report on the situation in Ukraine, more than a year after the invasion. While there has been wide coverage in the mainstream media, we could not ignore it. The war has become the single most important geopolitical issue of our time, impacting the globe in many different ways while exacerbating pre-existing humanitarian problems. The outcome of the war may well determine the future of Europe, yet may remain unresolved for some time while continuing to make Europe and the world more dangerous.

We also include an analysis of the situation in Afghanistan more than a year after it fell to the fundamentalist Taliban forces, as well as a report on Myanmar. Both conflicts have been eclipsed in the mainstream media by the Ukraine-Russia war.

On a more positive note, we publish a conversation with University of NSW Professor Zachary Steel, who has a long history of collaboration with STARTTS. Zachary heads a program of clinical research into the impact of trauma on veterans, first responders, refugees, asylum-seekers and civilian populations.

Neuroscience and technology are constantly transforming the way we assist clients. In this issue clinical psychologist Sejla Murdoch writes about the use of Heart Rate Variability (HRV) Biofeedback in healing trauma. Meanwhile, UNSW's Dr Lydia Gitau explores immersive virtual reality body mapping experiences that enable users to connect with and explore how thoughts, sensations and emotions are experienced by the body, and how this tool can help refugees.

In this issue we acknowledge Sergei Magnitsky, the Ukrainian-born Russian tax adviser responsible for exposing corruption and misconduct by Russian government officials. His arrests lead to prison and death. The Global Magnitsky Act of 2016 created in his name ensures human rights abusers and corrupt officials are denied entry into the US and are barred from using US financial institutions. It inspired the creation of similar legislation by other countries around the world.

Finally, closer to STARTTS and on a more personal note, I would like to pay tribute to two magnificent people who worked for STARTTS some years ago and have unfortunately recently passed away. Yasmina Nastassia and Esber Melhem will always be remembered for the important contribution they made to STARTTS as an organisation and the respective groups of clients they worked with. It was a privilege to work side-by-side with them as we shaped STARTTS into the organisation it is today. Their contribution will live forever in the many achievements of STARTTS.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

Jorge Aroche
Chief Executive Officer / STARTTS

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MODERN CONFLICTS

Last February the war in Ukraine passed its one-year mark with no end in sight. So far, neither Russia nor Ukraine has been able to win, yet there is no practical roadmap for resolving the conflict. ***OLGA YOLDI*** *writes.*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the all-defining crisis of our time. Once, COVID-19 dominated the headlines: now it is the war, with Western leaders pondering what is going on in Russian President Vladimir Putin's mind, and when his next offensive will be.

An invasion of this kind in the heart of Europe would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. Europe had enjoyed relative peace for the three decades since the end of the Cold War. With the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia stopped being a broader threat. But the invasion has marked a turning point in Europe's history, triggering the largest armed conflict since WWII.

The war's ripple effects have been massive. It has disrupted supply chains, energy markets and global food systems. It has caused untold suffering, the deaths of hundreds of thousands, the destruction of Ukraine's cities and towns, its vital infrastructure, and an epic refugee crisis. But what has shocked the world is the magnitude of the war crimes: the indiscriminate killings by Russian soldiers of Ukrainian civilians and the sheer inhumanity of it all.

In Ukraine, all aspects of life have been disrupted. Media reports note Ukrainians are now used to living with the uncertain rhythms of war and have learnt to survive and support each other in extreme circumstances. Apart from struggling with blackouts, they never quite know when a drone or missile will strike their buildings. In Kyiv you can track the trajectory of Russian missiles on smartphone apps in real time and air raid sirens about incoming rockets remind citizens they are living in the midst of a war zone. But journalists who have visited the country say Ukrainians are determined to win the war and not to be defeated by fear.

When Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine he seemed to believe he would get away with it. After all he had got away with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the war against Georgia in 2008, and his brutal intervention in Syria, where Russia alongside Iran conducted indiscriminate aerial attacks using barrel bombs, cluster munitions and poison gas on densely populated neighbourhoods, which amounted to

Vladimir Putin

war crimes. The West then turned a blind eye and decided not to do anything that might provoke Putin.

But Ukraine was different. An unjustified, unprovoked war of aggression against a sovereign country recognised by the international community, was not only seen as an assault but a potentially fatal blow to the international liberal order – the principles, values and institutions built since 1945.

"What made Russia's invasion so shocking was its anachronistic nature," writes University of Minnesota political scientist Tanisha M. Fazal in *Foreign Affairs*. "For decades, this kind of territorial conquest had seemed to be a thing of the past. It had been more than 33 years since one country had tried to conquer another internationally recognised country outright (when Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990)." She writes that with the Russian invasion, the norm against territorial conquest has been tested in the most threatening and vivid way since the end of World War II and the conflict is reminiscent of a previous, more violent era.

While in 1990 the US led other Western troops to repel Iraq from Kuwait, this has not been the case in Ukraine. US President Joe Biden, and European and other allies including Australia, strongly condemned the invasion, but decided they could not be parties to the conflict since Ukraine was not a NATO member. Instead, they sent arms, provided financial and intelligence support and imposed substantial sanctions on Russia.

US president, Joe Biden framed the invasion as a struggle between autocracy and democracy; between liberty and repression; and between a rules-based order and brutal force. Putin never provided a cohesive explanation for the invasion. Initially he blamed the eastward expansion of NATO for encroaching on Russia's area of influence. Then it became about protecting ethnic Russians living in Ukraine being subjected to abuse and genocide by a "neo-Nazi" Ukrainian government. In various speeches Putin has also appeared to be driven by a desire to rebuild the historical Russian empire, but lately he has framed the conflict as part of a larger confrontation between Russia and the West, with the West being the aggressor and Russia the victim.

Putin's so called "special military operation" did not go according to the Kremlin's plan. Media reports mostly blamed military incompetence, logistical systems breakdowns and a lack of materiel. But Dara Massicot,

an expert in Russian military at RAND Corporation, attributes the failure to a total lack of preparation. She writes that the war was planned only by the Russian President and his closest confidants in the intelligence services. Russia's own troops and most of its senior leaders did not learn of the invasion until several days or even hours before it began.

"The secrecy was a mistake." she wrote in *Foreign Affairs*. "By orchestrating the attack with just a small group of advisers, Putin undercut many of the advantages his country should have had … Russia created an invasion plan that was riddled with faulty assumptions, arbitrary political guidance and planning errors that departed from key Russian military principles." Massicot reminds readers that the Russian armed forces have adapted their tactics and learned from their mistakes.

The invasion failed to dislodge the government of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy or incorporate Ukraine wholly into greater Russia, despite illegally annexing part of Donbas and other eastern regions. All along Putin appears to have misjudged the power and resolve of Ukraine's military and underestimated the level of support from the West. One year on, all he has achieved is to isolate Russia and damage its economy, future prospects and reputation. He has also contributed to NATO's strengthening and expansion.

While the West remains united in its support of Ukraine, critics say the US, the main materiel supporter of Ukraine, and to a lesser extent NATO countries are providing just enough weapons to keep the Ukrainian army viable on the battlefield, but not enough to win the war against Russia. Critics say a greater supply of weapons is needed; otherwise this incremental approach could lead to a long and protracted war of attrition, with negative consequences for both Ukraine and Russia. However fear of escalation limits what the West is prepared to do. Critics insist the West must provide enough support to ensure a Ukrainian victory in the near-term. This means not only more weapons, but also economic aid and tougher sanctions on Russia and this must be done rapidly rather than incrementally.

So far sanctions haven't had the negative impact on the Russian economy. In the past year Russia's GDP shrank by 2.2 per cent as opposed to the 3.4 per cent predicted. The Russian government has managed to keep the economy afloat, with its central bank quickly introducing capital controls and bailing out companies hit by sanctions, while developing an alternative to SWIFT (global financial messaging) system. At the same time, high energy prices for most of 2022 allowed Russia to increase its oil revenues by an estimated 20 per cent. According to the *World Economic Outlook Update* published in January 2023, Russia's crude oil exports were simply redirected from sanction to non-sanction countries, such as China and India. Sanctions were also supposed to disable Russia's ability to produce weapons, but high-tech products such as microchips needed to build missiles were supplied by China and other countries. It was the introduction of a price cap on Russian oil exports late last year that forced Russia to sell its oil at prices below global benchmarks, causing the budget to fall into a deficit.

Only 33 countries observed the sanctions. There was an expectation most countries would join the West in their condemnation of Russia and impose sanctions, but nations in the Global South refused to do so. "The rest of the world genuinely sees this as a European war. They do not see a global conflict in the way it is presented by the West," a former Indian foreign secretary told the *Washington Post*. "Yes, it has international repercussions such as inflation. But those repercussions are because of the sanctions … they do not subscribe to the narrative that countering Russia is a moral imperative if the principles of democracy and territorial integrity and the rules-based world order are to be upheld."

Some commentators attribute their lack of engagement to resentment against the West for their failure to address conflicts and human rights abuses being committed in other parts of the world (Yemen, Palestine, Ethiopia). "The conflict has exposed a deep global divide and the limits of US influence over a rapidly shifting world order," writes Liz Sly in the *Washington Post*. "Evidence abounds that the effort to isolate Putin has failed, and not just among Russian allies that could be expected to back Moscow, such as China and Iran."

So far Iran has provided military assistance to Russia, particularly drones. US and NATO officials say this support will not turn the tide of the war in Russia's favour, but could prolong it and raise its death toll. However, a prolonged war is almost unimaginable, given the extent of death, destruction and displacement (14.5 million people, including eight million refugees) that occurred in the first 12 months.

Western officials estimate Russian forces have suffered more than 200,000 deaths and casualties, including at least 30,000 mercenaries from the notorious Wagner Group, and the Ukrainian armed forces at least 130,000 casualties. The UN recorded close to 18,000 Ukrainian civilian casualties, including at least 6,884 deaths mostly caused by the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in residential areas. This is carnage on an industrial scale.

Russian forces conducted multiple attacks with cluster munitions that damaged at least 300 schools, according to the Ukrainian Department of Education, and more than 600 attacks on health care facilities, according to the World Health Organisation. Russia has partially destroyed Ukrainian infrastructure. From October 10 2022 to the end of January, Russia fired 700 drones and missiles at Ukraine's power plants and distribution systems, killing at least 98 engineers and repair workers while damaging at least 40 per cent of the energy infrastructure, says Amnesty International.

Human rights organisations warned war crimes have been perpetrated in areas of Ukraine occupied by Russia, where thousands have been detained, tortured, mutilated and executed. Russian armed forces denied Ukrainian civilians in besieged areas access to humanitarian aid and attacked aid convoys. Russian authorities forcibly transferred and deported civilians from occupied areas of Ukraine into Russia. According to a report by the Conflict Observatory, at least 11,000 children were abducted and taken into 43 camps and institutions of re-education in areas from Crimea to Siberia, or put them for adoption. This has led to the International Criminal Court issuing an arrest warrant for President Putin for the unlawful dislocation of Ukrainian children.

These atrocities were not the work of rogue soldiers, human rights organisations say, but of organised brutality under the watch of Putin's generals.

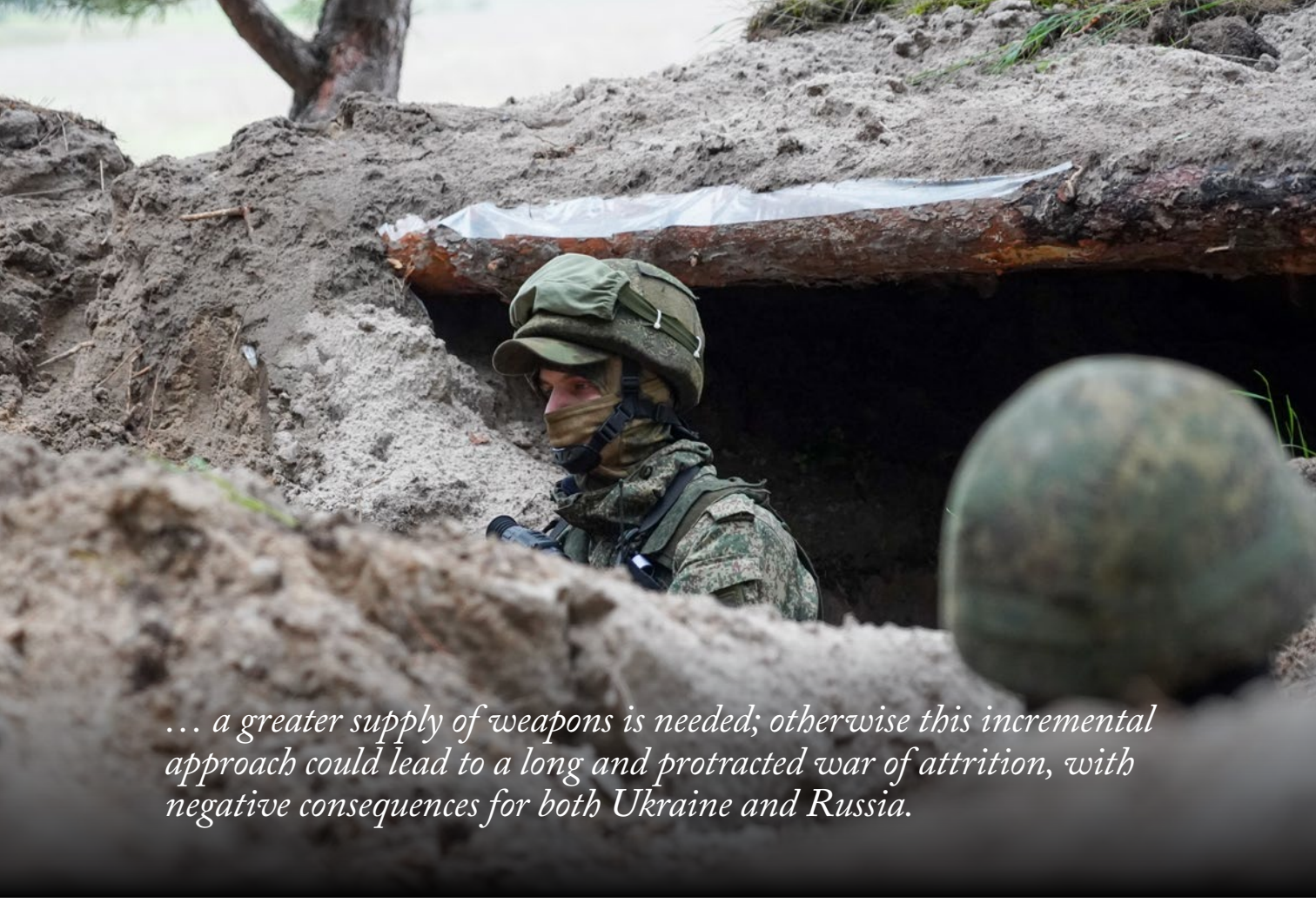
The *UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine* report say prisoners of war have been ill-treated by both sides. It documents cases of enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture and sexual violence by both Russian forces and Ukrainian security forces, armed forces and territorial forces.

The war has of course had a devastating impact on Ukraine's economy and environment. Its main exports, agriculture and metallurgy, have been largely destroyed and the economy has shrunk by a third. Preliminary monitoring of the conflict undertaken last year by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and partners points to a toxic legacy for generations to come. Thousands of possible incidences of air, water and land pollution and the degradation of ecosystems, including risks to neighbouring countries, have been identified. "The mapping and initial screening of environmental hazards only serves to confirm that war is quite literally toxic," said UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen. "The first priority is for this senseless destruction to end now. The environment is about people: it's about livelihoods, public health, clean air and water, and basic food systems. It's about a safe future for Ukrainians and their neighbours, and further damage must not be done."

A safe future for Ukraine is unlikely as long as Putin remains in power. Political repression in Russia has increased since the war began. Anyone who speaks against it is considered a traitor and sent to prison for terms of up to 10 years. Opponents to the war have been poisoned or died in mysterious circumstances. "Today's Russia counts more known political prisoners than the Soviet Union did in its later years – even forced psychiatric treatment has made a comeback," imprisoned Russian politician, author, and historian Vladimir Kara-Murza wrote in the *Washington Post*. It is estimated that about a million people have left Russia, either because they oppose the invasion or simply to avoid being drafted.

Most analysts say continuing the war benefits Russia's president. "Fighting on makes sense for Putin for one fundamental reason: wartime autocrats rarely lose power," write Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Erica Frantz in *Foreign Affairs*. "Being at war shuts down avenues for a country's citizens, military and security forces to challenge their leadership ... The same does not hold true for dictators who lose wars; they become more vulnerable to ejection—a fate that, should it befall Putin, could be deadly."

Neither Russia nor Ukraine is ready to lay down their arms. However, a year of intense fighting has inflicted heavy losses in terms of personnel and equipment on both Russia and Ukraine. Russia has lost nearly half its main battle tanks, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies. It relies on newly mobilised and poorly trained and equipped recruits. Some have been recruited from prisons (notably by Wagner), others from the poorest areas in Siberia such as Buryatia or the remote southern region of Dagestan, and recently from other areas. "It is doubtful they will



… a greater supply of weapons is needed; otherwise this incremental approach could lead to a long and protracted war of attrition, with negative consequences for both Ukraine and Russia.

be able to conduct complex offensive manoeuvres," said Max Bergmann, from the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

Both Russia and Ukraine are now preparing for a spring offensive that will no doubt result in more refugees, more devastation and deaths. "If the current casualty rates are any indication, the coming attack could result in unprecedented loss of life and spark a complete collapse in morale among Russia's already demoralised troops," writes Journalist Peter Dickinson, editor of *Ukraine Alert*. "This could lead to a breakdown in discipline that would severely limit its ability to stage defensive operations."

Russian and Ukrainian forces have made little progress on the battlefield in the recent past. Experts say Russian armed forces no longer have the capacity to take major Ukrainian cities. Ukrainians, on the other hand, are mobilising and training new recruits, but may lack the capabilities to push the Russians out of occupied areas.

A classified report leaked from the Pentagon points out Ukrainian deficiencies in training and supplies that make them vulnerable on the battlefield and increase the risk of casualties. Recently, Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba told European foreign ministers: "Artillery ammunition is the highest priority. The faster we get more shells, the more Ukrainian lives will be saved … This is not only about quality but also about the speed of supplies."

Ukrainians are determined to win this war. A recent poll by the International Republican Institute shows that 97 per cent think they can win and 74 per cent believe that Ukraine will maintain all territories from within its internationally-recognised borders defined in 1991.

Apart from weapons and infrastructure, geography could also have a major impact on Ukraine's and Russia's ability to gain territory. According to journalists from the *Washington Post*, the vast 600-mile (966km) front line, an expanse so vast that it is hard to defend completely, has stayed mostly the same since mid-November 2022. They write that the sheer scale of the territory means neither side can make gains without further major advantages in weaponry or force size.

Since November most of the fighting has concentrated in Eastern Ukraine, with the fighting between Ukrainian armed forces and Russian Wagner mercenaries in the city of Bakhmut considered to be the longest and bloodiest

"The conflict has exposed a deep global divide and the limits of US influence over a rapidly shifting world order,"

— Liz Sly

Volodymyr Zelenskyy

battle since the invasion. However last May Russia launched a series of missiles at Ukrainian cities including Kyiv, destroying dozens of homes and wounding at least 34 people.

The OECD estimates the conflict will cost $28 trillion. The World Bank has estimated the cost of post-war reconstruction at $411 billion. The US continues to be Ukraine's biggest supporter. Since the war began the Biden Administration and Congress have directed more than $75 billion in assistance to Ukraine, including humanitarian, financial and military aid. Britain, Canada and various European countries have contributed with more than $20 billion. It is interesting to note that Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland have contributed the highest percentage of their GDP to support Ukraine, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, a German research institute.

But the West may struggle to provide new military and economic assistance. With elections looming in the US and for the European Parliament in 2024, new governments may face domestic economic pressures from inflation, cost of living rises and climate change. However, if Ukraine is to stand a chance the assistance will have to keep flowing.

So far there have been no serious attempts to negotiate a peace deal and the West does not appear to have a strategy to end the war. At the same time, it is unclear as to how victory will be defined, by either the West or Putin. Is it to liberate the entire territory? To push Russia back to the line that existed before the February 2022 invasion? Or to let Russia retain control of Crimea and the Donbas?

Ukraine strongly opposes any territorial concessions or compromises. According to Michael O'Hanlon from the Brookings Institute, Russia controls about 17 per cent of the land area in Ukraine – up from 7 per cent before February 24, 2022, but down from at least 22 per cent a year ago. It is expected Putin will want to keep the territories Russia has occupied: Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Crimea, the peninsula Russia illegally annexed in 2014.

According to General Philip M. Breedlove, a former Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Ukraine needs to retake Crimea to be safe. He told *Foreign Policy* that Crimea was a decisive land when it came to the stability, security and sovereignty of Ukraine as it includes Sevastopol, the deep-water naval port on the Black Sea that Russia used to lease from Ukraine – and which Russia desperately needs as it has important strategic defence capabilities. Through Sevastopol Russia can directly access the Mediterranean Sea, transport weapons to Georgia or supply to the Assad regime in Syria. Mariupol is another vital port on the Sea of Azov in Donetsk, also occupied by Russia. General Breedlove says both ports are vital for Ukraine's economic viability.

Some political analysts have warned of the risks of negotiating with Russia. "Not only would a peace deal ceding territory betray Ukraine and the concepts of sovereignty and territorial integrity; it would also justify Putin's view that the West is weak, and that he can accept its gift of part of Ukraine now – effectively a reward for aggression – and then come back for more, in Ukraine and farther West," David J Kramer, John Herbst and William Taylor wrote in *The Atlantic*. "The costs of letting Putin have his way in Ukraine, including the damage it would cause to the decades-old international order, are too grave to bear. If not stopped and defeated in Ukraine, Putin will try his luck in other countries in the region, including Moldova and possibly even the Baltic states."

Others, however, continue to advocate for a diplomatic solution. They warn the scale of civilian suffering is greater than people recognise and that the bloodshed needs to stop now. "The continuing carnage – on a path to half a million dead and severely wounded – cannot be allowed to continue, nor can obvious nuclear or other escalation risks be wished away," Lyle Goldstein, a Brown University professor writes in *Foreign Policy*. "For the sake of Ukraine and also global peace stability, painful compromises with Russia must be made – the soon the better."

Putin's threats to use nuclear weapons will continue to be a major concern for Europe and the US. Some commentators note that the probability of Putin using them is low, given the risk of retaliation and Russian allies condemning it. However, British officials at the G7 foreign ministers' summit in Japan said they were expecting Russia

to retaliate and must be prepared for extreme tactics as it attempted to hold on to Ukraine's territory. Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chair of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, warned Russia would use absolutely any weapons if Kyiv attempted to retake Crimea. But as Lawrence Freedman wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, nuclear weapons have already played a critical role in setting the boundaries of the conflict. And the longer the war goes on, the greater the risk.

There's consensus that the conflict is heading for a stalemate. Diplomacy and a negotiated settlement may be the only way to stop the bloodshed, but the challenge is for the West is to develop a durable solution to end the conflict and sustain peace that satisfies both sides: because if the war drags on for years, it will have catastrophic repercussions for Ukraine, Russia and the world.

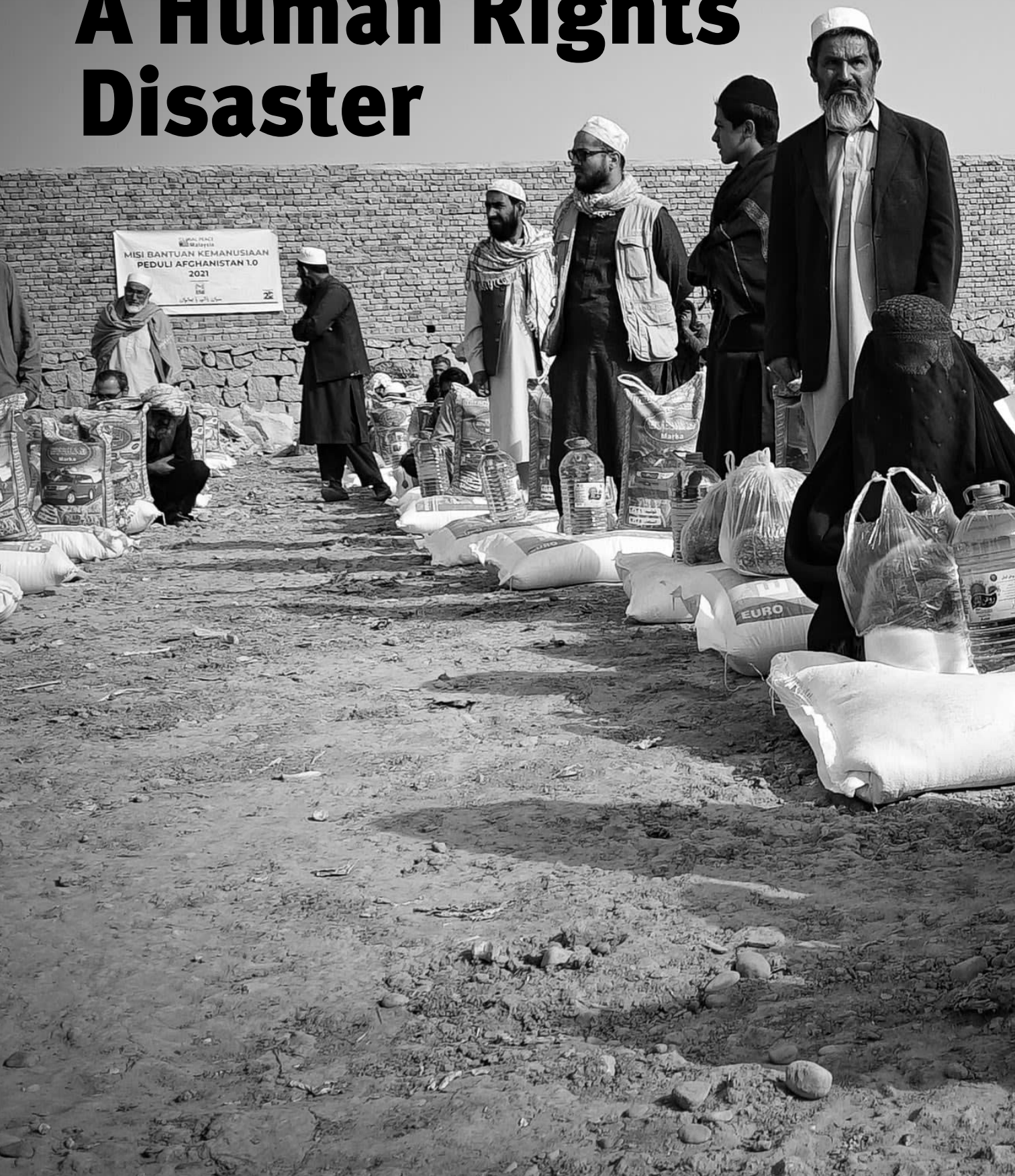
The OECD's latest *Economic Outlook* warns the conflict will continue to impact the global economy, which is expected to slow further in 2023. At the same time, Ukraine's grain fed 400 million people around the world in 2021. Although Russia has recently agreed to allow further exports, the risk of blockades will still cause food insecurity and rising food prices, while potentially triggering political instability in developing countries.

At the same time, Russia under Putin may keep posing a security threat for Europe in years to come. Russia expert Fiona Hill often speaks about the need for Europe and not just the US to craft durable regional security arrangements that roll back Russia's land grab in Ukraine, because such European actions will serve to counter the Russian perspective that NATO is just an American tool.

The tragedy of this war is that there is no equitable or safe solution. Ukrainians cannot afford to lose their country but Putin also cannot afford to lose the war, so he is likely to prolong it until Ukraine's economy, its morale and support from the West are exhausted.

It may seem that there is no end in sight to the fighting and suffering, but as Andrei Kolesnikov, senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, writes: "Putin has to keep moving all the time: stopping is a luxury he cannot afford. Recognising this fact offers little comfort to those hoping for a resolution to the war. But when a train has no brakes, it may crash into a wall. It might also simply run out of fuel and grind to a halt. For now, it is full steam ahead – to nowhere, because no one knows where it is going. That includes the driver." Я

Afghanistan: A Human Rights Disaster



Womens in Burka in Kunduz City on humanitarian Aid
Photo Sohaib Ghyasi

While the headlines are dominated by the war in Ukraine, Afghanistan's humanitarian catastrophe continues to unfold and the Taliban is taking the opportunity to target its opponents. Emeritus Professor ***WILLIAM MALEY*** *writes about the events that led to Afghanistan's social and political decline.*

The collapse of the Afghanistan's Republican system in August 2021 and the seizure of the Afghan capital Kabul by the radical Taliban movement have precipitated a human rights disaster on a dramatic scale. This development was the culmination of a campaign of destabilisation that the Taliban had waged for almost two decades, with the support of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) of Pakistan's Armed Forces, which provided critical sanctuaries from which the Taliban had been able to operate and mount their spoiler operations.

But it also reflected the conscious abandonment of Afghanistan and the Afghan people by the United States, which went behind the back of the Afghan government in order to cut an exit deal with the Taliban that fundamentally compromised the capacity of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) to resist Taliban attacks.

For ordinary Afghans, the consequences of this US act of betrayal have been profound. The significant gains that vulnerable groups had won in the period since 2001 have been almost entirely lost, and Afghanistan has been exposed to the predatory activities of what is by any realistic definition a terrorist group.[1]

Furthermore, as things turned out, the ramifications of this betrayal stretched beyond Afghanistan's borders. When the United States sold out Afghanistan – a 'major non-NATO ally' under US law – the Russians were watching, and the erosion of general deterrence created by the spectacle of a botched US withdrawal from Afghanistan, almost certainly contributed to a sense in Moscow that it would be safe to flex its muscles with respect to Ukraine.

The unravelling of Republican Afghanistan was a complex process, and had a number of distinct dimensions.[2] One related to political legitimacy. The presidential system established after the overthrow of the Taliban, as a result of the US 'Operation Enduring Freedom' in 2001, was over-centralised and had become increasingly 'neopatrimonial' in character, with formal institutions and agencies entangled with patronage networks that offered significant benefits to those who happened to have the right connections.[3] This naturally compromised the capacity of the system to generate generalised normative support.

Another related to the pathologies of aid. From 2001, seeking a 'peace dividend', western donors had flooded the country with money at a time when it conspicuously lacked the absorptive capacity to manage the funds effectively, and the result was a burgeoning of corruption. Much of this funding came in 'off budget' form, undermining the state by denying it credit for what was achieved, and drawing skilled staff away from the public sector.[4]

Political leadership also proved underwhelming: Afghanistan's first Republican president, Hamed Karzai (2001-2014), was weak in the sphere of policy-making, while his successor Ashraf Ghani (2014-2021) had strong policy objectives, but proved a quixotic administrator who needlessly alienated potential allies. On top of all this, the flow of insurgents from sanctuaries in Pakistan created an atmosphere of perennial instability; and Afghanistan's western backers, who alone had the capacity to apply serious diplomatic and political pressure to Pakistan to curtail its destructive meddling, instead dithered over what to do, allowing the problem to fester.

These problems were very serious but not necessarily fatal. What tipped Afghanistan over the edge were the decisions of the United States, first under President Trump and then under President Biden, to partner with

the Taliban in order to ensure an orderly exit of US troops from the country. Reflecting Trump's broader isolationism, Biden's lack of interest in Afghanistan, and a high degree of boredom with a conflict, that had long ceased to be especially costly but showed no sign of coming to an end, the exit decision was embodied in a Trump-era agreement signed with the Taliban by US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad on 29 February 2020 in Doha, an agreement which Biden then opted to adopt once he became US president in 2021.

The psychological effects of this agreement were devastating for the Afghan government: as Thomas Hobbes put it in 1651, 'Reputation of power, is power',[5] and the effect of the agreement was hugely to boost the reputation of the Taliban and undermine the reputation of the government, setting the scene for a 'cascade' as Afghans who did not want to be on the losing side repositioned themselves.

The deadliest dimension of the agreement, however, was the US promise to the Taliban 'to withdraw from Afghanistan all military forces of the United States, its allies, and Coalition partners, including all non-diplomatic civilian personnel, private security contractors, trainers, advisors, and supporting services personnel'. Given that the ANDSF had been built up and configured to function *inter-operably* with the US, with high-tech systems that required contractor maintenance to keep them working, the agreement produced a relentless deterioration in the operational capabilities of the ANDSF, opening the door to a Taliban victory.

What this process reflected was a radical misreading of the character of the Taliban by the US and its envoy in the Doha talks. As the analyst Kate Clark put it, "Khalilzad had gambled all on the Taliban genuinely wanting to negotiate. He never had a Plan B of what to do if the insurgents were playing for time and actually intent on military conquest. Bizarrely, he and other US officials clung to their fantasy peace process into August, even as huge swathes of Afghanistan fell to the Taliban". [6]

The US had naïvely hoped that the Doha deal would trigger a round of 'intra-Afghan' peace negotiations, but since the Taliban had secured from the US all that they wanted – namely the status of being a negotiating partner with the US, and a firm commitment and timetable for a US withdrawal – they simply had no incentive to negotiate in good faith thereafter.

The Americans had been gulled. In their rush to strike a deal, they had lost sight of the elementary proposition that a group aspirant to power may tell very little about how it will behave once it has got what it wants.

Coercion has become the principal basis for regime survival. There is no rule of law in Afghanistan, and those whom the Taliban wish to attack or intimidate can be murdered, beaten up, displaced from their homes, or robbed with complete impunity.

As an example of diplomatic blundering, the Doha agreement is rivalled in modern times only by the Munich agreement of September 1938 that sacrificed Czechoslovakia to Nazi Germany. [7]

The dynamics of repression

The Taliban movement has been widely misunderstood, and some critical misunderstandings persist to this day. One mistake that has commonly been made has been to see the Taliban as a 'traditional' movement, or as a manifestation of the culture of the ethnic Pashtuns, who historically have made up the bulk of the Taliban's membership. This, however, is quite misleading. A 2019 survey of opinion in Afghanistan conducted by the Asia Foundation found that 85.1 percent of respondents had no sympathy at all for the Taliban,[8] which implied that a majority of Pashtuns had no sympathy at all for the Taliban either. (The Taliban have shown no hesitation in brutally persecuting Pashtuns in provinces such as Helmand and Kandahar who were associated with the Republican regime.) Furthermore, simplistic 'culturalist' interpretations of this kind are highly misleading in a period of dynamic change of the kind that Afghanistan witnessed after 2001, when its notably-young population – nearly 75 percent under the age of 30 by 2020[9] – had been exposed to the

It is quite clear that the Biden administration has no great desire to draw attention to its own shameful abandonment of Afghanistan by speaking loudly and forthrightly about the abuses of human rights carried out by the extremists whom it helped bring to power.

unprecedented influences of globalisation.

The Taliban are not a 'traditional' movement, but a pathogenic force, a reflection of the *disruption* of traditional society produced by decades of conflict following the communist coup of April 1978. Their extremist and puritanical religious views are not so much a product of village 'conservatism' as of the Deobandi *madrassas* – religious training colleges in Pakistan – in which they were exposed to highly-idiosyncratic interpretations of Islamic doctrine.

The US, when negotiating with the Taliban, made the fatal mistake of assuming that they were driven primarily by considerations of *interest*, discounting the radical gulf in *values* that separated the Taliban from the bulk of Afghan society. This problem has now resurfaced with a vengeance.

In their desperation to find 'moderates' within the Taliban movement with whom it would be easier to negotiate, US officials also lost sight of the essentially-totalitarian character of the Taliban. The term 'totalitarian' in this sense does not refer to a formal model of a political system of the kind that was occasionally used to characterise the Soviet Union in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist periods, but rather to refer to a mindset that denies the legitimacy of any kind of private space which the Taliban have no right to control. This does not mean that the Taliban exercise total control all the time, but rather that they can claim the right to do so whenever they wish, injecting a horrible unpredictability into people's lives.

In this kind of world, the idea of 'human rights' as protections against the state can have no meaning or significance. That said, the Taliban's preoccupation with moral purity does not translate into a particular focus on the welfare of ordinary people; when an earthquake caused major damage in Paktika on 23 June 2022, a Talib revealingly responded to misery of homeless villagers as follows: "This was an act of God and they need to accept it," he continued, explaining that people in the villages around him should pray for help. "When God is angry with people he sends events like this. It's a test."[10]

The Taliban have resorted to high levels of coercion in order to bolster their position. This is not particularly surprising. Regimes can survive on a number of different bases. One is legitimacy, or generalised normative support, but the Taliban are in no position to rely on this: the very limited support that they enjoyed from the Afghan population as measured in 2019 fully explains why.

Another basis upon which regimes can survive is exchange, where resources of the state are deployed in effect to buy off elements of the population or strategic local elites. This is not a viable strategy for the Taliban

either. While they have collected significant customs revenues at Afghanistan's borders, they face expectations from within their own ranks that the Taliban themselves will benefit from such cash flows.

In addition, the collapse of purchasing power flowing from the reality that western donors, with domestic political considerations of their own to take into account, will not deploy development funds or pay state salaries from which the Taliban could benefit, contributed to a 20 per cent fall in GDP[11] which makes an exchange strategy a feeble basis for regime survival. Coercion therefore has become the principal basis for regime survival. There is no rule of law in Afghanistan, and those whom the Taliban wish to attack or intimidate can be murdered, beaten up, displaced from their homes, or robbed with complete impunity. The risk for the Taliban is that at a certain point, ordinary people may snap, and those who joined the Taliban opportunistically in 2020 and 2021 might conclude that it is time to abandon them. This makes it more important than ever for the Taliban to maintain their reputation for ruthless control.

This also helps to explain the Taliban's approach to Afghan women, which in terms of their relations with the wider world might seem to be massively counter-productive. The Taliban practice of 'gender apartheid' reflects views on the social roles of women that are quite out of touch with a globalised Afghanistan, but nonetheless deeply held by the rigidly-ideological clerics who control the movement. (This is one reason why pressure simply to reopen high schools to girls misses the wider point of who would be the teachers and what the curriculum would contain.)

But the practice of gender apartheid also reflects a realisation on the part of the Taliban that control of women and their life opportunities is a way of signalling a wider capacity to exercise control, which serves the movement's deeper political objective of hanging onto power. This should be borne in mind by those clinging to a vision of a softer, 'reformed', Taliban. As one observer recently put it, "Despite the hopes and prayers for a kinder, gentler, and more moderate Taliban 2.0, there are now few illusions left about who the Taliban are: ethnic nationalists who believe in an authoritarian, ostensibly religiously sanctioned, rule under which women and minority ethnic groups are confined to a restricted, tightly defined space largely out of the public realm. The Taliban are not foreseeably going to form an inclusive government, allow all girls and women to return to school and public life, stop persecution of other ethnic groups, halt repressive actions, or deny militant groups safe haven in Afghanistan".[12]

The risk of genocide

On 30 September 2022, a bombing attack killed 57 students sitting for a university entrance preparation test at the Kaaj Education Centre in Dasht-e Barchi in west Kabul. The overwhelming majority were members of the historically-marginalised Hazara ethnic minority. On the day the attack occurred, the US commentator and onetime State Department advisor Dr Barnett R. Rubin used social media to state that 'These repeated genocidal attacks on Hazaras and other Shi'a in Afghanistan require a high-level international response'. The attack was but one of many directed at Hazaras in recent times,[13] but the horror of this particular atrocity prompted worldwide demonstrations, and a Twitter campaign using the hashtag *#StopHazaraGenocide* that drew responses from millions of people. It focussed attention to an under-discussed yet frighteningly-real danger: that of genocide in Afghanistan.

Genocide is a term with a precise definition. Article II of the *1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* provides that 'In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.' Article III provides that 'The following acts shall be punishable: (a) Genocide; (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide; (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide; (d) Attempt to commit genocide; (e) Complicity in genocide'. As these Articles make clear, intent to destroy a group in part is no less genocidal than an attempt to destroy it in its entirety, and the attempt to commit genocide is just as punishable as genocide itself. Attacks on young Hazaras in educational institutions have a distinctly genocidal ring.

Furthermore, sophisticated 'early warning' modelling of the risk of genocide sounds an alarming bell in the Afghan context. In 2003, Professor Barbara Harff published a six-variable model which is widely used.[14] The variables she identified as significant were the following: (1) magnitude of prior political upheaval (2)

experience of prior genocides or politicides; (3) exclusionary elite ideology; (4) autocratic regime type; (5) an elite based mainly or entirely on an ethnic minority; and (6) International interdependence. Afghanistan under the Taliban arguably ticks every box. And even before the Taliban takeover, the Atrocity Forecasting Project of the Australian National University had placed Afghanistan in the top five countries in the world at risk of genocide or politicide in 2021-2023.[15] Hazaras have every reason to be profoundly fearful of what the future may hold for them.

In the face of these perils, it is vital above all to speak out. In a speech to the famous March on Washington in August 1963, Rabbi Joachim Prinz made this point with compelling force: 'When I was the rabbi of the Jewish community in Berlin under the Hitler regime, I learned many things. The most important thing that I learned in my life, and under those tragic circumstances, is that bigotry and hatred are not the most urgent problems. The most urgent, the most disgraceful, the most shameful and the most tragic problem is silence … America must not become a nation of onlookers'. It is quite clear that the Biden administration has no great desire to draw attention to its own shameful abandonment of Afghanistan by speaking loudly and forthrightly about the abuses of human rights carried out by the extremists whom it helped bring to power. It is thus now all the more important that others take up the task. We should never send to know for whom the bell tolls.R

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End Notes

[1]See William Maley, Terrorism and insurgency in Afghanistan', in M. Raymond Izarali and Dalbir Ahlawat (eds), Terrorism, Security and Development in South Asia: National, Regional and Global Implications (London: Routledge, 2021) pp.140-156

[2]For more detailed discussion, see Ahmad Shuja Jamal and William Maley, The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan (London: Hurst & Co., 2023).

[3]Timor Sharan, Inside Afghanistan: Political Networks, Informal Order, and State Disruption (London: Routledge, 2023).

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[5]Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p.62.

[6]Kate Clark, Afghanistan's Conflict in 2021 (2): Republic Collapse and Taleban Victory in the Long View of History (Kabul: Afghanistan Analysts Network, 30 December 2021).

[7]William Maley and Ahmad Shuja Jamal, 'Diplomacy of Disaster: The Afghanistan "Peace Process" and the Taliban Occupation of Kabul', The Hague Journal of Diplomacy, vol.17, no.1, 2022, pp.32-63.

[8]A Survey of the Afghan People: Afghanistan in 2019 (Kabul: The Asia Foundation, 2019) pp.19, 315.

[9]Estimated Population of Afghanistan 2020-2021 (Kabul: National Statistics and Information Authority, June 2020) p.3.

[10]Susannah George, 'Taliban struggles to respond to earthquake amid international isolation', The Washington Post, 24 June 2022.

[11]Afghanistan since August 2021: A Socio-Economic Snapshot (Kabul: United Nations Development Programme in Afghanistan, September 2022) p.11.

[12]Paul Fishstein, The New Afghan Fund and Engagement with the Taliban (New York: Center on International Cooperation, New York University, 30 September 2022).

[13]See Mehdi J. Hakimi, 'Relentless Atrocities: The Persecution of Hazaras', Michigan Journal of International Law, vol.44, 2022 (forthcoming). For historical background, see Niamatullah Ibrahimi, The Hazaras and the Afghan State: Rebellion, Exclusion, and the Struggle for Recognition (London: Hurst & Co., 2017).

[14]Barbara Harff, 'No Lessons Learned from the Holocaust? Assessing Risks of Genocide and Political Mass Murder since 1955', American Political Science Review, vol.97, no.1, February 2003, pp.57-73.

[15]See https://politicsir.cass.anu.edu.au/research/projects/atrocity-forecasting/forecasts

HEALTH

Challenging the Status Quo: Advancing Trauma Recovery

University of NSW Professor ***ZACHARY STEEL*** *heads a program of clinical research into the impact of trauma on veterans, first responders, refugees, asylum seekers and civilian populations. His work with asylum seekers has helped to develop an evidence base on the adverse mental health consequences of harsh asylum, including the use of immigration detention and temporary protection visas. Dr Steel holds the St John of God Chair of Trauma and Mental Health. He spoke to* ***Karen Collier.***

Professor Zachary Steel

How did you come to work in the trauma field?
I began working with marginalised populations with young street kids out of home, providing supportive environments for them. I had a background in trauma and in 1992 I started to work with psychiatrist Professor Derrick Silove, who made a great contribution to this field. At the time, the Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) network was being established and the clinical evidence accumulated over the past 10-15 years translated into a commitment by governments around the world to establish services for those affected by torture and human rights abuses.

Derrick and some colleagues from STARTTS had arranged a meeting with the then Minister for Immigration to raise their concern that the new policy of "humane deterrence", including immigration detention, would risk retraumatising torture survivors and the very refugees that STARTTS and others at FASSTT were assisting. The Minister challenged this, citing "a lack of any evidence to support the concerns being raised". So I assisted Derrick with research to prove that incarcerating asylum seekers in detention facilities and depriving them of liberty, restricting access to services, and introducing harsh living conditions would be harmful. We knew from the outset that we were implementing a research program to prove the self-evident.

We discovered that the mental health of asylum seekers was a marker of a fundamental breach of a foundational human right in asylum policy: the right to live in the community, the right to access health and welfare services as well as the fundamental building blocks that we call "the second generation of human rights". Even the first generation of rights, liberty and freedom from imprisonment, were violated.

And this has been central to your work ever since?
Yes, it was driven by my own moral shock and quest for justice. The objective of the early research was to promote advocacy for human rights. We were inspired by Amnesty International, which believes the best way to create change is to document the harm done and to shame the perpetrators. That was our commitment. We were also inspired by the courageous psychiatrists and mental health professionals working in Latin America who brought such wisdom and insights, and by Danish medical doctors, who both attempted to eradicate torture by using medical

evidence to document the nature of the harm done and committed to remove doctors from participating in acts of torture or being complicit in them.

Those initiatives eventually led to the creation of *The Istanbul Protocol*, which has been a major international tool to establish evidence of torture. We were driven by the quest to use research to document the harm done to those who have been marginalised, were denied the full enjoyment of their human rights and the dignity that it comes with.

Did you always have an inclination towards social justice? Was there a personal experience of trauma before embarking on this path?

I had a family affected by mental health problems. My home was unsafe so I became homeless and finished school while living in a youth refuge. In fact, many of the friends there came from even more distressed and disturbed homes and they didn't make it. I've seen what it's like to live in an environment of severe deprivation due to a loss of family support and having nowhere to live.

I was fortunate enough to live with the Sydney City Mission for two years and I completed my schooling there and somehow got into university, which is a slight miracle in itself. I wasn't really aware of the motive driving me then, but when I saw what was happening to asylum seekers, I was outraged because their rights were being deliberately denied and I realised science can be used to establish facts and hold the government accountable for the damage inflicted. I think I was probably driven by my early experiences perhaps.

Thank you for sharing that, Zac. There was a lot happening in the world at the time, right?

Yes, there were enormous moments happening. While we saw signs of hope in the world, there was also a capacity for descent into terrible acts of abuse and harm. However, we were in a hopeful era because progress was made in human rights. I remember being inspired by barrister Geoffrey Robertson AO QC. His book about the history of human rights (1999) was very inspiring to me. It narrated the progress made across the ages, from the early times when indentured slavery was widely practised and accepted, to a time of gender equity. We had made incredible progress with the establishment of the international legal system, first it was Amnesty International, then Human Rights

Watch and the establishment of the international criminal justice systems.

There was hope we may eventually eradicate torture. That is a much more complex story, of course, but it was a hopeful time and there was a sense of being part of a global community. That's when I met some of the inspiring clinicians at STARTTS.

How long have you been associated with STARTTS?
My first link to STARTTS came in 1993. At that time Timor-Leste was still under Indonesian control. A large number of Timorese had fled to Australia, including Sydney. Australia had been the only western country to recognise Indonesian sovereignty over Timor-Leste so there wasn't much political willingness by Governmental authorities to accept that Indonesia had established an authoritarian and brutal system of control and abuse in Timor-Leste. So as not to harm Indonesian relations, the Australian Government put all Timorese asylum applications on hold, leaving Timorese in Australia in a state of prolonged uncertainty, with many restrictions on their access to services.

Given a chance, refugees become the most committed citizens you can have.

Derrick, some other researchers and I partnered with STARTTS to undertake a research project documenting the impact of these asylum conditions and political trauma. That's where I first met and had the chance to work closely with psychologist Mariano Coello, who has a great depth of clinical wisdom. I am sure it is no surprise that STARTTS had already been working with the Timorese community, which allowed us to form a partnership to work with Timorese asylum seekers. In fact, it was that partnership and the trust that STARTTS, Derrick and our team built with the Timorese community that made the project a success. Once nationhood was attained Derrick, STARTTS and the wider team were invited to work with the new Timor-Leste Government to establish the very first mental health service in that country. Mental health care is now a fully-integrated part of the Timor-Leste health system.

We should note that Timor gained independence 20 years ago. If we can trace the thread of science, can you share some insights about your research and collaborations over the years?

Globally we have faced a period of increasing restrictions on the freedom of movement. The post-World War II era saw the establishment of some breathtakingly important international instruments that provide protection to people exposed to severe human rights abuses. The United Nations Refugee Convention allows asylum seekers to transition from one country to another, bypassing normal immigration channels and seeking protection from return. This originated because of the global failure to have such a convention before the war, which led to the terrible betrayal of Jewish people and other victims of the Holocaust who were turned around and returned when they tried to flee the death camps. This convention has been ratified by 146 State parties, but few governments have shown the political will to fully honour its intent. Having an integrated policy to accept asylum seekers has been established in the European system, but the big immigrant nations, particularly Australia, US and Canada, have been more focused on direct resettlement from refugee camps than accepting that refugees also have a right to apply directly at the border. Reflecting that unwillingness was John Howard's statement in 2001: "We will choose who comes to our country and the circumstances in which they come."

In Australia, a brutal system has been erected against those who fled and bypassed the immigration system, giving preference to refugees selected by the Department of Immigration. Political rhetoric to try to minimise the harm associated with this policy has been in constant use.

If you read the early descriptions of the detention centres, you'd think they were holiday resorts where you would get a better education and health care than anywhere else in the country. It was an intentional perversion of the truth. The same goes for asylum seekers living in the community who were excluded from health care and income support for long periods, leaving many destitute, reliant on charities while their claim was assessed.

There were many problems with the asylum determination process. Torture survivors' visa applications were more likely to be rejected than non-torture survivors because decision-makers did not understand the consequences of trauma.

Further, there are documented cases of highly-traumatised people whose capacity to tell their stories and

present their protection claims was profoundly affected by that very trauma. Immigration officers and UNHCR staff, not informed of this evidence, found it difficult to accept refugees' accounts of past treatment in support of their claims.

Given this situation, STARTTS partnered with researchers. One of the most important studies in this field showed temporary protection visa holders were effectively unable to learn English or anything else because of the stresses associated with obtaining asylum and being in a state of limbo. Asylum seekers had a very legitimate fear that at the end of their temporary protection visa stay, they would be forcibly repatriated. That apprehension was much more credible then than now. We saw high rates of threat-related symptoms that were ever present in their lives. Those offered permanent protection thrived.

Given a chance, refugees become the most committed citizens you can have. The Vietnamese community has one of the highest citizenship conversion rates, reflecting widespread community gratitude and commitment to Australia. We didn't see that among asylum seekers, instead we saw their English language skills deteriorate, as did other indicators of wellbeing and functioning.

In 2002, we were approached by human rights lawyers to undertake mental health assessments for a group of families detained in a remote desert-based detention facility in Australia. We used detailed diagnostic assessments and found extraordinarily high rates of mental disorders and health-related concerns among children and their parents in immigration detention. Similar findings were documented by colleagues in the Woomera Detention Facility. Both studies aligned with many other reports and provided overwhelming evidence of harm to children that formed a part of the findings of the first *Human Rights Commission National inquiry into Children in Detention*, which was pivotal in the 2008 decision to end mandatory detention. Unfortunately, this was promptly overturned following a surge in boat arrivals in 2009 with the re-establishment of people smuggling networks in Indonesia.

After decades leading research and developing an evidence based on the adverse mental health consequences of asylum policies, what are some of your insights on the findings?

There have been some important findings. We needed evidence that harm is caused by post-migration stressors and that fact is now established as one of the major research findings in the refugee mental health field. That's important because before it was all about pre-migration trauma, ignoring the critical role of the post-migration environment. Now, we know we can bring the two together and then there's a need to allow people's voices to be heard.

I brought to this field a commitment to the social understanding of trauma, yet I also recognise that we are bio-psycho-social creatures. We're created socially but we're embodied biologically. And the revolution in neuroscience has helped us understand the modular nature of memory and that trauma is encoded in parts of the brain that has a core survival value for people. It is encoded completely differently from our usual life story and hardwired into our survival endocrine system. Humans can endure incredible adversity and they're not defined by it because the system can hold our trauma when we're not injured or when our safety has not been denied and we can draw on our trauma to transform the world.

While we increasingly recognise the failings of even the greatest past leaders, nonetheless, many of us are deeply inspired by the enormous courage and strength of the likes of Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Reverend Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, Sr Oscar Romero, to name a few, who fought against tyranny with moral courage, despite the enormous threats of violence, imprisonment and intimidation. Their stories of trauma created and forged their commitment to social justice that inspires people around the world. Those that have experienced trauma will be damaged when safety is denied to them and malevolence is not acknowledged. One of the biggest findings from the trauma research of the past 40 years is that dose eclipses everything. As the dose of trauma increases, the transition to injury increases. The more pressure, the more trauma, and people's resistance will crumble in the face of it.

And we call this cumulative stress a "trauma load"?
Both in severity and quantity. We've always known that PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] never captured the full extent of the way in which lives are transformed by political violence and by torture. It's not just a threat but a fundamental loss of faith in goodness and on the fundamental values that most people take for granted. Recently, the term "Complex PTSD" was introduced in the ICD-11 [International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision]. That's been acknowledged early in our field of research. Most of us working with those affected by torture and human rights abuses know what Complex PTSD looks like; that's what we see. There is no doubt that prolonged periods of insecurity, violence and injustice will change people's template of the way they approach and live in the world.

We're talking about two terms here, traumatic stress injury and moral injury. What are the origins of this term, moral injury?
When we started research about trauma, there were conflicts in Indo-China, Central and South America and the genocide in Cambodia, so the world was witnessing the most horrendous malevolence. The term "survivor guilt" was used. Now we understand survivor guilt is a form of moral injury – people who witness horror question themselves as to why they survived it when others didn't. How can I continue living when they did not? And the burden of that moral fact is overwhelmingly crippling. The distress experienced was not about the threat to life but about something entirely different. And for some reason, the trauma field got lost in this space, believing PTSD was all about the threat and threat appraisal related to death.

One of the consequences of the resumption of the practice of torture by the US military during the second Gulf War, which was officially sanctioned, was that men and women of the US Armed Forces became directly or indirectly involved in, complicit, or exposed to acts of torture. They came back home injured, even though their lives had not been under threat.

The term "moral injury" was coined by psychiatrist Jonathan Shay to describe the injury that Vietnam veterans experienced, in feeling abandoned by their society and community. In this instance, moral injury referenced feelings of moral betrayal.

The most recent form of moral injury involves acts of morally egregious behaviour in settings such as Abu Ghraib and other places of rendition that have led to injuries that look like PTSD. The truth is there are certain jobs that carry great moral responsibility. There are times during conflicts when soldiers commit acts that betray their moral standards. Torture is used as a moral threat to terrorise and harm, and yet the consequences of torture related not only to the targeted group, to all those connected and involved. This is perhaps the greatest argument for the absolute prohibition of torture.

Further, those of us who care for people affected by torture and trauma have used the term "vicarious trauma". But it may be useful to also think of this as morally hazardous work, which creates a moral burden for all of those who care for victims of violence and that moral burden may harm us as well. It's not really vicarious trauma – it is, in fact, real trauma that we hear in the words and see in the bodies of those we care for. As

Mariano Coello once said to me, "The great challenge of this work is that you can't un-see what you've seen and you can't un-hear what you've heard. And it's a silent burden, a silent knowing that cannot be unknown." I have learnt over time that, while this work can take its toll, it can also greatly inspire us.

Can you describe the key differences between vicarious trauma and moral injury?
Primary trauma is caused by being a witness to something that is morally objectionable that you feel in your attachment and relationship to that person. I wouldn't say it is vicarious trauma but moral trauma, which is a helpful term that doesn't capture everything but it does capture the violation of the psychological standards that hold our existence.

You often talk about connection in the trauma space in frontline workers and how ethics exist to protect us in the trauma field. It was interesting to learn that war veterans are the best trained group in ethics that you've observed.
Yes, the only place where ethics is taught is in military college, because if you're operating in an area where you might have to take lives or use power to secure an end, if that's not done within a framework that can morally hold that action, it is annihilating.

And when rules of engagement are breached or corrupted, safety is eroded. The terrible acts we've seen by some in our own armed forces reverberate throughout the whole military community, shattering the notion of goodness. Brute violence is not part of the moral-social contract that holds things together.

We don't want to see mental health practitioners facilitating a framework that justifies breaches of the international criminal standards. We have to be very careful to ensure ethical standards. So we should consult and partner with jurists, philosophers and those that bring the deep spiritual wisdom of the world's great traditions. We can all work together in this space even though we have operated separately for a long time.

You've also expressed concern about what you describe as the formation of a "siloing" in the system? Are decision makers aware of the effects of trauma on individuals?
I'm aware that there is siloing forming in the field. STARTTS, the FASSTT Network, had to build itself as a community of knowledge and practice because there was little openness, commitment to diversity, or bringing other voices within the wider, mainstream academic trauma field at the time. The mainstream trauma field was largely still blind to its own privileged power, leading to the assumptive exclusion of non-mainstream voices. Yet it's fundamental the voices of those who were persecuted be included as part of all our planning. STARTTS has always had a commitment to do so.

The deterioration of mental health in communities is often the first sign that human rights are being violated.

The traumatic stress field was very tied in to traditions of academia and science for many years.

I was aware when I came in as the president of the Australasian Conference on Traumatic Stress that we needed to break down these silos and come together because we needed to be enriched by knowledge and committed to evidence-based understanding and practice in traumatic stress. Initially, we didn't have the voice of those working with torture survivors, now we're lucky we can reach out to the FASSTT network. With our digital format we can now access the largest number of professionals assisting torture and trauma survivors. It's a life dream to bring these two worlds together by enabling humanitarian workers to access research findings and us reaching out to them. In the 2021 Australasian Conference on Traumatic Stress, we were able to bring together, for the first time, a large number of FASST workers with mainstream practitioners and researchers in the broader

To make our research useful, we helped asylum seekers document their stories and submit them as part of their application for refugee status, just to see how psychological evidence of trauma was dealt with.

trauma field, within a single conference. The online format allowed us to fulfil an even larger dream of linking some 50 humanitarian workers from conflict-affected and low-income settings around the world.

Breaking down silos is equally relevant for the assessment of refugee protection across the world.

It's time to create bridges, and break down silos and tunnel visions, which can happen so easily.

Decision-makers (assessors at Immigration, UNHCR) are not always aware of the effects of refugee trauma. To make our research useful, we helped asylum seekers document their stories and submit them as part of their application for refugee status, just to see how psychological evidence of trauma was dealt with.

In a study conducted with UNSW Law, we were horrified to see Immigration officials, particularly those

without mental health training, ignore and set aside evidence of trauma. Indeed, other researchers had written that decision-making without being mentally health-informed, is dangerous. Fortunately that has changed. Every jurisdiction has now in place a detailed guide on psychological vulnerability.

We published with UNSW Law best-practice guide notes on how to write a forensic report and the particular aspects of this jurisdiction. And this allowed us, through the work of my very inspiring colleague Guy Coffey, to help UNHCR develop the first Global Practice Note on Psychologically-Vulnerable Applicants, focusing on aspects the Istanbul Protocol deals with, such as how psychological evidence can provide probity of information for asylum claims. But much more importantly, how decision-makers can change, do procedural modifications to make it safe for the person making a claim for refugee protection to tell their story and present the information in a way that is understood. In conjunction with UNSW, we also provided training for about 400 Immigration officials.

Going back to silos, even with UNHCR, there are two elements of that organisation that don't talk to each other. There is one decision-making process that does refugee assessment claims and the other that provides mental health psychosocial support services globally.

Part of our work is trying to break down silos, which prevent knowledge exchange that can be crucial for asylum seekers.

Decision-makers just want to do their work well and need access to psychological evidence to properly assess claims. They want to ensure the integrity of the refugee system because trauma impacts people's capacity to speak about what's happened to them. Without psychological evidence, there's a grave risk that their claim will be misunderstood.

Essentially, your vision is to improve mental health outcomes by improving access to services in emergency settings, so improving mental health outcomes post-migration.

That's the hope. First, it was just an issue of making an administrative-decision system more accurate and therefore, more just. There has been no resistance, since decision-makers, as we have learnt, are very open to applying knowledge from psychological research so they can better understand the refugee claims being considered and create a more effective and equitable environment for assessing those claims.

And that's taught us there's potential to globalise this. The next step is to form a global consortium to bring together the decision-making context and the mental health psychosocial services that operate side by side in every refugee camp but don't talk to each other, and then create a formal partnership to improve the assessments of applicants' claims and outcomes.

The experiences of refugees going through a decision-making process and that of veterans making an injury claim are identical because they all involve justice and administrative decision-making. The consequences of poor outcomes are the same for each group. The irony is that the refugee decision-making space is far more advanced in creating psychologically-informed processes than other jurisdictions.

What does that reality look like in the context of emergency evacuations, for example, following the fall of Kabul? Is it the waiting time?

Situations like the one in Kabul created long periods of uncertainty for people. Certainly, speeding it up at the cost of procedural integrity, nobody wants that, but these delays aren't about procedural integrity. For example, the large legacy case hold that came about with the Pacific Solution II and the decision to defer cases left more than 30,000 people in limbo for years. The temporary protection provisions in place haven't been resolved yet.

There is uncertainty with the current safe haven provisions and the constant need to bring this evidence forward because it's often forgotten. There may have been merit in interrupting and preventing people-smuggling that was leading to many maritime tragedies, but relaunching mandatory detention was such a great blow that it effectively punished those who most needed to be protected. In this manner, our nation lost its moral compass in this vital sphere. Immigration detention has now been globalised and represents one of the greatest threats to the wellbeing of displaced people today – those who should in fact be afforded the full benefit of the UN convention on refugees.

What gives you hope? Tell us more about bringing forward marginalised voices.

The question of hope is very challenging at the moment. The increasing militarisation is worrying. The deterioration of mental health in communities is often the first sign that human rights are being violated.

There are challenging times ahead but there's a global opportunity to address issues. If I look back at my research, at one level it contributed to a helpful

human rights narrative, but at another level, it was driven by privilege, I was unaware of my own privilege. We worked with those who've become voiceless and nameless and we captured their story, often advocating on their behalf.

This is not a shared story and there is a growing recognition that research itself is empowered by past histories of colonialisation and dispossession, and if not done with great care, perpetuates further dispossession, silencing and disempowerment.

Can you share some insights for students or professionals entering the trauma field?

It's a very exciting time because the old template isn't adequate any more, even though it's still widely practised and there is a new template about bringing forth the voices of those with lived experience. There is a commitment for self-questioning and self-examination on our part.

There is probably a greater push than ever towards knowledge creation and knowledge generation just as academia is globalised. There are now more students wanting to do more research about more subjects, but that does need to be balanced by taking into consideration the priorities and rights of the refugee voices which we are trying to understand.

I'd love to end our conversation on the notion of service. Can you share a final reflection about the meaning of service to you?

I think service is at the heart of the field. The field is founded on this fundamental commitment to humanitarian principles and principles that promote dignity and justice. These are the core values since the beginning, combined with a commitment to evidence-based medicine and traumatology.

And we followed on the great examples of people like Robert J. F. Lifton, the great American psychiatrist who worked with Hiroshima victims and Holocaust survivors. There was commitment from the very beginning both to service and to resisting, creating a better world by documenting and bringing justice, in particular to those who've been denied justice. Most importantly, we have had an opportunity to meet the most inspiring and remarkable individuals, who carry their wounds with enormous courage.R

The Fight for Myanmar's Future

A Boy Standing Near the Temple, Myanmar
Photo Kosygin Leishangthem

HUMAN RIGHTS

Unrest has deepened in Myanmar since the military seized power from the elected government in February 2021, writes ***CONNOR MCDONALD***

Myanmar has been in crisis since an attempted military coup in February 2021. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has waged a widespread, systematic campaign of atrocities against the population in efforts to suppress nationwide resistance to his attempted rule. Thousands of civilians have been killed and more than 1.1 million internally displaced by the military's violence.

Nearly two years into the crisis, it is becoming increasingly clear that Min Aung Hlaing's efforts have failed. Without any outside help, the Myanmar people have successfully resisted the attempted takeover. Now, for the first time in decades, the military's oppressive stranglehold on the country's politics is under threat as the population embarks on a revolutionary struggle to free themselves from violent oppression and turn their dreams of genuine federal democracy into reality.

The Myanmar military has been at near constant war with the people of Myanmar for more than 70 years. In that time, successive military strongmen have committed a litany of grave human rights abuses against Myanmar's ethnic minorities and pro-democracy activists. The military atrocities committed against Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2016 and 2017, driving three-quarters of a million people into Bangladesh, have been labelled a genocide. The latest bloody manifestation of military aggression began on 1 February 2021, when the architect of that genocide, Min Aung Hlaing, launched an illegal military coup bringing an end to nearly a decade of quasi-democracy in Myanmar.

Within weeks, peaceful pro-democracy street protests and mass labor strikes swept across the country. Millions of people joined boycotts of products made by military owned and affiliated companies and stopped paying their electricity bills as part of a nationwide Civil Disobedience Movement. In less than a month, Min Aung Hlaing's attempted coup, and the nationwide resistance to it, had brought the gears of state grinding to a halt and crippled the economy. Min Aung Hlaing responded by ordering his forces to massacre hundreds of protesters in the streets. Thousands were arrested and thrown in junta jails or went into hiding. Many Myanmar people had lived through the similarly brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests in 1988, when the democratic aspirations of an entire generation were crushed by the then junta. But this time, the junta's exceptionally callous and cold-blooded response to the peaceful protests would ignite a revolution.

By the middle of 2021, tens of thousands of mostly young people had fled Myanmar's major cities and central lowland areas to join a campaign of armed resistance. In May, the National Unity Government of Myanmar (NUG), duly appointed in April that year by lawmakers elected in the 2020 elections, announced the formation of localised civilian defence militias called People's Defence Forces (PDFs). Similar local defence forces emerged independently, as did others with the help of Myanmar's powerful Ethnic Resistance Organisations (EROs). Hundreds of these resistance groups, together encompassing tens of thousands of fighters, began launching defensive operations against military convoys, police stations and military checkpoints across the country. Lacking the junta's advanced military grade weaponry, fighter jets and attack helicopters, the newly formed resistance groups were vastly outgunned by the much larger and better equipped military force. But in just a few months, they would have a seismic impact on the post-coup landscape. In border regions, the long-established EROs, many of which have been resisting military aggression for decades, were now leading coordinated attacks with PDFs and local defence forces. Regular acts of armed resistance also began in major cities as well as the farming communities of the central Dry Zone, the heartland of Myanmar's ethnic Bamar majority.

In response, the junta unleashed brutal offensives on towns and villages across the country. In Chin State and Sagaing Region in Myanmar's northwest and the neighbouring region of Magwe, areas of fierce anti-junta resistance, the military's scorched-earth tactics have been compared to the genocidal "clearance operations" carried out against the Rohingya in Rakhine State in 2016 and 2017. Junta troops, often backed by pro-military militia, move from village to village, firing into buildings, looting possessions, destroying crops and burning house after house to the ground. Those who don't escape are routinely rounded up, beaten, tortured and executed. At least 2,400 civilians have been killed in the junta's brutal campaign of violence nationwide since the coup began.

The junta is committing regular acts of terror against the population in an attempt to break popular support for the resistance. Reports of massacres detail the victims being bound and gagged and sometimes burned alive. In September, junta forces abducted and

decapitated a teacher at an NUG-funded school in Magwe. The victim's body and severed head were dumped at the front gate of a local school. Reports of rape, mostly against women and girls, are widespread.

In the face of growing armed resistance, the junta is increasingly reliant on artillery, fighter jets and attack helicopters to rain terror down on civilians. Towns and villages in contested areas are pummelled with artillery fire and airstrikes day after day. A junta airstrike on Sunday, 23 October, on a music concert in Kachin State in Myanmar's north, killed at least 80 people, the largest single death toll from a military air attack since the attempted coup began. In Sagaing on 16 September, at least 14 children were killed when their classroom was obliterated in an airstrike by junta attack helicopters.

The junta violence has fuelled a humanitarian crisis. There are 1.1 million people newly displaced inside Myanmar, in addition to 330,000 people displaced by military violence before the attempted coup. More than a quarter of the population, or 13.2 million people, faces food shortages. To Myanmar's genocidal generals, vulnerable people are targets. The junta has repeatedly shelled camps and places of worship providing refuge for displaced people, as well as civilian buildings including hospitals and schools. Junta troops have killed more than 100 health care workers, shot charity workers and destroyed food stores and medical supplies intended for the displaced. It has sought to weaponise the delivery of humanitarian aid for its strategic gain. Repeated military offensives have prevented farmers in the northwest and east from

Myanmar National Flag
Photo Aboodi Vesakaran

The Myanmar military has been at near constant war with the people of Myanmar for more than 70 Years.

planting and harvesting their yearly rice crops, the main source of local food supply, driving communities to the brink of starvation. There is firsthand testimony of 33 people having starved to death in one township of Chin State.

As the junta's attacks escalate, greater numbers of displaced people are seeking refuge in areas under resistance control, particularly those controlled by EROs such as the Karen National Union (KNU) in Myanmar's southeast on the border with Thailand. Since the crisis began, civil society organisations, community and faith-based groups and other local actors with long-established humanitarian networks in these areas have been delivering lifesaving cross-border aid to the huge numbers in desperate need. But these networks are severely under-resourced and heavily restricted in their activities by the neighbouring national authorities, including in Thailand. There are frequent reports of Thai authorities detaining Myanmar refugees and sending them back across the border towards the junta's violence. Meanwhile Malaysian authorities have summarily deported more than 2,000 Myanmar asylum seekers, including military defectors, back to Myanmar since April, putting them at extreme risk of arbitrary detention, torture and death.

The NUG and EROs have consistently called for international coordination for the provision of humanitarian assistance via cross-border networks to areas under their control. So far, their calls have gone largely unanswered. UN agencies inside Myanmar and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) continue to engage with the junta as their primary partner. After widespread condemnation from civil society groups, ASEAN was pressured to stall plans floated in May that would have put the junta in complete control of the delivery of humanitarian aid to Myanmar. Questions were raised over how, under the plan, the junta was going to deliver aid to the population in areas under resistance control and how ASEAN would make sure the junta will not obstruct the delivery of aid to the very people it had spent so many months attacking.

The ire of the Myanmar people has been raised further since then as UN agencies and international humanitarian organisations have presented their credentials to the junta generals, compounding the people's sense that they have been betrayed by the international community.

This misguided approach by the UN and ASEAN to addressing the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar denies the reality of what is happening on the ground. The junta is not only causing mass suffering but it is also losing territorial control at an increasing rate. Acts of armed resistance have become so frequent and widespread that junta troops are unable to conduct regular operations across much of the country. It is unable to carry out the functions of government even in areas where it maintains a constant presence. Reports suggest the military is struggling to fill recruitment quotas as a result of its sustained attack against the Bamar communities of Sagaing and Magwe that make up its recruitment base. Research conducted by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar (SAC-M) found that, by June 2022, just 17 per cent of the country was under stable junta control. Since then, this has been reduced further, as the military has lost ground in fierce clashes with the powerful Arakan Army in Rakhine State. In late October the junta was forced from southern Kawkareik, a strategically important town near Myanmar's border with Thailand, after clashes with KNU-led resistance forces. More than half the country is now under the effective control of allied resistance forces represented by the National Unity Government.

In these areas, a range of civilian-led structures of governance is delivering essential services to millions of people, in addition to providing vital humanitarian assistance. Long-established ERO systems of governance, such as those of the Chin National Front in the northwest and the KNU in the southeast, are collectively providing education to hundreds of thousands of students and healthcare to millions of people, and these numbers have rapidly grown. The ERO administration departments also provide services

for courts, police, forestry, land tenure and administrative mechanisms. Elsewhere, highly demand driven, highly localised civilian administrations have emerged in areas where the junta's presence has collapsed since the coup. These operate at township level to provide essential services to their communities with the support of the NUG, EROs or a hybrid effort. Despite the often chaotic and violent context in which they operate, this nationwide patchwork of revolutionary civilian systems is expanding and growing to meet the needs of the people.

Since the crisis began, the democratic resistance has rallied around an ambitious vision for Myanmar's federal democratic future. Now, for the first time in the country's history, a roadmap has been laid out to move towards the creation of a genuine federal democratic constitution. The National Unity Consultative Council, a forum made up of Myanmar's democratic stakeholders including the NUG, EROs, civil society organisations, and state-level ethnic councils, has already ratified the interim Federal Democratic Charter. The interim charter stipulates guiding values and inherent rights of Myanmar's ethnic minorities and lays out a political roadmap for building a Federal Democratic Union once the fight to abolish

If the international community is genuine about alleviating the suffering of the Myanmar people and supporting their right to self-determination, it must first coordinate with the NUG and EROs...

military dictatorship is over.

These dynamics must form the basis of a principled international response to Myanmar's military crisis. If the international community is genuine about alleviating the suffering of the Myanmar people and supporting their right to self-determination, it must first coordinate with the NUG and EROs to channel urgently needed humanitarian assistance through existing cross-border networks to the millions of vulnerable people living in areas under the control of the latter groups. Second, foreign governments should heed the call of the Myanmar people and formally recognise the legitimate National Unity Government as the government of Myanmar and engage with it as such. It is the legal government formed by the elected parliament. As the representative of the allied resistance, it has the greatest claim to effective control of Myanmar and with the overwhelming support of the population it has responsibility for guiding the country towards its democratic future.

In the face of Min Aung Hlaing's increasing belligerence, the international community's failure to come to the aid of the Myanmar people risks complicity in his crimes. Meanwhile, the democratic movement presses forward, unwavering in its determination to overthrow the military and build a new politics based on justice, equality and human rights for all. The people of Myanmar will not accept a political settlement on the military's terms but allied resistance forces don't yet have the capability to force the military to accept terms of their own. International support for the Myanmar people and their revolution could tip the balance and circumvent a bitter and protracted struggle for Myanmar's future. R

Connor McDonald is a freelance reporter. Both lead the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, and independent group of international experts working to support the people of Myanmar in their fight for the human rights, peace, democracy, justice and accountability.

Special thanks to Chris Sidoti

One Step Closer to a World Without Torture

A revised edition of a major human rights document – the Istanbul Protocol – was launched in Geneva in June. Since 1999 it has set out international standards for investigation and documenting cases of torture and ill treatment. ***KAREN COLLIER*** *reports.*

Torture, one of the most heinous crimes known to humanity, damages individuals and threatens the wellbeing and dignity of communities. International human rights and humanitarian law prohibit torture and ill treatment of detainees, yet it still occurs in 141 countries, many of which are signatories to the *UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, according to Amnesty International.

One way of protecting individuals is conducting effective investigations and documentation to provide evidence of torture and ill treatment so that perpetrators are held accountable. The *Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, that is, the *Istanbul Protocol*, was created 20 years ago.

It outlines the international legal standards and sets out specific guidelines on how to document and conduct effective legal and medical investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment. Before 1999, this medico-legal evidence showing signs of torture was often dismissed in court or discredited by forensic doctors.

At the time the *Istanbul Protocol* was described as one of the most effective tools for ending impunity related to torture, and a major victory for human rights. Developed by 75 experts in law, health and human rights from 40 organisations in 15 countries, it was officially endorsed by the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson.

Its international principles were promoted in resolutions of the UN General Assembly and the former Commission on Human Rights in 2000. At the time all states were called upon to disseminate the principles widely and use them to combat torture. It was included in the professional training of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2001 and updated in 2004.

In the past 20 years, it has been used increasingly by state and non-state actors, providing a practical and essential guide for doctors, police, prosecutors and other relevant professionals worldwide in the investigation and documentation of torture and ill-treatment, the protection of victims and advocacy work of civil society.

In his annual report to the General Assembly, October 2014, the Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan E. Méndez, said the quality of forensic reports was revolutionizing the investigation of torture. He noted: "The *Istanbul Protocol* serves as a standard for the evaluation of medical evidence, as a reference tool for experts delivering expert opinions, as a benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of the domestic fact-finding and as a means of redress for victims."

The *Protocol* is also routinely used as a point of reference for measuring the effectiveness of investigations into torture by the Committee against Torture, the Special Rapporteur on Torture and the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In addition, the standards laid out in the *Protocol* have been applied by regional human rights bodies, including the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, as well as many national institutions.

In June, 2022, the *Istanbul Protocol* was updated and a new and revised edition published. Building on years of experience using this document in practice, medical practitioners and academics worldwide collected their experiences, identified good practices and highlighted the lessons learned from its use.

The revision was six years in the making, involving thousands of hours of voluntary work by 180 experts

from more than 50 countries. It was led by four civil society organizations – Physicians for Human Rights, the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims, the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey and the Redress Trust – and members from four core UN anti-torture bodies: the Committee against Torture; the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture; the Special Rapporteur on Torture; and the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture.

It entailed regional coordination meetings in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, Mexico City and Copenhagen and a survey of more than 200 individuals with substantial experience using the Protocol in anti-torture activities. As well as updating its six original chapters, this edition adds two chapters: Chapter VII provides guidance on the role of health professionals in various contexts in which documentation may be necessary; and Chapter VIII provides guidance on the steps needed for the effective implementation of the *Istanbul Protocol* by states.

This large-scale international effort has helped to further reflect on the advances made in understanding the practices and effects of torture and ill-treatment. Based on provisions of international law, the new edition has more concrete, better defined and well-understood guidelines to assist member states, national human rights institutions, national preventive mechanisms, civil society, legal and health professionals and other relevant experts to implement the *Protocol's* standards.

According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the revision covers the most recent jurisprudence on torture prevention, accountability and redress, as well as the lessons derived from using the *Protocol* over the past 20 years.

It provides additional guidance for health professionals in documenting torture and ill-treatment in different contexts and a step-by-step guide for states on how to effectively implement the *Protocol*. As a crime under international law, torture is absolutely prohibited and cannot be justified under any circumstances.

Despite the *Protocol* being a non-binding document, international law obliges governments to investigate and document incidents of torture and other forms of ill-treatment and punish those responsible in a comprehensive, effective, prompt and impartial manner under the *UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*.

Health professionals have essential roles to play in preventing and documenting cases of torture as well as rehabilitating its victims, according to the UN. Saluting the work of medical professionals and human rights defenders around the world, who often risk their lives to undertake this invaluable work, former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet noted, "I have no doubt that the improvements to the *Protocol* will strengthen the capacity of professionals to undertake meaningful investigations that can contribute to ultimately ensuring accountability."

The High Commissioner said the revised edition provides added guidance for judges, prosecutors and health professionals, while outlining best practice on legal investigations of torture and new treatment. It also provided guidance to states on the effective implementation of international obligations to prevent and fight torture and ill-treatment.

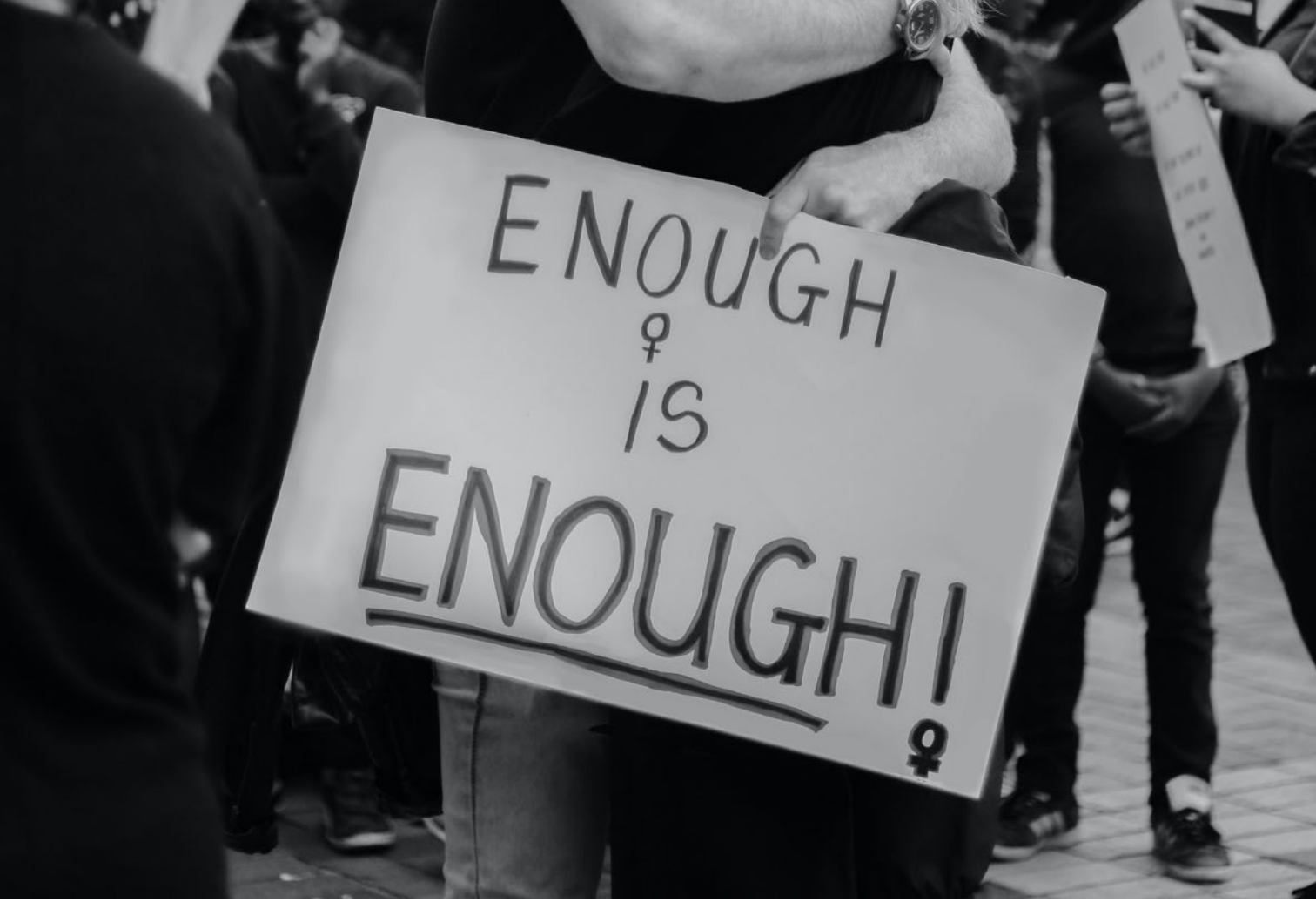
States also have the duty to provide victims with adequate redress, including rehabilitation. Despite a shared global commitment to prevent and eradicate torture and ill-treatment, Bachelet cited continuing examples, varying from deprivation of liberty to conflict-related situations.

Investigations into allegations of torture and ill-treatment are complex and wide-ranging, requiring multidisciplinary expertise. For this reason, effective clinical investigations and documentation include rigorous gathering of testimonial evidence -- to corroborate allegations, it is essential to have evidence, both physical and psychological.

Every year, the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT) Secretariat works with an Independent Forensic Expert Group and member centres to provide training on the *Istanbul Protocol* to other members of network, as well as civil society and state authorities. An essential part of its mission is to increase the capacity of the anti-torture activists.

To train as many stakeholders as possible in an accessible and resource-efficient manner, the IRCT has designed an online curriculum to teach the *Istanbul Protocol 2022*. The first modules are to be launched by the end of 2022. "The extent to which States implement Istanbul Protocol standards should be considered a measure of their commitment to ending torture and other ill-treatment," said programme coordinator James Lin.

An event co-sponsored by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights



and the Istanbul Protocol Editorial Committee marked the official launch of the updated *Istanbul Protocol*, with representatives of the core UN anti-torture mechanisms and other international human rights bodies and civil society organizations, commemorated this historic event and discussed advances in torture investigations. The launch, held in Geneva on 29 June, included High Commissioner Bachelet. More than 1000 attendees around the world joined the launch online.

Panellists recalled how the international community had committed to eradicate torture at the time of adopting the *Conventions against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment*. Today, 173 states have ratified the Convention, accepting their legal obligations to proactively prevent torture and other ill-treatment through legislative reform, training and monitoring and to ensure accountability.

"The *Istanbul Protocol* has transformed how we understand, investigate, document, and work towards the eradication of torture around the world," said Vincent Iacopino, MD, PhD, former Medical Director and current Advisory Council member at Physicians for Human Rights.

Following discussions on the advances in torture investigations and advocacy, the panel noted that despite good examples of legal, policy and institutional progress in law and practice, the work to combat and prevent torture was far from finished.

The launch culminated with an invitation to states to make the *Istanbul Protocol* an essential part of training for all relevant public officials and medical professionals. It is available online.

The 2022 edition of the Istanbul Protocol (IS) is available in all six official United Nations languages on the website of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (www.ohchr.org). With special thanks to Vincent Iacopino MD, Physicians for Human Rights, and colleagues.

Climate Change and Forced Displacement

HUMAN RIGHTS

Sustainable Development Goal 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and its Impacts. This paper was presented at the Journalists and Writers Foundation Conference, New York by Dr Graham Thom

What does climate displacement look like and how are governments responding?

When we look at the impacts of climate change, specifically on displacement, it is important to remember that climate change alone does not lead to displacement. It is here I would like to pay my respects to the late Professor Stephen Castles (1944-2022) one of the foremost scholars in research on migration and its causes, as noted by Professor Jane McAdam as far back as 2002:

Stephen said that climate and environmental factors "are part of complex patterns of multiple causality, in which natural and environmental factors are closely linked to economic, social and political ones. This is where we need much more research and better understanding, if we are to address the root causes of forced migration."

Reasons for moving are always multifaceted. Sadly though, as we have seen recently, other significant drivers -- conflict, poverty and human rights violations (not to mention natural disasters) -- are often closely linked with the impacts of climate change.

Further, when discussing climate displacement, as Prof McAdam noted: "Climate change amplifies the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, meaning that disasters will worsen and displacement will likely grow." In short, without action, things are only going to get worse.

In the lead-up to the UN Climate Change Conference, COP27, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Vulker Turk, stated: "The outcome …is critical for people's effective enjoyment of human rights around the world, not just in years to come but now."

People being forced to move due to the impacts of climate change is certainly a serious humanitarian issue. It also becomes a human rights issue when states fail to address the health, safety and dignity of

Photo Li-An Lim - Union Square, San Francisco , United States

those impacted. In 2021, the Human Rights Council (HRC) recognised the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in its resolution 48/13.

Last year nearly 24 million internal displacements were linked to disasters. What was done to support them, and what are their prospects now that they have been displaced? And what happens when they are left with no choice but to cross a border?

UNHCR has noted countries highly vulnerable to climate change host 40 per cent of the world's refugees and are home to 70 per cent of people internally displaced by conflict and violence. The vast majority of the over 100 million displaced including those Internally Displaced People (IDPs).

Among numerous recent examples of climate-induced disasters, not only leading to displacement but impacting on those already displaced, the recent floods in Pakistan are particularly telling. Since mid-June 2022, 80 million people in Pakistan have been affected by unprecedented rains and devastating floods, leaving 6.4 million in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, with about 800,000 refugees currently in Pakistan.

Over the past 15 years the international community has increasingly stepped up to address climate displacement, for example:

- The cases brought before UN treaty bodies;
- The creation of UN resolutions.

At the recent General Assembly there has been lobbying for an ICJ advisory opinion on climate change, brought by Pacific states;

A recent UN Secretary General Action Agenda on Internal Displacement;

A new working group established within the International Law Commission will examine the legal implications of sea-level rise, including with regard to displacement, migration and planned relocations.

It is difficult to argue that the international

community has not identified the need to address the impacts of climate change, specifically in relation to forced displacement. As noted by Prof McAdam: "One of the most significant achievements has been the inclusion of language and action lines on climate mobility in multiple instruments, including the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*, *the Agenda for Sustainable Development,* and the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*. All these have been aided by the creation in 2012 of the *Nansen Initiative on Disaster-Induced Cross-Border Displacement*, and its successor the Platform on Disaster Displacement."

Despite this, it is at the individual state level that protections for individuals forced to move across borders, continue to be found wanting.

With climate change, we have both extreme events and slow onset processes. Increasing numbers of IDPs due to climate displacement is a serious issue in itself. However, where both extreme events and longer term processes combine with other factors, we see people forced to cross borders -- and where nation states continue to fail those in need of protection.

According to Dr Koko Warner, there are four emerging patterns of human mobility:

- Short-term displacement and return (for example following bushfires, or flooding, etc);
- Longer-term displacement where climate stressors interact with conflict etc;
- Long-term deterioration of habitat, e.g. sea level rise issues currently facing the Pacific Islands.
- Short-term displacement, when combined with other issues such as impacts on livelihoods, through to social unrest etc, forces people to move longer term. Initially this can be internally (often to cities) but ultimately it can also include people forced across borders.

Key challenges remain. As noted by Prof McAdam, there is "a resurgence of nationalistic political parties and anti-migration sentiments around the world". Recent elections in countries such as Sweden and Italy, where significant gains were made by parties espousing anti-immigrant policies, are clear examples of this trend.

UNHCR issued in October 2020 a number of legal considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters." Further, in March 2022, UNHCR made 10 recommendations relating to climate change, displacement and human rights. Two cross-border displacement is due to climate change occurs; 2) facilitate regular pathways to contribute to climate change adaptation and prevent displacement.

A significant decision in providing a legal basis for those seeking asylum, based on climate displacement, was the 2020 UN Human Rights Committee's decision in the case of Teitiota v NZ. It found that countries may not deport individuals seeking protection who face climate change-induced conditions that violate the right to life in their country of origin.

Have states changed their practices in any way, when it comes to individuals attempting to cross their border to seek protection due to the impact of climate change? The short answer is no. Rather, what we are seeing around the world is the increasing use of externalisation policies, both to stop and to deter others from trying to cross their border. For example:

- Australia, with Operation Sovereign borders, is warehousing refugee and asylum seekers attempting to enter Australia by boat, in countries such as Nauru and previously PNG.
- Frontex, the EU Border agency, handing back those attempting to cross the Mediterranean by boat, to the Libyan Coast Guard, often to be detained in appalling conditions – in addition to refusing to rescue boats, leading to the recent tragic deaths of young Syrian girls, in the arms of their parents, while the authorities looked on and did nothing;
- The UK and Denmark, looking to remove asylum seekers to countries such as Rwanda.

Building barriers to stop people entering, turn backs, detention and other externalisation practices, are all part of an increasing global deterrent to stop those seek

When it comes to resettlement, UNHCR has identified more than 2 million refugees will be in need of resettlement in 2023. During the height of the pandemic in 2020, refugee resettlement plummeted to record lows, with only 22,800 departures that year.

Historically, only about 30 countries engage in refugee resettlement and even in a good year resettlement has rarely provided a solution for more than 100,000 to 200,000 people. Not only are we not seeing a significant uptake in countries offering alternative pathways for those in need of safety, ensuring they do not need to make dangerous journeys, but we are also not seeing those countries that do

Flooded Village and Forest, Kijal, Terengganu, Malaysia
Photo Pok Rie.

provide resettlement places introducing practices to identify those displaced due to climate within their humanitarian quotas.

There has not been a significant uptake in countries offering alternative pathways so that those in need of safety do not need to make dangerous journeys,

And among those countries that provide resettlement places, we do not see practices to identify those displaced due to climate within their humanitarian quotas.

The need for a global response to climate displacement is increasingly recognised, yet individual states make it increasingly difficult for individuals to cross their borders, -- regardless of their reasons for fleeing and seeking protection and even when there is clear recognition of the right to seek safety due to the impact of climate change and guidance on how those who have been displaced can be recognised and protected.

Until governments, particularly those in the global North, adopt policies to allow those in need of safety to cross their borders, then step up to provide safe and durable pathways, the impacts of climate change and climate displacement will undoubtedly lead to further human tragedy.R

The Science of the Smart Heart

HEALTH

Use of Heart Rate Variability (HRV) Biofeedback in healing trauma — New research shows that the heart communicates to the brain in major ways, writes ***SEJLA MURDOCH***

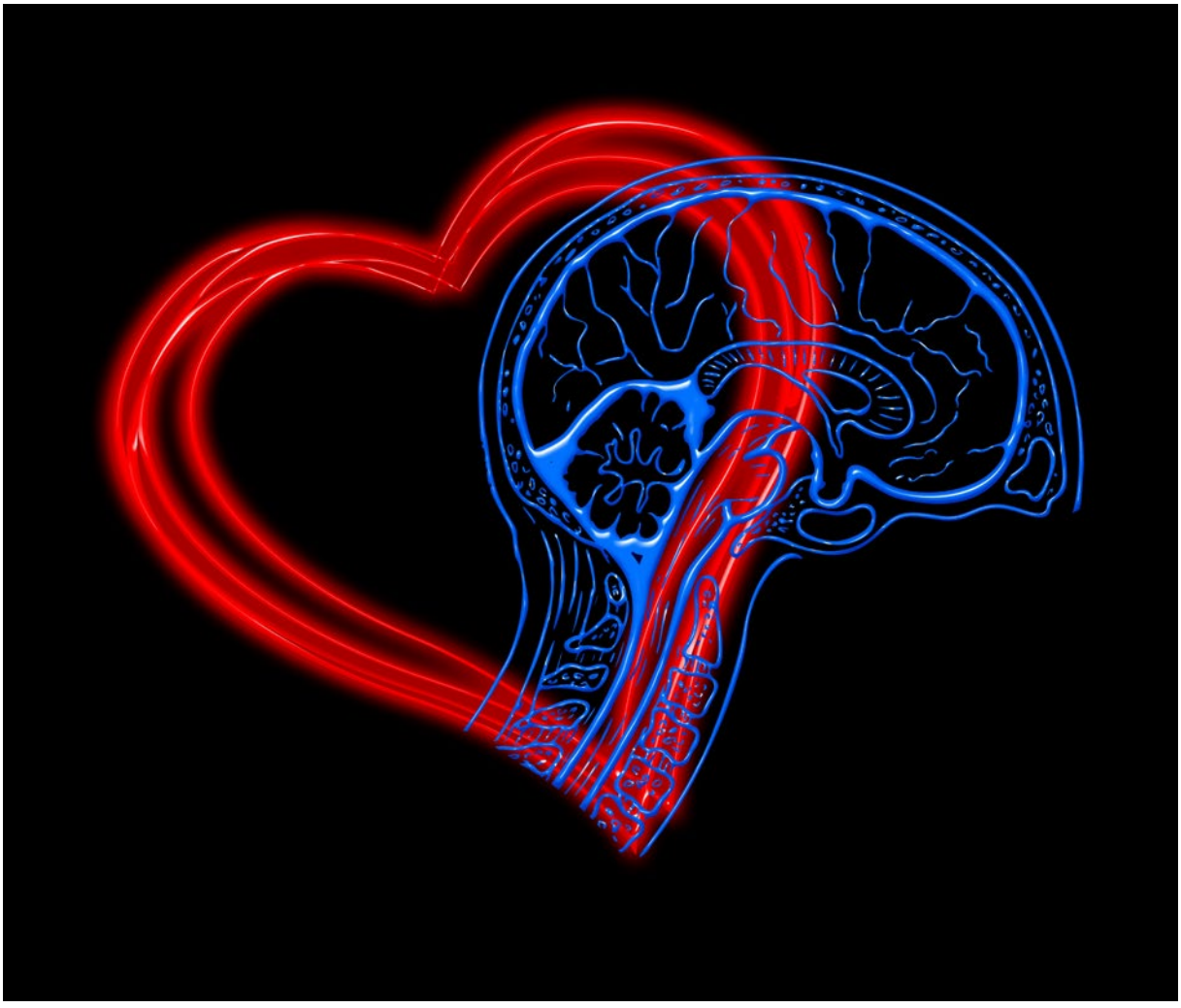
For as long as humanity can remember the heart was considered to be the seat of the human soul, love, joy and emotional pain. When we are happy, we say: "My heart is full." When we are sad, we say: "My heart aches." Science has shown us that the brain is responsible for the above experiences. However, recent research reveals the complexity involved in the heart and brain's communication that demonstrates that is our heart that is shaping our inner experiences.

At STARTTS for the past 14 years we had the privilege of using the science of the heart in the form of Biofeedback Heart Rate Variability (HRV). Generally, these are devices that measure muscle tension, heart rate, finger temperature etc.

Biofeedback therapies, combining physiology and psychology, are non-pharmacological treatments that use scientific instruments to detect and amplify internal body activities that are too subtle for normal awareness, making information about one's body available to the conscious mind. Once we are aware of the internal processes, we can understand how our bodies are functioning and we can control these processes.

For example, when we are under stress, our body temperature drops. This can be modified with temperature biofeedback training; that is, by learning to increase the body temperature we will also reduce stress levels. Repetition and continuous feedback enable STARTTS clients to gradually teach themselves to produce the desired results.

High incidences of trauma in clients result in an imbalance in the autonomic nervous system (ANS) and this distress can lead to significant physiological dysfunction. Such dysfunction can have a severe impact on clients' general health and well-being, and everyday functioning. At STARTTS we have recognised that, when used with children and adults alike, biofeedback and HRV techniques can help to reduce symptoms of anxiety and chronic stress, as well as improving sleep



and elevating depressed mood.

HRV-biofeedback also can improve health outcomes for individuals experiencing numerous conditions, including cardiovascular disease, asthma and gastrointestinal and immune issues. Since the biofeedback techniques can be used as an adjunct to counselling, in this context they always involve a clinician (counsellor, therapist), a client and a monitoring instrument (HRV, GSR) capable of providing accurate physiological information.

The analysis of HRV, therefore, serves as a dynamic window into the function and balance of the autonomic nervous system. Unlike a clock that ticks at a regular interval, the human heart is a bio-electrical pump beating at an ever-changing rate. This variability in heart rate is an adaptive quality in a healthy body. Hence, the rhythm of a healthy heart even under resting conditions is irregular, as the time between successive heartbeats is constantly changing and fluctuating. Heart rate variability describes this naturally occurring beat-to-beat variation.

Previous scientific focus was chiefly on the heart's responses to the brain's commands, yet today we know that communication between the heart and brain is essentially a dynamic, continuous and complex dialogue, with each organ continuously influencing the other's function.

Research has shown that the heart communicates to the brain in four major ways: neurologically (through the transmission of nerve impulses), biochemically (via hormones and neurotransmitters), biophysically (through pressure waves) and energetically (through electromagnetic field interactions). This complex and dynamic communication significantly affects the brain's activity. Even more significant, perhaps, is that the recent research shows that messages the heart sends to the brain also can affect performance and that the heart communicates with the brain in ways that

significantly affect how we perceive and react to the world.

New theories propose that all of our inner systems interact when we are aroused and calm down in concert when we are at rest and the brain is in control.

With the introduction of signal-processing technologies that can acquire continuous data over time from physiological processes such as heart rate (HR), blood pressure (BP) and nerve activity, it has become abundantly apparent that biological processes vary in complex and nonlinear ways, even during so-called steady-state conditions. For example, we now know that the normal resting rhythm of the heart is highly variable rather than monotonously regular, which was a widespread notion for many years.

In general, emotional stress -- including anger, frustration and anxiety -- gives rise to heart rhythm patterns that appear irregular and erratic: the HRV waveform looks like a series of uneven, jagged peaks (an example is shown in the figure below). Scientists call this an incoherent heart rhythm pattern. Physiologically, this pattern indicates that the signals produced by the two branches of the ANS are out of sync with each other.

In contrast, positive emotions send a very different signal throughout our bodies. When we experience uplifting emotions such as appreciation, joy, care and love, our heart rhythm pattern becomes highly ordered, looking like a smooth, harmonious wave (an example is shown in the figure above). This is called a coherent heart rhythm pattern. When we are generating a coherent heart rhythm, the activity in the two branches of the ANS is synchronised and the body's systems operate with increased efficiency and harmony. It's no wonder that positive emotions feel so good -- they actually help our bodies' systems synchronise and work better.

HRV training directly measures and trains autonomic balance. Training is relatively easy. Since heart rate is related closely to respiration, breathing is a key technique. Once a client is trained to breathe in a specific pattern and see the immediate effects of proper breathing on their heart rate on a computer display, they can achieve a state of psycho-physiological coherence at will.

Since STARTTS clients are often experiencing serious ANS imbalances resulting from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, we propose HRV training as a standard adjunct to counselling work with clients.

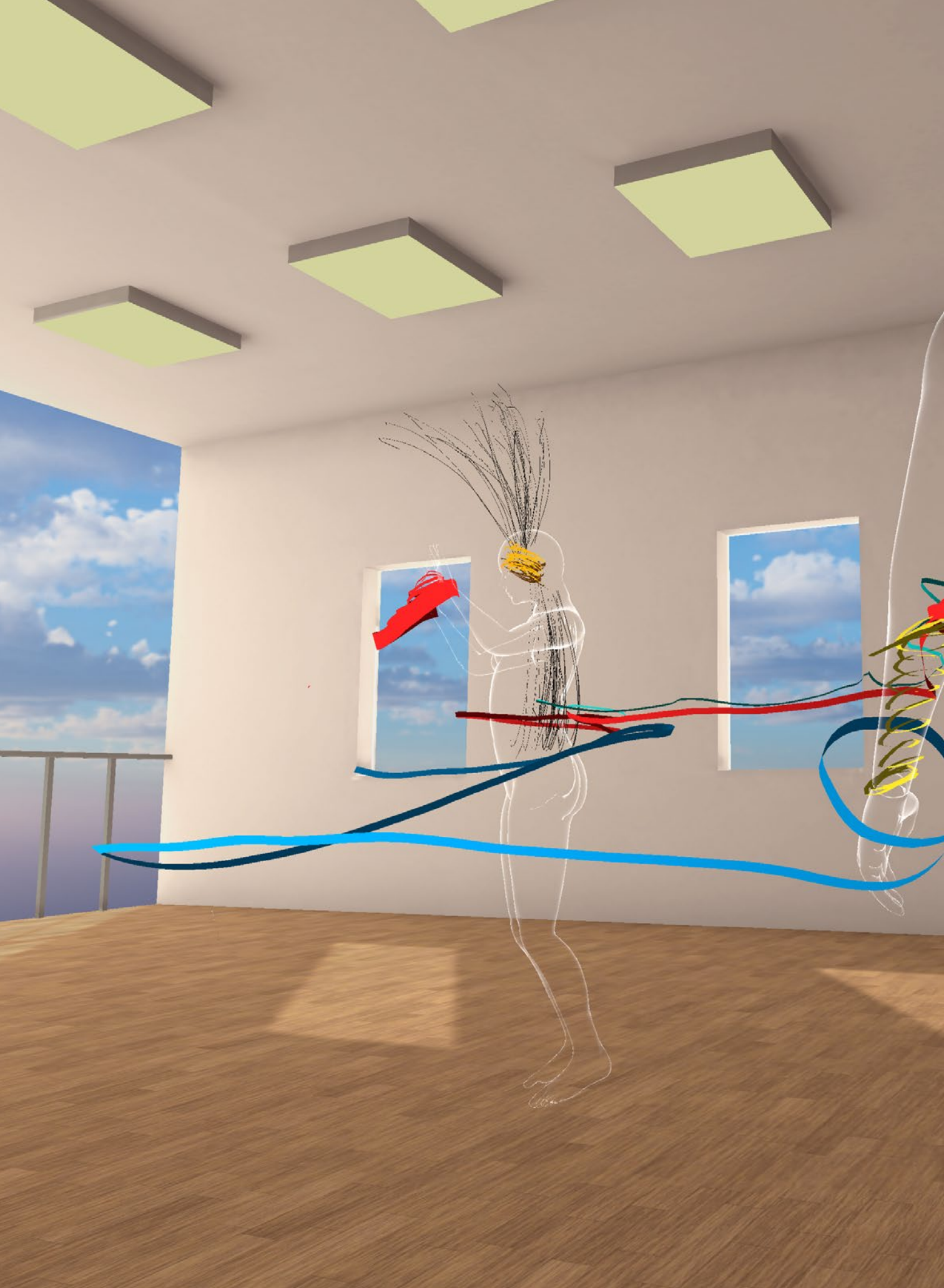
Given our experience in HRV Biofeedback for clients, we also had the privilege of providing training on the technique to numerous health and allied health professionals, schools and hospitals on the use of HRV biofeedback. Currently, our Australian Neurofeedback Institute (ANFI) is providing a workshop on the use of HRV in clinical practice. This workshop is based on the polyvagal theory developed by US neuroscientist Professor Stephen Porges. It supports practitioners in better understanding the nature of stress, trauma and PTSD and how extreme stress can lead to complex and long-lasting consequences for emotional and physical health. HRV also can provide feedback about an individual's lifestyle and help motivate those who are considering taking steps toward a healthier life.

The workshop is facilitated by experts in the field of neurofeedback and HRV biofeedback who possess the Biofeedback Certification International Alliance BCIA HRV Biofeedback certification. The training covers the role of HRV and coherence training on the ANS, gives an understanding of the polyvagal theory and the role of the "smart heart" and examines case examples of HRV in working with clients. Participants gain practical experience in assessment and treatment. ℟

To find out more please go to: https://training.anfi.org.au/workshops/heart-rate-variability-biofeedback-training/

Sejla Murdoch is a Senior Psychologist and BCIA Accredited Neurofeedback and HRV Biofeedback Mentor, Neurofeedback Clinic Senior Team Leader and Australian NeuroFeedback Institute Deputy Director

New theories propose that all of our inner systems interact when we are aroused and calm down in concert when we are at rest and the brain is in control.



HEALTH

EmbodiMap is a tangible and immersive virtual reality (VR) body-mapping experience that enables users to connect with and explore how thoughts, sensations and emotions are experienced in the body. ***Dr LYDIA GITAU*** *of the University of NSW outlines how this therapeutic tool assists refugees.*

New Immersive Visualisation Technology

Amid growing demand to address the mental and emotional needs of refugees, researchers and practitioners in the field of refugee mental health are called to face immense challenges in innovative and co-constructive ways.

The transformative potential of arts-based approaches to address the refugee mental health crisis has been acknowledged. These involve going beyond what is experienced or expressed, while speaking to it and simultaneously opening up space for more adaptive ideas.

To address such challenges, researchers at UNSW fEEL (felt Experience and Empathy Lab) have developed a virtual reality (VR) tool, EmbodiMap. This immersive sensate experience enables users to explore subjective experiences, by focusing on sensations felt in the body to gain insights into their emotional and mental wellbeing. EmbodiMap aims to support participants in engaging with their thoughts and emotions, how these are experienced bodily, and how they derive meaning from these experiences.

The EmbodiMap Virtual Reality tool and experience is designed as a qualitative research method and a creative experience.

To use the technology, participants wear a VR headset to enter the virtual space, make marks in a range of colours they select for each fingertip.

Guided by a voice-over, participants are invited to map feelings, emotions and sensations onto an

Figure 1 VR headsets access virtual space. Photo courtesy of Lydia Gitau

avatar figure that appears before them. Participants can pose the figure, walk around and step inside. They are then invited to observe and reflect on the drawings they have created.

EmbodiMap draws on two areas of practice: somatic psychotherapy and body mapping.

It engages with Sensorimotor Psychotherapy theories in understanding the capacity offered through movement and change of posture, and how this experience facilitates shifts in psychosomatic awareness. Traditional body mapping involves creating body-maps using drawing, painting, or other art-based techniques to visually represent aspects of people's lives. Employed to share stories, for research, advocacy, communication and therapy, it is recognised as a powerful means of expressing felt experience of the body.

EmbodiMap effectively transforms body mapping experience from a two-dimensional drawing process into a physical and virtual representation of the body and emotions. Using EmbodiMap, participants can walk around, step inside, pose and re-pose their avatars and even get inside them. By allowing users to experience their physical body in this way, EmbodiMap potentially offers a transformative experience has the potential to illustrate how emotions are felt and experienced in the body, and so can be used to develop personalised understandings of the body-emotions relationship.

Pre-engagement

Co-developed with people who have experienced trauma, anxiety and stress, EmbodiMap is adapted to suit the needs of individuals. Using a "pre-engagement approach", a small selection of people from potential participant groups uses the prototype tool and trial the protocols. Such an approach allows them to engage with EmbodiMap before providing

Photo courtesy Lydia Gitau

insights into how the tool might be further developed to address specific community needs and to deliver meaningful interactions.

We used this pre-engagement approach with a small group from Sydney's South Sudanese refugee community, who trialled EmbodiMap before discussing how they envisaged it being used to support the broader community. The aim was to understand how currently available support for the mental and emotional wellbeing of the refugee population can be bolstered through psychosocial engagements using tools developed for that purpose.

We should remember that understandings of mental health differ within and between cultures, and that refugees are not a homogeneous group. Culture tends to play a big role in how people experience, perceive and express trauma, as well as the pathways to recovery and the treatment choices they make. Because of this, we see the need to continue to search for, identify and mobilise resources that consider different approaches to mental health, doing so alongside the community whose members, we hope, will benefit.

The role of the pre-engagement was to examine responses to creative approaches and methods, to learn more about community needs for future engagements and to understand how to build trust, enabling deeper engagement in future co-designed projects.

Pre-engagement paid attention to the complexity of experiences and to what members would like to prioritise in the engagement. It revealed scope for further involvement with the broader community, while adapting to the needs and issues identified. For this community, it emerged that the development and application of EmbodiMap is likely to be more effective if adaptation included: importance of community and collective engagement; the notion of the cultural embeddedness of trauma; the significance of listening to the participants; the importance of safety; and maintaining a critically reflective and culturally responsive attitude through the process. There was further input dealing with EmbodiMap's potential in supporting mental and emotional wellbeing in the community.

The Potential Impact of EmbodiMap tool for Representations of feelings, sensations and emotions:

As participants reach virtually into the avatar figure, they begin to express experiences for which they may not have language, rendering a deeper articulation of their realities. The "felt" becomes "told", the unseen, visible. As one participant said of the drawings on the figure he had made: "When you are looking at that, it is art, yes, but inside, it is more than art. Those are the things that actually help the community."

The virtual figure acts as a "holding place". A typical response: "It is more about your feelings, and emotions, and how you react to them … and if you have stress, or emotion, how does it affect you and where?"

If art in general is a means to explore and express the internal and the subjective, EmbodiMap directly transports participants into spaces where what is experienced internally can be represented externally. As another participant remarked: "One of the best tools you can use because what it does,

it externalizes, you know. So you can engage with it in your own way."

For initial participants, there seemed to be a distancing of feelings and self, a reluctance to identify felt emotions as one's own. However, at a point, the participants noticeably began to identify with the avatar and to consider it as a representation of self.

One of them described a moment when, as he engaged with the tool, he felt "I am explaining myself to myself". He exclaimed: "That's me, that's me, that would be me!"

Another expressed surprise when he noted the avatar's height corresponded with his own. Such moments marked the symbolic shift from the avatar being "other" to the avatar being "me", when self and object merge as one, and where subjective feelings can be represented.

Identification with the avatar as "self" seemed affirming, as it gave the participant a feeling of control over the avatar.

Opportunity to process and change emotion:
The virtual figure or avatar enables participants to review their emotion. It allows space to expose the undesirable mapping or drawings, and replace them with desired alternatives, in the same way that theatre enables to expose the unwanted scripts and allow for the rewriting of desired scripts. The participant can take charge of the emotion. The revision and reconstruction of these mappings allow for the possibility of transformation, for instance, from a debilitated state to one in which one has more control and agency.

As well as acting as a "holding place" for feelings and emotions, the virtual figure serves as a vantage point for actions to take and changes one may want to make. This process may not be immediate. EmbodiMap allows one to engage in a slow, unhurried and calm setting, while paying attention to thoughts, emotions and sensations. One participant remarked about his experience in the virtual space: "You wonder and think a lot of things ... it makes you really transported there, you know. And then as you do that, you feel you are grounded, you know, especially when you do the breathing, you are now there."

In this way EmbodiMap '"pulls" time – giving the opportunity to feel a range of emotions and sensations. Once participants have identified and represented their feelings and emotions, they can undo what they did and try to represent emotions or feelings in whatever other way they like. One participant said they wanted to represent their feelings "more accurately". Small changes on the virtual figure can translate into micro-acts of regulation and agency in the participant's own body, promoting a sense of control and self-determination. This assumes greater importance when we consider the internalized sense of wretchedness and dehumanisation that may be central to refugee trauma.

Curiosity: A sense of openness and expectation:
Participants expressed a sense of discovery after their EmbodiMap experience, a sense of fascination about drawing one's feelings and emotions, changing colour to represent the intensity of the feelings. This was expressed by one of the participants:

" Was it orange, or pink colour… and then it got down to a little bit darker… when you become more emotional which I think it's when it gets darker…

When you go to the level of emotions, that's exactly how you do it, it's like your image in front of you, saying this is how you look when you are emotional or stressed … and that is what represents your feelings, discussed like lightly, you go down to dark, and you see you need to do something."

As the participants came to the end of the exercise, they expressed curiosity, wondering what would come next. What would happen next? How would this benefit the community?

This is not a question we can answer outright. It will take more engagement with the community to do so.

The tool may augment other methods that support the mental and emotional wellbeing of people from refugee backgrounds and this potential is being explored. As an arts-based approach, EmbodiMap may provide an innovative alternative to approaches that rely heavily on words, thus helping boost the participants' self-expression. ℞

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Witness to War – phone support service for migrants impacted by global conflict

by Lynne Malcolm

HEALTH

Zuhra Dastyar arrived in Australia 20 years ago as a refugee from Pakistan. She and her family fled their her home country, war-torn Afghanistan, and spent years in Pakistan before migrating to Australia. Zuhra had some family members here to support her but she encountered many difficulties including mental health challenges. She faced a range of issues that come with re-settling into a new country, involving culture, identity, language and had feelings of guilt that she was safe in Australia while her other family and friends had not escaped the conflict at home.

She didn't know of any support services to help people in her circumstances. It took her at least 10 years of navigating issues before she could fully adjust and settle.

Svitlana Yakovenko, an Ukranian immigrant, arrived in Australia at the end of the 1990s as an exchange student, well before the recent Ukrainian/ Russian conflict when Ukraine was at peace. She was not a refugee but even so, she found settling in to the culture of this new country difficult and frightening and has bad memories of being bullied and mistreated. She's only too aware of how much more difficult it is now for those Ukrainians who are refugees in Australia since Russia invaded Ukraine, Ukrainian people in Australia are struggling, worrying about the loved ones they are separated from, as well as dealing with the range of challenges that are involved in settling in to a new culture and language.

Svitlana and Zuhra are now drawing on their own lived experience of being a refugee or immigrant in Australia, against a backdrop of conflict in their home country, to help others in situations they once faced. The are both bi-cultural support workers in an Australian first, a free multilingual telephone helpline to help refugees and migrants deal with their feelings and trauma triggered by political turmoil in their own countries.

What is Witness to War

The project Witness to War provides free, independent and confidential support to help individuals and families in NSW who are impacted by or exposed either directly or indirectly to overseas conflict. Run by STARTTS (NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors), it was established as a successful pilot program in May 2018, delivering specialised training and information sessions to community groups and individuals in NSW. It has since been funded by Multicultural NSW and will be delivered by STARTTS up until January 2023.

Ellen Alcon, the Witness to War senior project officer, says when it first started it provided face to face support to people who were affected by overseas conflicts whether they had arrived in Australia as refugees or not.

During COVID and particularly the lockdowns, STARTTS realised that people wouldn't call a phone line if they had to call an interpreter service first.

"That realization was further strengthened by seeing the impact of the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and the impact on Afghan community again, particularly during the Delta lockdown," Alcon says

"People were unable to provide physical support to each other because of all the public health measures at a time when they were most distressed."

Multicultural New South Wales funded Witness to War until January 2023, providing a multilingual hotline in languages including Farsi, Pashto, Dari, English, Ukrainian, Russian and Arabic. Two new staff members speak Tamil and Swahili.

The main communities currently likely to use the service are the Ukrainian and Afghan communities. It is also supporting Sri Lankan or Tamil people affected by the political events in Sri Lanka.

How global conflict impacts daily lives

People can be affected by a range of health, social and financial issues, isolation and lack of social support when they experience, directly or indirectly, war and conflict in their home countries. Alcon explains that people who may have been living here for a long time can be vulnerable and be triggered by past trauma and current events in their home country. They may not necessarily be linked in to support networks and have much information about available services, which causes a lot of stress for them, and they also become concerned about their family members and friends overseas.

She adds: "For people who are newly arrived … there can definitely be a lot of people requiring that emotional support and still in that phase of being really shocked and needing that psychological support."

Trauma informed approach to support

Understanding that the impact of trauma and conflict can affect people's daily lives in many different ways is at the centre of the STARTTS approach in supporting clients, using what is called a biopsychosocial model.

As Jasmina Bajraktarevic, the Community Services Coordinator at STARTTS, describes it:

"The model says that trauma impacts on all levels of the social system from your body, to your emotions, to your thinking, to your connections with the outside world, to the whole family and community. So that's what we would call the biopsychosocial approach, and being trauma informed. Absolutely everything we do is trauma informed, because that is what STARTTS does …. It's a mix of psychological support and practical linkage."

Alcon adds: "That trauma informed approach allows people that time and that space and talking to someone in their own language where they can unpack some of those issues … and someone's helping them make sense of what they're experiencing'.

As a bi-cultural support worker, Svitlana Yakovenko says when she takes a phone call it's most important not to be patronising and pretending to know what is going on for them.

"You're there to listen and to just offer whatever support you can, and to stay strong because it's so close to all of us."

Sometimes callers are crying so much they can barely speak . Yakavenko understands this; she may have heard on the news before her shift about another Russian bombing. She was visibly emotional when she was explaining to me how having these conversations affects her, but she is very grateful to STARTTS for equipping the bi-cultural workers with the psychological support they need themselves to assist the callers.

Yakavenko sometimes hears from people who are not only worried about their loved ones back in Ukraine, but are also having conflict with their relatives here, caused by the stress they are all under. She listened to one woman's concerns in detail for over an hour, and helped to calm her about this family conflict, and convince her to focus on one of the things she enjoyed most in her home country, gardening. The woman was most grateful to receive some coping strategies over the phone.

Callers can also be helped in more practical ways by

There are some people who might shy away from seeking help culturally speaking or for whatever reason, but knowing that they can seek help, that is what I would always advocate for...

being put in touch with other support services they didn't realise were available. Svitlana helped one woman to move her daughter from a school in which she was very unhappy, to another more suitable school. This made an enormous difference to the whole family.

She reflects on her own experience of being a new arrival in Australia and says that having a service like Witness to War back then would have spared her real hardship, so she is passionate to continue to contribute to the project.

The first thing that bi-cultural support worker Zuhra Dastyar does when she answers a call is to make sure the person is mentally and physically safe.

People can be quite distressed because they often don't know the language, the culture and what services are available, so she helps to normalise their experience and guide them to whatever services they need, which reduces their anxiety and stress. She finds that one of the best things for callers is to speak to someone who speaks their language and understands their culture. She notices the tension dropping almost straight way when they know she is from the same background.

She then helps people focus on just one thing at a time and bringing them back to the present moment.

Sometimes they need help with dealing with their children's schools and may receive letters from the school that they don't understand. Other help they require is how to find English classes or driving lessons or just navigating the city and their surroundings.

When Dastyar calls them back to check how they are going she finds "the conversation has eased them, to know that there is another Afghan on the line ..that helps so much!"

How does helping in this way make her feel?

"It just brings me so much happiness … like a joy because I have been through similar experiences. Everyone's experiences would be different, I guess knowing that I'm making a difference, I hear it and I see it in their words and reactions. It's like giving back to the community whatever experiences we have and whatever knowledge I have. This is the best way to live a fulfilled life for me."

Future Hopes for Witness to War

Dastyar hopes the service continues because it is not just helpful for new arrivals. There is no consistent timeline on how long it takes for people to settle in to a new country and culture. Everyone has a different experience, and it may take 10 years for some.

"And even when they settle in once, other things would come up – mental health is always a big thing," she says.

"There are some people who might shy away from seeking help culturally speaking or for whatever reason, but knowing that they can seek help, that is what I would always advocate for – and let everyone know that there is help available for those who need it."

Operating from Monday-Friday 9am-4pm, the free telephone service is open to all people affected by overseas conflicts and can be accessed by calling 1800 845 198 within NSW. Article by Lynne Malcolm. Author, podcaster, communicator. Her book 'All in the Mind – Fascinating, inspiring and transformative stories from the forefront of brain science' was published by Harper Collins in March 2023


I have so much
to tell yet so
little to say

PROFILE

Uyghurs are barred from freely practising their religion, speaking their language and expressing other fundamental elements of their identify. ***FATIMAH ABDULGHAFUR*** *writes about her father, her homeland in East Turkistan and the impact of Chinese colonisation on her family.*

When I think of the Uyghurs being murdered in East Turkistan, a land invaded and forcefully occupied by China, I shake. I can't stop shaking. I shake with anger, extreme anger.

I began to write this piece in English, then switched to the Uyghur language. I felt I had to express myself in a smoother and softer tone, as if people had expectations from me, and I had to meet these tacit expectations if I continued to write. This phenomenon I call "the muteness" or "eclipse of the tongue" if I translate it directly from the Uyghur language. In Uyghur, the first words that came out were "East Turkistan".

This is the translation of the original sentences I wrote, then deleted: "Where do I start? Should I tell you about the inner peace I am feeling now or the turmoil that turned my life upside down? How am I dealing with the huge responsibility of helping millions of people in the death camps? How can I feel at peace knowing that the rest of my family, friends and the land are going through extinction?"

I am familiar with this "tongue eclipse" as I grew up being extremely careful with what I say and how I say it. As a child in East Turkistan, even the kids knew that they could not speak certain words, such as "occupation", "East Turkistan", "Chinese invaders" (or Xitay in Uyghur language) and so on.

This was not because, as kids, we didn't care about what was going on around us – like the gradual appearance of Chinese people living in our neighbourhood that didn't look like us, didn't eat like us, didn't speak like us, or didn't like us – but because teachers and parents or even random Uyghur adults warned that if we said anything "wrong" against those people, we would be punished heavily.

We were taught how to avoid sensitive topics and hide our true thoughts and emotions when it came to stories about our grandparents (who fought against the occupation or knew things about the work) or our hopes and dreams about the land and our nation. We were taught instead how to dissimulate and beat around the bush on things we wanted to talk about the most. Unfortunately, the punishment was the everyday word we would hear, so we had to be politically extremely sensitive.

Yes, "tongue eclipse" has something in common with the lunar eclipse. It's not that I don't have a tongue/language, not that I don't have light, but my light and words are always overshadowed by something else. This is the collective being of people in occupied East Turkistan. What did I intend to say? What couldn't Uyghurs say?

"In the beginning was the Word,", said John (1:1) in the Christian Bible. For some words, meaning is constant,

As a child in East Turkistan, even the kids knew that they could not speak certain words, such as "occupation", "East Turkistan", "Chinese invaders"

for others it changes, becomes sinister. For me, in the beginning, homeland meant East Turkistan and then it meant colonised land; , nation meant Uyghur but came to mean a colonised country and genocide; but family still means the Abdulghafurs, Roshan, Aisha, Sami, and Maryam.

Hijran (separation) came to mean forever in exile. Chinese people are referred to as settlers in East Turkistan and the name China has come to mean colonisation and mass murder. The Chinese language has been forced upon Uyghurs, as the eclipser of the Uyghur language.

There is an Uyghur idiom, "tongue has no bone"', yet I don't believe in it; how could we be so choked up by our tongue if there is no bone?

The third anniversary of my arrival in Australia was 9 September, 2020. An incoming email woke me at 2.45am. It was from the United Nations, telling me my father had died.

After reading it, my throat was stabbed by my tongue, and my heart was scattered all over my body. I was wordless, as my tongue was useless. The eyes saved me from that frozen moment when I started to cry. I felt the sense of release from the grab of the language, I could breathe, and a sound like a pistol came out of my torn heart.

How many times had I seen him in dreams, telling me to save him, telling me only I could keep him? In one dream, he handed me a car key and showed me an underground path. I drove up the vertical wall to a deserted neighbourhood surrounded by iron fences in front of a lonely muddy hill. I was stopped by two white female guards. I told them I was there looking for Abdulghafur Siddiq because he said I could find him there. They looked at each other and pushed me out of the gate, saying dismissively, "he is not here, sorry".

I had that dream two years before I received the email. When I awoke, I was full of guilt over failing to find my father and save him. I felt the pain of permanent separation. That dream had come true with this email. The UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances letter stated that the Chinese regime had given the Group an official account of my father's whereabouts. He had died on the 18 November, 2018.

Why did I have to learn about his death this way? This is how a life starts, continues and ends under colonisation. This is a typical ending to a life so worthless to the colonisers, a death as unnoticeable as the decaying of a leaf, as forgettable as a drop of rain, as brief as a meteorite. This is an ancient story of invasion, oppression, murder, sadness, tears, grief, anger, resilience … everything. This is the forced separation of a daughter from her father, the destruction of a nation and a land. This is my story but is also that of many others, the last century's story of an aboriginal father killed by the colonisers, all the heart-breaking stories of colonised, occupied and invaded lands and nations.

My father did not die of natural causes – he was killed in the death camps in East Turkistan, built by the Chinese colonisers. I hadn't been able to locate him since 2016, and when I finally heard about him, the message was delivered by the cold voice of his murderer. Among the causes for his detainment and death: he was an aboriginal to the land, and he was the father of a daughter living in the democratic world that could potentially bring ideological harm to the regime. When being an aboriginal is a common factor in the Uyghur nation's detainment in East Turkistan, I feel incredibly guilty and saddened that the specifics of my living and studying abroad contributed to his death. This is not survivor guilt. There is a permanent mark on my soul, the question of "'what if I never left East Turkistan?"

I am not a refugee or asylum seeker in Australia. I did not arrive from a country where a visible war occurred. However, the smokeless war has never

stopped in East Turkistan since its annexation in 1884 by the Chinese Empire. I came to Australia to pursue my professional dreams as a scientist; at the same time, I am among many exiles who cannot return home as long as our land is under occupation.

In the past three to four years, the term "Uyghur" has entered the collective consciousness, usually amid reports of genocide, death camps, orphan camps, crimes against humanity, the Chinese communist party, the belt-and-roads policy and so on. Major media outlets have written extensively about the concentration camps, camp survivors, missing Uyghur family members, forced labour and other related matters. Search engines bring up topics such as Uyghur Muslims in China, ethnic minorities in China, Chinese concentration camps, Uyghur human rights and Xinjiang.

Among these topics, my father's death was also widely covered: Uyghur poet's father, Uyghur Muslim's father, China's Uyghur Muslim, a man who died in the Xinjiang camps. I understood and appreciated the sympathy from around the world but it saddened me more to see that the world is still misinformed concerning the cause of my father's death. No one asked or answered the question, "Why is this happening?" Journalists, academics, politicians, and many organisations tried to understand and help Uyghurs, yet almost all of them avoided or did not understand the root cause of the atrocities: the colonisation of East Turkistan by China, whether it was the Chinese Empire, Qing Dynasty, that invaded East Turkistan in 1759 and annexed the land in 1884; or the Republic of China that overthrew the feudal Chinese Empire and came into force between 1912 and 1949; or the current regime of the Chinese Communist Party.

When people talk about change, they say it should be a system change and structural, but for East Turkistan and its people, no system or structural change brought any change or end to the colonisation. The different Chinese systems never attempt to terminate the colonisation and free the people of East Turkistan – on the contrary, the oppression and cruelty have intensified in all possible forms. Neither the Democratic Republic of China nor the idealistic communists liberated East Turkistan from illegal occupation.

This is the truth that was choking my throat; this is the truth I live with every day, even in a world of free speech, democracy, freedom of thought, and freedom to realise one's aspirations and dreams. Unfortunately, even in this free world, I am still eclipsed, I still cannot speak about the truth, and I still cannot tell my story as it is. This time it is an invisible fear, an invisible wall, an invisible power that is stopping me from saying something. What is it? I no longer live in occupied East Turkistan, and I should feel safe and free to tell my stories to the world, as the world deserves to hear the truth. It is my right to freedom of speech and the rest of the world has the right to exercise the freedom to listen. As I recognise these fundamental rights of all of us, I no longer feel scared or choked; what a liberation to realise the most obvious and live in it!

When I was living in the United States before coming to Australia, I rented a room in one of the "dangerous neighbourhoods" in Milwaukee. People of that neighbourhood were labelled as "violent". Despite never experiencing violence there, I didn't dare to sit in the front yard. I met one of the most kind-hearted people in that neighbourhood and became best friends with her. I wasn't rushing to stamp others with any label because of my experience. I was always labelled and caged with words I didn't want.

The Chinese colonisers, and now the world, marked me as an "ethnic minority". Ironically, I was never a minority in my land. Quite the opposite, as an Uyghur, I was and still am a member of the majority ethnic group in East Turkistan. My land was never Xinjiang, a colonial name given by the Chinese Empire in 1884, meaning "new territory"; it was and still is the land of my Uyghur nation, which created the rich and resilient oasis culture in the middle of the Taklimakan desert, the creators of great poetry, music, arts and crafts, tales, remedies, tolerance, love and spiritual practices and survived and thrived, meanwhile taking good care of the land with all their souls. What an innocent people my ancestors were!

When the colonisers came into our land, my ancestors thought they were visitors and treated them with love and respect as we have a saying, "visitors to the family and land are half-gods". They didn't know that these visitors were never half-godly creatures but monsters who would brutally violate their hospitality, traumatise their descendants for centuries to come and destroy their sacred land. The substantial minorities are the Chinese settlers who came to our land, raped and are still raping our women, killed and are still killing our people, took and are still taking our resources, and telling lies to us and the world about the ugly realities.

Imagine if someone strips you of your identity – your name, your culture, your beliefs, your wife, your husband, your children, your parents, your job, your

Imagine if someone strips you of your identity – your name, your culture, your beliefs, your wife, your husband, your children, your parents, your job, your income, your memories, and your hopes for tomorrow

income, your memories, and your hopes for tomorrow – and forces you to take their names, their culture, their beliefs and still takes away all the rest from you. How would you feel? What would you do? I sincerely hope it never happens to anyone reading this because the feeling is that of death without a hereafter or second life. This is what Uyghurs and other non-settler residents of occupied East Turkistan have been experiencing since the colonisation reached its peak in 2017.

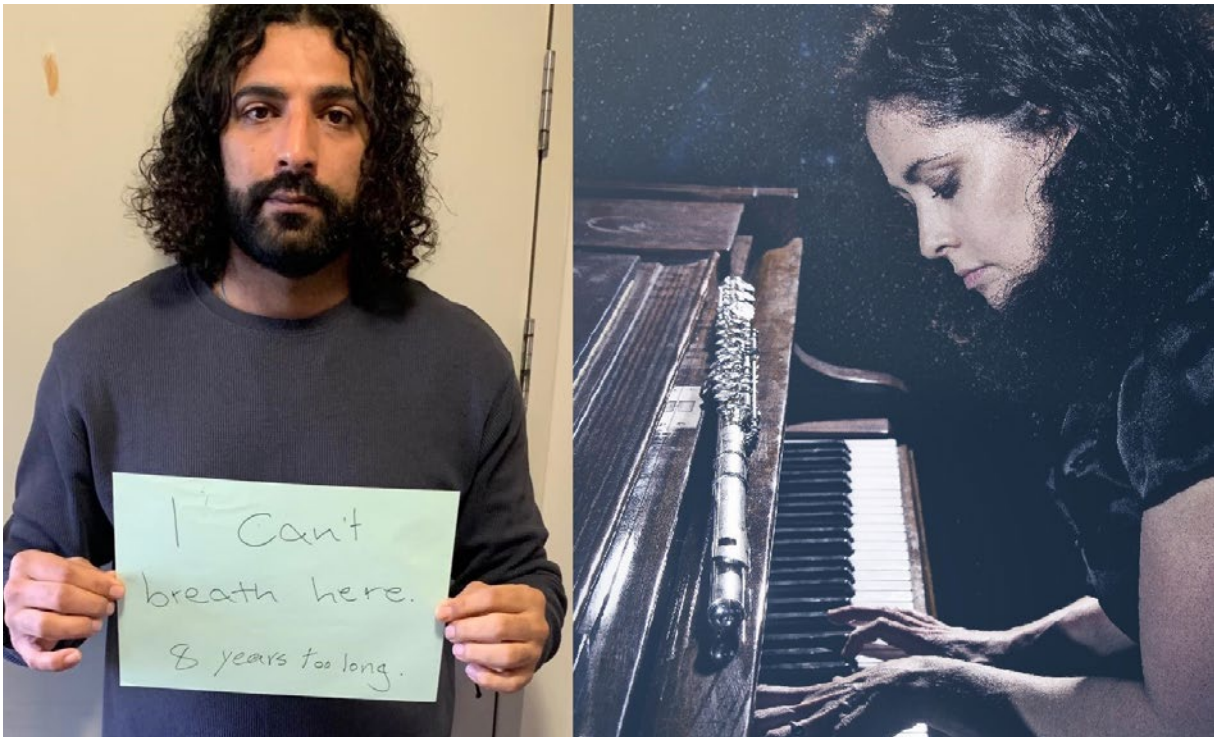
Having lived in the Western world for more than 10 years, I understand the values of a free world. In Australia, for example, people are highly individualised and cherish their unique identities. European settlers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have kept their cultures alive. They still talk about their parents coming from England, Greece, or Ireland. They still keep family names and their history. If you were born and raised in Ireland as John, you still would be John in Australia. No one would force you to take another name. As an Uyghur from the colonised land of East Turkistan, the name my parents gifted me with, Fatimah Abdulghafur, had to be extraordinary as it had to be written and pronounced in the Chinese way, Abuduwufu Patiman. This is my double identity: the faithful Fatimah, whose soul and mind were never colonised, and Abuduwufu, who has been subjected to the cruelty of colonisation.

I am a poet; what I express through my writing is way beyond my personal feelings. Yet most people don't understand this about my poetry and only read and find clues about my experience as an Uyghur, as an immigrant, as a refugee, asylum seeker, or something about me. Of course, I am honoured to have readers and grateful for the publications. However, I do not wish to live in that nightmare again. The terror of being labelled, stamped, caged, framed, and only seen from one angle and referred to as a "refugee poet". As with my aspirations and dedications, my poetry now belongs to the Uyghur nation and my fellow Australians. Perhaps this is the difference between the dictatorship and coloniser culture of the Chinese regime and democratic Australia. This settler-colonial state was and still is the land of Aboriginal people struggling to maintain their culture in the face of colonialism and destruction. Perhaps the "eclipse of my tongue" will pass and the truth will shine again. ꟿ

PROFILE

Ahwazi Arab refugee and artist Jalal Mahamede's new poetry collection captures the despair of nine devastating years spent in immigration detention. DUNJA KARAGIC writes.

'My Tears Will Calm the Sun': An Arab Ahwazi Poet's Lost Years in Immigration Detention



It's the middle of winter and a bookshop in Brisbane is teeming with visitors. They're here to celebrate the launch of an illustrated poetry collection, *My Tears Will Calm the Sun* by Ahwazi Arab refugee and poet Jalal Mahamede.

Wearing a white blazer and with his dark brown hair tied back neatly, Jalal takes a deep breath before introducing his work to the audience.

"What I have learnt in these few years, is that your experience is not just what happened to you, it's what you take from it, learn from it and create from it. This book doesn't belong to me. It belongs to everyone. We have a responsibility to know what has happened and what continues to happen," he says.

In 2013, at the age of 26, Jalal fled Iran, hoping to find a better future in Australia. Instead, he found himself detained on Christmas Island, Nauru and in two Brisbane immigration facilities for nine arduous years overall.

It was a traumatic period that, at the same time, unearthed a gift. In 2019, profound trauma and grief propelled Jalal to document his experiences in detention through illustration and poetry.

His harrowing words and drawings are a testament to the grievances felt by many asylum seekers who faced the perils of immigration detention.

Growing up as an Arab Ahwazi minority in Iran

Jalal was born into an Arabic family in Ahwaz, the capital of the Khuzestan province in south-west Iran, where his father, Kazem, was a renowned poet. Jalal didn't write poetry before detention but he believes he inherited this gift from his father.

"I'm Arabic and the Iranian government, they hate us…they don't let us learn our language and it's really hard to save our language. He didn't teach me [how to write poetry], but I feel like I got [the talent] from him," Jalal says.

It's broadly estimated that between four to six million Ahwazi Arabs live in Iran, with most concentrated in Khuzestan. Home to much of Iran's oil and gas reserves, the region produces more than 70 per cent of the country's crude oil. Despite being the heart of Iran's oil wealth, the province reportedly is plagued by severe socioeconomic deprivation.

Leader of Sydney's Ahwazi community, human rights advocate Malik Nour,* says the Ahwazi minority gain nothing from Khuzestan's wealth in natural resources. "The only share we got is poverty… the only thing we got from that land is disaster," he says. He describes

Khuzestan as a "strategic region" beset with a long history of conflict between Arabs and the Persian ethnic majority in Iran.

Amnesty International reports that the Arab Ahwazi population in Iran experiences arbitrary restrictions on their daily lives, including access to housing, employment, education and exercising their linguistic and cultural rights.

Jalal says he experienced oppression from a young age. "When I started school, I couldn't speak Farsi, just Arabic because of how I grew up… [therefore] my teacher beat me a lot. All the time I just ran from school. I was scared of the teachers."

He got to university and worked on a weekly student magazine, deciding to publish Arabic poetry written by his father and other Arab writers. The university ordered him to stop publication and he believes this was due to pressure from the Iranian government. "After a month or two they closed our magazine. It's so sad. [The Iranian Government] controls everything," he says.

In 2013 Jalal fled to Australia by boat following years of oppression that affected most aspects of his life, from schooling to employment. In that year, the Abbott Government commenced Operation Sovereign Borders, a border protection operation led by the Australian Defence Force and aimed at stopping boats carrying asylum seekers to Australia. Jalal was already on a boat when it came into effect, he was unaware he would face mandatory detention on arrival.

"Many bad happenings": Nine Years in Detention

Jalal is downcast as he shares details the six years he spent in Nauru Regional Processing Centre after several months in Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre. "We had many bad happenings, bad trauma," he says in a shaky voice.

The blistering, sticky heat on the tiny island country made most days unbearable. He shared a tent with more than 40 other asylum seekers, there were initially no fans and, he says, showers were strictly limited to three minutes a day. "It was so hot we had no appetite. In order to access services, we had to line up in the sun for many hours," Jalal says.

He describes seeing "many terrible things" such as teenagers self-harming and a 21-year-old Somali refugee who set herself alight in Nauru in 2016. "She put all the petrol on her clothes and body…. She just held the lighter and burnt herself…. We didn't know where she was or how she was. She was so young."

The incident occurred just days after 23-year-old Iranian refugee Omid Masoumali set himself alight in the presence of United Nations representatives. An inquest into his death heard that it took 30 hours for him to be medically evacuated to Brisbane for specialist burns treatment.

Jalal pauses before recounting the suicide of his close friend, 26-year-old Fariboz K, whose body was discovered in his tent by a family member in 2018. "My good friend… I remember I was standing in front of my room, and he came to me and asked me for a cigarette. Two days after, I heard he died. It was a lot of trauma," he says.

Advocates have long warned of the mental and physical health risks associated with Australia's offshore detention policy. The Refugee Council of Australia reports that children as young as seven had attempted suicide in detention in Nauru. Since 2013, 14 people have died in offshore detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea (PNG).

Immigration detention expert and senior lecturer in politics at Deakin University, Dr Amy Nethery says that medical neglect in offshore detention is well-documented. "People who have needed more medical treatment than just Panadol could solve did not receive that treatment and in fact that treatment was actively blocked by the department and that has resulted in several deaths from preventable illnesses."

In 2018, Jalal was attacked by a group of locals in Nauru, leaving him bloody and swollen. He says he suffered from a concussion, a temporary stutter, nightmares and a hanging tooth that, excruciatingly, he snapped off himself. "I had dizziness, headaches, and stuttering. I couldn't speak, I couldn't speak with anybody," he says.

In 2019, he was transferred to Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation Centre under Medevac laws to receive proper psychological treatment. Jalal says he received more "trauma and torture" rather than proper treatment.

A spokesperson for the Australian Department of Home Affairs told *Refugee Transitions* that the department does not comment on individual cases but that the Australian Government works closely with the Government of Nauru to ensure that "transferees have access to health and mental health services".

"Through the Australian Government's contracted health services provider, International Health and Medical Services, general practitioners, nursing and mental health care clinicians are available seven days a week. There is also after-hours medical staffing to respond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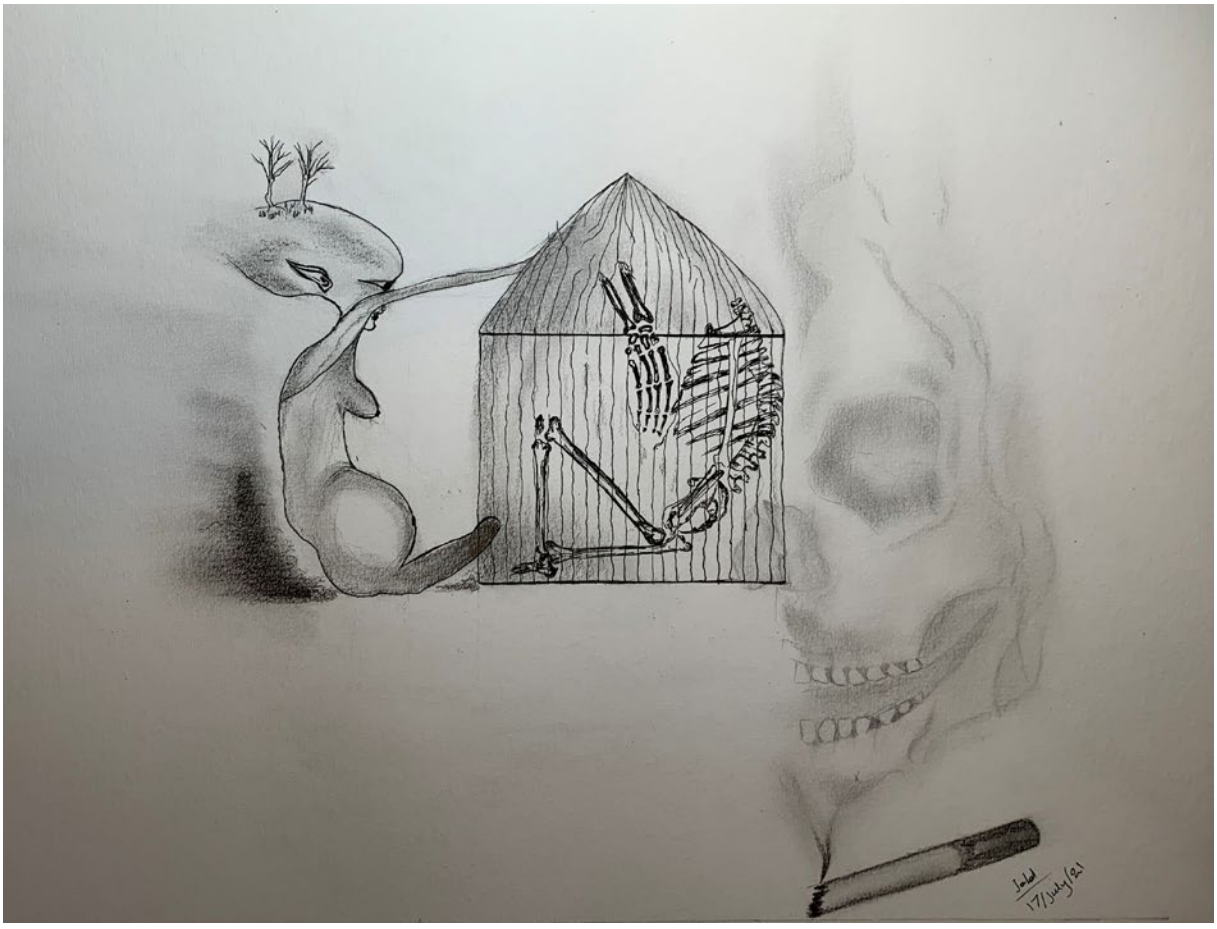

to medical emergencies."

In 2019, in detention in Brisbane, he received devastating news that his father had died. The grief coupled with memories of the assault propelled him to start writing and drawing.

"All the time, I said, 'Tonight I will sleep, and he will come visit me in my dream', but he didn't, and I was so angry at him," he says.

"I remember one day when I woke up, I just started to draw to express myself on paper and when I saw the art, the words just came."

A Collaboration with a Sydney Composer

During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2021, Sydney musician and composer Keyna Wilkins read a poem Jalal had posted in a refugee action group on social media.

As a professional musician and composer with more than 20 years of experience, Jalal's words stirred something special in her. "I found his work was very high quality and it seemed very genuine, very truthful… he had a really unique style in his poetry and in his art that works together," she says.

With Jalal in detention, they linked up on video calls and decided to collaborate on an album, which involved Jalal reciting his poetry over Keyna's moving compositions. The final album, called Set Me Free involved 19 guest musicians from around Australia.

In November 2021, more than 100 people attended the album launch at the quirky Lazybones venue in Sydney's inner-west -- without Jalal, who was still detained. Keyna encouraged guests at the event to write letters to then- Immigration Minister Alex Hawke and then- Home Affairs Minister Karen Andrews to plead for Jalal's release.

About two weeks later, that moment arrived. Jalal recalls painting half a butterfly in an array of colours the day before the long-awaited knock on his door. "In the morning when I woke up, I was looking at the butterfly and then suddenly they knocked on the door and said, 'Immigration wants to talk to you' … for maybe two hours my brain was locked. I couldn't think, I couldn't believe, I couldn't say."

For Keyna it was a moment of elation. "I thought he was never going to get out, it was such a shock … I was just screaming, all of us were. He has a lot of fans all over the country," she says.

Since then, she has helped Jalal publish and compile his poetry collection *My Tears Will Calm the Sun* as well as create musical collaborations with other refugees who are still in detention.

The lasting scars of detention

Jalal is now living in Brisbane, working four to five days a week at a café. He has work and friends to keep him occupied but struggles daily with PTSD. "I have a place to live but what about my mind? What about the things that I saw in these years through detention? Safety is not just about a house, a visa, a job, it's about mental health."

The latest data from the Refugee Council indicates that 112 asylum seekers and refugees remain in Nauru and more than 100 on Manus Island, despite the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre being forcibly closed after the PNG Supreme Court ruled it was unconstitutional in 2016. Jalal finds it hard to enjoy freedom while others are left behind.

"It was so hard for me to be happy. I'm still confused… I'm just looking at everything, thinking, 'Why are they drinking? Why are they dancing?'"

In common with many others in Australia, he is living day to day in limbo on a temporary bridging visa, which offers no certainty about the future and prohibits him from studying.

"We don't have a right to study, we don't know if we can stay in this country…we're still unsafe in our life," he says.

For now, Jalal hopes the change of government will bring good news. In its official policy platform, the new Labor government promised to move all refugees currently on temporary visas onto permanent visas.

A spokesperson for the Department of Home Affairs told *Refugee Transitions* that the Australian Government is committed to giving effect to its election commitments to "ensure there is a permanent visa pathway for existing Temporary Protection Visa and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa holders".

The department says refugees transitioning out of immigration detention may be eligible to receive short term support through its Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) program, which can include financial assistance, accommodation and case worker support.

Despite international criticism of Australia's offshore processing centres, the United Kingdom has now taken steps to replicate the controversial policy. In April 2022, the UK and Rwanda signed a deal, which will result in some asylum seekers being sent to Rwanda for processing and relocation. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which in the past has been scathing of Australia's policy, has stated it "firmly" opposes the new deal.

"When I started school, I couldn't speak Farsi, just Arabic because of how I grew up… [therefore] my teacher beat me a lot. All the time I just ran from school. I was scared of the teachers."

Dr Amy Nethery says that immigration detention sends a devastating message to refugees and asylum seekers. "It sends a message that their possible belonging within the Australian community is always going to be precarious and determined by the executive arm of government that has near total unmitigated control over their lives."

In many cases, even those who eventually make it to the "land of the fair go", are left with lingering scars of rejection.R

**Name has been changed to protect identity.*

Jalal Mahamede's 'My Tears Will Calm the Sun' illustrated poetry collection, published by Tangerine Books, is available for purchase via Avid Reader bookstore in Brisbane. Go to avidreader.com.au.

All One Under the Sun – a remedy for racism

AGENDA

Two years ago young people from many backgrounds living in Coffs Harbour came together to develop an anti-racism campaign using multi-art form messaging, a project that transformed their lives. ***LYNNE MALCOLM*** *reports.*


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Marko and Asina

Marko Kisose is a bricklayer and his sister Asina is an aged-care worker. They settled in Coffs Harbour, on the mid-north coast of NSW, having fled their home country of Congo then enduring five years in a refugee camp in Malawi.

Their refugee experience was tough. Asina is grateful for the opportunity to come to Australia a decade ago because, although she was very young at the time, she knows that her parents suffered a lot, getting the family to safety in Australia.

Marko describes his early days in Coffs Harbour as being very strange. The environment and the people were new to him. He felt lost. He experienced racism, which he found difficult to deal with especially when he was younger. Sometimes, as he walked down the street, there would be a shout from a car window: "Go back to your own country." Even when he was playing football, people would make racist comments. Among the taunts: "You think you're a good player just because you're black … go back where you came from."

Younger sister Asina often experiences racist attitudes towards her. She remembers an incident at her first job at Hungry Jack's. A customer wanted something that was not on the menu, so she explained it wasn't available. The customer didn't think she understood them because of her skin and insisted on being served by someone else, with white skin. Asina was hurt and devastated when she realized what was happening and retreated to collect her thoughts in the bathroom. Thinking about it still makes her want to cry.

The siblings have now learnt to stand up for themselves with new confidence and manage these racist attitudes, thanks to a NSW Campaign called All One Under the Sun, based on Gumbaynggirr country at Coffs Harbour.

AOUTS is a youth-led anti-racism project, bringing young people together from across the community to stand up against hate, fear and division and promote inclusion, belonging, connection, education and empowerment.

All One Under the Sun

AOUTS is a youth-led anti-racism project, bringing young people together from across the community to stand up against hate, fear and division and promote inclusion, belonging, connection, education and empowerment.

Project co-ordinator Naomi Steinborner, from Blue Sky Community Services, sees it as a remedy for or antidote to racism. AOUTS uses the arts to bring together young people from different cultural backgrounds, including indigenous Australians and those from the Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Combining their musical and artistic talents, they have created an AOUTS anthem featuring in a film clip, a documentary about the process, a theatre work and a Hip Hop project.

The project was initiated by The Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) in response to dealing with young people with refugee backgrounds being deeply affected by racism, at school, work and in the community. Among services helping STARTTS to run the AOUTS project are the Coffs Harbour and Districts Local Aboriginal Lands Council, headspace Coffs Harbour, Blue Sky Community Services and Coffs Harbour City Council, with funding through Multicultural NSW.

According to Dianne Jacobus, the Youth Community Development worker for STARTTS, until 20 years ago the demographic of Coffs Harbour was quite Anglo. In the intervening decades, many people with refugee backgrounds have arrived and settled there, making a big difference to the city's demographic profile.

Gumbaynggirr country around Coffs Harbour also has a very strong First Nations presence.

Naomi Steinborner describes some examples of how racism plays out. Young people with different cultural backgrounds often report going into shops in the city and are immediately made to feel like they are criminals, or under suspicion, that perhaps they are going to rob the shop owners, simply because of the way they are dressed or the colour of their skin. Aboriginal youths echo these feelings. She cites the Aboriginal education officer's daughter who went into a furniture retailer, to be told she obviously wouldn't be able to afford anything in the shop, the salesperson having assumed that as an Aboriginal, she wouldn't have any money. Further, she says, where there is division and segregation in schools between groups of young people of different backgrounds, the conflict is not managed well and often escalates.

Working with young people, Dianne Jacobus is well aware of the racism that exists in the community, and the attempts to remedy the situation through schools. As resources allowed little more than a Band-Aid approach, the grant for AOUTS provided the funding and the opportunity to make a difference in the community.

Music, arts and story telling

The organisers opted for a creative process, using the arts, music and story telling to unite young people from diverse backgrounds. The initial collaboration involved writing an uplifting, moving anthem to reflect AOUTS's values of connection and understanding and its aim of countering fear, division and racism.

Local organization Grow the Music supported

the young people in the development of the song. This anthem was made into a short film clip and then a moving documentary was produced about the whole process of AOUTS.

When Marko Kisose saw the advertisement calling for interest in the AOUTS campaign he knew it was right for him, given his talent and passion for music. He saw it as an opportunity to connect with others in the community. He encouraged Asina to join, too, as she had always loved singing -- though never in front of other people.

At a musical workshop, participants gathered in groups and shared their experiences of racism, working out how they could help each other to understand, manage and communicate. Gumbaynggirr cultural educator and artist Troy Robinson, Syrian-born singer and bouzouki player Ali Hassan, and First Nations hip hop artist Tory Paasi also collaborated in the musical workshop. The group drew on combined experiences to write new music and lyrics, creating an empowering song. For some, Marko explains, it was their first involvement in singing or any other musical activity. He enjoyed acting as a mentor for them.

Marko, on guitar, also sings the first verse …

"Under the sun we're all the same here. We are shining stars. The colour of my skin does not define me. Let's change the world and make it a better place."

He is proud that the group came up with a powerful anthem, to convey the message that racism is a major issue that united action can defeat.

Asina enjoyed singing in the All One Under the Sun project, too. She loved being with people from different backgrounds and gained a major boost in confidence. She's excited to tell *Refugee Transitions* that she even wrote her very first song because of her involvement. Being a Christian, her message is about feeling down and looking up to God for safety and strength.

Youth Action Collective

Along with the songwriting, film clip project and documentary, an integral part of the AOUTS program is the Youth Action Collective, which Naomi Steinborner describes as the engine room of the project. Training started with the song-writing group and then expanded to teach a group of year 10 and 11 students from local schools about cultural awareness and racism with a First Nations perspective.

Project participants then designed a logo and T-shirts for the project launch at the All One under the Sun cross-cultural community festival at the Coffs Harbour Botanic Gardens in June.

Jaslyn

Jaslyn Walker, a First Nations year 9 student at Orara High School in Coffs Harbour, has been taught about racism by her family and has experienced it herself. She particularly recalls a scary incident involving her cousins as they rode their scooters. They were chased by adults in a car who called them "dogs", yelled other abuse and told them to go back to where they came from. Jaslyn was appalled.

She has made friends with people from other cultural backgrounds and has witnessed them experiencing racism too. Occasionally, she has to tell her friends how hurtful it is when they behave in a racist way.

She spoke of an upsetting incident at school: "I had a teacher who talked about African Americans using the 'n' word." Hearing this was very difficult for her friends and her cousins, who sit with each other, giving energy and support. Once when a teacher moved her to the other side of the classroom, her confidence plummeted.

Jaslyn's first contact with the AOUTS project was in year 8. She was too scared to go along by herself so she accompanied cousins and older indigenous students to their music and art activities.

She collaborated in AOUTS's Youth Action Collective, working with other indigenous students on writing and performing their own song. She's always loved singing and performing but had never done it publicly before AOUTS. Explaining her story in her own voice has given her new confidence and has built her self-esteem.

"I expressed a more powerful version of me," she says.

Being involved in AOUTS's activities has helped Jaslyn enormously. She loves writing songs and lyrics and has started writing poetry as well. She will encourage her sister and her friends to join her.

Nada

Nada Ali, 17, is a Coffs Harbour High School student. In 2013, her family -- from the Yazidi minority group in Northern Iraq -- fled to Australia. Over many years, ISIS followers raped or killed her people, including among them both grandfathers and some aunts and uncles.

Safe in Australia now, she still has been hurt by racist attitudes and behaviour towards her. She's been called names and people make assumptions about her because of the way she looks, her background and her less sophisticated English language skills. She doesn't think people really understand how hurtful these racist attitudes are, because if they did, they wouldn't do it deliberately. She has felt unwelcome at times, and it's been difficult to make friends.

She became involved in AOUTS through the arts and music groups, the Youth Action Collective, the logo design -- then she was selected as a student to represent the school program. She feels proud about making a speech, despite initial nerves, to the whole school at Assembly, talking about her experience and the AOUTS campaign. She was an MC at the AOUTS Festival. She also writes poetry: "As a teenager with a lot of emotions, I feel like poetry is one way to get the ideas out of my head and on to paper."

She writes about war experiences, missing home and family, relationship issues and teenage emotions. She was thrilled then to have the opportunity to perform her poems for an audience at the AOUTS event.

Nada's confidence has blossomed through the program, as she sees how it has helped to raise cultural awareness and acknowledge the hurtful impact of racism across the whole community.

...we're all the same, we are shining stars. The colour of my skin does not define me

The difference AOUTS has made

Asina Kisose enjoys the numerous benefits of AOUTS for herself and the community.

She has new confidence and has had great feedback about her singing abilities, and she now teaches African dance to people from other cultures. She feels she has much to offer now, and she has a greater awareness of other people's experience.

"I've educated myself into knowing that racism doesn't only happen to darker skins, it comes in different forms. Like the way you speak, like a condition, even a disability that you have. You get discriminated in so many ways. ….. I wasn't really educated in knowing that a person with a lighter skin …. I came to having the knowledge that yes, other people do experience racism. You don't have to be black to go through it."

Asina says AOUTS has changed her life. She would love to continue to be involved. "I don't want it to stop here because we are changing the world and trying to make it a better place. So, we shouldn't stop now. We should keep going."

The future

The good news is that All One Under the Sun has received funding for a further two years. Dianne Jacobus and Naomi Steinborner are thrilled by the prospect of building on the positive changes they've already seen in the diverse Coffs Harbour community.

"I think (the AOUTS project) it's absolutely vital. I look like an ordinary old woman, but I've got Jewish heritage and also I have Aboriginal heritage. I don't say I'm Aboriginal because I haven't grown up Aboriginal. So, I feel that I'm at that stage in my life where if I can make a contribution to make young people's lives better, that's what I want to do.

"And I just think that young people, everybody, deserves good support in their life and if one young person in their family or their school, gets more confidence in themselves, feels better about themselves, they're going to model that to others…. it all adds to the richness of our culture and our community," says STARTTS Youth Community Development worker Dianne Jacobus.

I think young people getting to experience rich cultural diversity at a young age makes a big impact in their lives. And I think that's the best thing about this project … bringing people together has been a big thing, says Naomi Steinborner, Project Coordinator.

I urge you to watch the film clip of the All One Under the Sun anthem filmed on the beautiful Munim Munim headland, north of Coffs Harbour and the documentary about the project.

It highlights the positivity and hope that the project has brought to this cross-cultural community of Coffs Harbour – and it will bring tears to your eyes! ꟿ

A national health initiative for migrant and refugee communities is addressing the barriers faced by these communities in gaining vaccine literacy and increasing uptake, dealing with vaccine hesitancy and aiding service navigation. LILLY SHAMOON reports.

Health in My Language Program.

Educating communities about the risk of COVID-19 and the efficacy of vaccines, while tackling the spread of unreliable information, is crucial to boosting the numbers of vaccinated refugees and migrants. STARTTS' Health in My Language Team has delivered 154 vaccine literacy sessions about to 12 communities (Assyrian, Arabic, Bosnian, Chaldean, Congolese, Croatian, Dari, Dinka, Serbian, Spanish, Ukraine and Yazidi) across NSW since July 2022 and 2310 participants.

Limited access to health information among communities whose first language is not English creates serious barriers to understanding how to access vaccination services, and why it is so important that they do so. Delivering accurate information from trained health educators in native languages does a great deal to remove these barriers.

In the past year, health education sessions were delivered to more than 30 migrant and refugee communities in each state and territory. The Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) partnered with local organisations, deploying 44 bilingual, trained educators to deliver the sessions in 20 languages and dialects, using the MCWH health education model. The initiative was funded by the Federal Government.

STARTTS is the partner supporting the program in NSW. From July 2022 it deployed 10 bilingual educators to speak to groups of parents, carers, older people, women of child-bearing age or who are pregnant and people living in regional and rural areas. Health In My Language has helped people gain confidence in understanding vaccine information, while enabling them to learn and ask questions in a safe, supportive and non-judgmental environment.

Topics have included:

- General COVID-19 updates
- COVID-19 misconceptions
- 'Long COVID' and antiviral medications
- Healthy relationships during the pandemic
- Menopause
- Women's health
- Mental health
- Self-care.

Feedback from participants has been very positive. They enjoyed the sessions and the sense of being in a safe space. Participants particularly valued being informed about 'Long COVID', with many acknowledging they had continued to suffer symptoms while not being aware that this was now a recognised condition. ꟿ

NSW Humanitarian Awards 2022

AGENDA

The STARTTS humanitarian awards recognise the excellent work of individuals in making a difference in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers in their communities. This year the awards ceremony took place at Government House. These are the awardees.

Margaret Beazly, AC, KC Governor of NSW

It's always such an honour for us here at Government House to host the NSW Humanitarian Awards and to welcome Jorge, Roger, Adama and Jasmina from STARTTS and from the Refugee Council respectively. An honour because these awards recognise and celebrate what is best of our community. That puts things very simply. But as we know, the underlying complexity is immense.

Thinking about time made me wonder what time means to somebody in a refugee camp or to an asylum seeker here with us in our community, not one of us, and maybe never to be one of us. It also made me think of what COVID-19 lockdowns represented for our refugee and asylum seeking communities. They were locked down. But we were all locked down. They're isolated. But we were all isolated. But there has to be a difference. If you're locked down and if you're isolated without the support structure of family, of friendships that goes back to school days, locked down without the Friday night Zoom drinks, which even the isolated got sick of, or the book clubs, and without the financial resources, that sort of lockdown seems to me to be almost beyond normal comprehension. But we've come to learn that there was actually more than that type of lockdown, which we didn't experience.

It's now been well documented that the pandemic had a profound yet invisible impact on many refugees and asylum seekers. For some, we're told the sight of empty streets, where some people quite liked the quiet, actually prompted flashbacks because streets would empty when there were air raids. For many, the heightened police and army presence intended to protect the health of the community were actually distressing reminders of political terror or even detention, someone coming to knock on your door perhaps to take you away, never to be seen again. And for others, the sensation of wearing the face mask, about which so many of us complained, but actually triggered memories of being gagged or hooded during imprisonment or torture. And then all of those sensations, different from the majority of the population, was compounded by the continuing humanitarian crises around the world, the time in Afghanistan, Syria, the parts of Africa which were continually undergoing trauma, countries which were once a homeland but which so many were compelled to leave.

Refugee Community Worker, awarded to Mr Bilal Waheed, Executive Director, Massoud Foundation Australia.

Refugee Supporter, awarded to the Blue Peony Foundation The award will be accepted by Ms Zoia Douglas.

Best Project, Awarded to Afghanistan Crisis Response Clinic Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS).

Highly Commended, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) and Western Sydney Local Health District (WSLHD).

Youth, Awarded to Ms Nargis Karimi.

Social Media, Awarded to Ms Maryam Popal Zahid Afghan Women on the Move.

It's not surprising then that the theme of this year's refugee week was healing. And for most of you here tonight, you have offered a healing hand to those who are reaching out to grasp it. As I've said, you are community and you represent the values of community, the values of compassion, support, enablement, and an understanding of trauma which fortunately is often outside our own experience. Those who give the helping hand and the healing hand, sometimes they've experienced the trauma, but so many of you haven't, but you've understood that there was a need to hold out that helping hand. And so as I see you in this room, you are the big people who help and have helped others to grow as tall as you. And so this is a proud moment when we say thank you. Thank you to you, to your organisations and to your supporters.

It's also the occasion to say thank you and indeed to honour the multifaceted and community grounded approach embodied by the Refugee Council of Australia and by STARTTS, an approach that serves to enhance their professionalism with which they undertake the work that they do, as I've had the opportunity to observe when I visited STARTTS at Carramar in February of this year. What an enlightening experience that was. And when that work at STARTTS is added to the work of the Refugee Council of Australia -- giving voice to those so often forgotten people in our community who tirelessly educate and reconnect people in our community -- we have indeed a most powerful voice and a most powerful healing force.

And so, in celebrating the achievements and the efforts of STARTTS and the Refugee Council, the achievements and the efforts of all those who have been nominated for these awards, as well as our wonderful final recipients, we say we can see you, we appreciate you, and we thank you. And so it is an honour, it's a privilege to now commence these presentations. Thank you.

Jorge Aroche CEO STARTTS:
As I cast my eyes around, I see so many friends, longstanding supporters of the work that we do in contributing to the healing of refugees. Sometimes we talk about STARTTS as healing refugees, and that work being complemented by the community. That is not so. Is it us who complement the work that the community does in healing people that arrive from other shores after surviving trauma? Of course, there are partners to the people that make it happen. It is fitting that we do these together with the Refugee Council of Australia because they have played such an enormous role in ensuring that different governments of Australia continue to support the role that Australia plays worldwide in assisting refugees.

Governor, Your Excellency, I would like to thank you for your words at the beginning. They really summarised the plight of refugees these days. Not only the result of the humanitarian crisis aggravated by the pandemic and different things that continue to happen in the world, it's been a very difficult time since the beginning of the Pandemic for refugees, more so than ever with over 100 million people displaced by war and strife around the world.

It's a time that I would also like to use to thank you for your warm patronage of STARTTS and what it means for our organisation. Your visit was a tremendous boost for us, it was a tremendous boost for all the sector. And your kindness and graciousness in agreeing to host this event, I'm sure you'll hear it from the people that receive their award later, but I think – I know it means a lot to receive this award from you. It is so fitting at these difficult times that we face. So thank you so much for your support and for, once again, hosting us in this house. Thank you. R

Education, Awarded to Ms Kylie Adams, Holroyd High School.

Rural and Regional, Awarded to Armidale Sanctuary Settlement Support.

Sport, Awarded to the Tibetan Unity Cup.

Lifetime Achievement Award, Presented to Mr Ernie Friedlander OAM.

PROFILE

Leaving home when home is unsafe

***Danihel Malbasa** was just a child when he and his family fled the Bosnian war and came to Australia. He told his story at STARTTS' Refugee Ball.*

As a kid, halfway through the war I developed what psychologists call catatonia – an abnormality of movement arising from a disturbed mental state, whichinvolves repetitive or purposeless overactivity.

In my case, it was sitting on the couch and rocking back-and-forth, back-and-forth, for hours on end.

I now know that the rhythmic movement was my body's defence mechanism against the carnage of war happening around me.

The repetitive activity numbed my brain to war, helping me tune it all out.

When we came to Australia, our teachers suggested that as children of war we should try rhythmically attuned movements in safe places where the social re-engagement system could begin to re-emerge.

At our teachers' urging, my twin brother took up soccer and I took up tennis.

You see, nobody can "treat" a war. What happened to me cannot be undone. War veterans returning will tell you this. War refugees and war veterans experience shell shock equally.

The passage of time does nothing to dull the impact. A clap of thunder reminds me of exploding bombs. Fireworks on New Year's Eve remind me of anti-aircraft gunfire. The noise of aeroplanes coming in to land remind me of nightly air raids sending me scurrying for shelter. These are the sequelae after-effects for a body that has seen war.

War, along with fear, reaches you in an instant. It enters your mind, your heart, your soul. It finds home there and never vacates.

But playing tennis and being physically active healed me from war trauma by helping me get out of my head and into my body. It kept me strong, fit and healthy.

One other thing that helped me process war has been writing and storytelling, specifically writing about forced displacement and the refugee experience.

We talk a lot about the need to offer safe spaces to those who have survived torture or trauma and these spaces always seem to be physical, structural places.

But for me, a safe place is a blank piece of paper. It is often the only place I have control over. I believe that language and words can lift the veil allowing us to truly see each other.

We think of terms such as "refugee" or "asylum seeker" or "war" but we rarely think about wonder, and awe, and resilience, and tenacity, and survival, and joy, and courage and the creativity it takes to be a survivor.

We rarely see people. We rarely see individuals. We don't even bother to know their names or their histories or their aspirations.

We have been conditioned to see refugees on the evening news as something you are either "for" or "against".

We have been conditioned to see refugees as "the risk to be avoided" rather than "people at risk" to be helped and assisted in their time of need, as was envisaged by the Refugee Convention some 70 years ago, a convention championed by Australia's then Attorney General, H.V. "Doc" Evatt.

We have been conditioned to see refugees as a risk to be pushed back out to sea, to be detained in detention centres and hotel rooms, to have barbed wire fences erected to keep them out.

We have been conditioned to see refugees as "scapegoats" to be blamed for economic woes refugees did not cause. To be demonised for political gains.

We have been conditioned to see refugees as this intractable problem that cannot be resolved.

We used words like "*waves of refugees, a flood of refugee, an armada of refugees*".

We speak of refugees in abstractions, in concepts, in quotas, in numbers, never as people with lived experience.

We use words such as "crisis" – a "refugee crisis" to describe refugees.

But who is it a crisis for?

Is it a crisis for us here in Australia with our comfortable lives?

Or is it a crisis for a refugee mother stuck in limbo in a refugee camp in Zaatari or Moria or Kakuma or walking across the Ukrainian/Moldovan border in search of shelter from war?

We use words such as "burden sharing" of refugees. I was not a "burden" to be shared.

I was a 12-year-old refugee in need of home and protection. I was an asset for this country, not a liability to be tolerated.

This conditioning is a result of those who get to control the stories and the narrative about refugees.

It is extremely rare for refugees to have a platform to speak their truth. To provide a counter-narrative.

How often do people meet refugees in their daily interactions? It is so easy to fear the things you don't see or don't understand.

But this is where storytelling and language come in.

I write to convince people to hear and see us refugees.

I wrote an ode to refugee mothers for Mother's Day for an organisation called Road to Refuge.

My mother is a formidable woman, as are all refugee mothers.

So much of her identify is erased when she is relegated

to nothing more than the label "refugee".

And this is the "danger of the single story" identified by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie.

Before she was a refugee, my mother had at least eight other identities.

- A woman
- A war widow
- A single mother with children in tow
- A Croatian woman wedded to a Serbian man – in the context of civil wars these nuances matter
- A factory worker
- A worker in male-dominated industry
- A breadwinner
- An internally displaced person (IDP)
- Only then is she a refugee.

Every time I write about my refugee experience, I experience the power of witness and because of that I am home.

Ode to Refugee Mothers

I have almost no photographs, possessions or mementos to recall the gruesomeness of the days, months and years spent trying to survive a war.

But recently I found a grainy photo in my mother's old photo album, stuck between sticky yellowing pages that made a crackling sound when I flipped through them.

The photo says so much, but it does not encompass most of the reality to which it refers, so I will coat it with some words.

It was taken on 23 April 1999, in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in the dying days of a broken country about to become extinct.

We are about to board a UNHCR chartered bus to take us to Hungary, following a path beaten by European refugees decades before us.

It was a long journey for my Mama to get us to the front of this bus.

A war widow, she fled with us under the cover of darkness five years earlier, leaving everything behind, because when you're a refugee, the only thing you get to carry with you is your blood.

She walked with us for days and nights in search of safety.

Hailed oxen carts, tractors and trucks. Slept with us in ravines, under lorries and bridges. Scaled walls and barbed wire fences. Crawled through forests and minefields. Navigated through borders and bureaucracies. Found shelter in a factory-turned-refugee camp.

At the camp, she got a job milking 300 cows every morning in frigid cold at a nearby dairy.

Due to sanctions, electricity was always out and machines could not be used. She had to milk by hand as I held up a paraffin lamp in one hand lugging a heavy tin pail of milk in the other, pre-dawn silence punctured by sharp ka-ka-ka-ka-ka of anti-aircraft gunfire in the distance.

Backbreaking work that gnawed at the bones of her dignity, devoured the meat, tongued the marrow. Her hands swelling to size of baseball mitts.

It was also my first job: herding cows into bays, trampled and thrashed about, hauling hefty tin pails twice my body weight, covered in manure. Teeth chattering cold. Waist high in snow and mud. I was unpaid. I was out of school. I was eight. I could not watch Mama struggle alone.

When foreign aid left us, her work put bread into our stomachs and arthritis into her knees.

Sometimes the dairy fed their cows with expired candy to bolster milk production. And Mama would bring some back to us at the refugee camp. And we would sit on the floor knobby-kneed and atrophied, devouring dung-coated stale wafers meant for livestock.

And we were grateful. Because in wartime privation, it was the best she could do.

At the airport in Budapest, we were met by a woman who worked for the United Nations. She spoke to us kindly in English and was all winks and bright smiles. Or at least I thought she was kind. I couldn't understand English but I understood smiles.

She handed us tickets for a flight to South Korea, then Sydney and then on to our new lives in Adelaide. I was 12. It was my first plane ride.

When we boarded this bus, no one spoke English and we knew no one in Australia. Entire contents of our lives stuffed in one duffel bag between the four of us: a mother and three sons.

Mama cloaked in her usual black, in chronic bereavement for all our loss, sheathing herself in black grief that reached to her wrists and ankles, clutches our Australian humanitarian visas in her purse along with some faded crinkled photographs so we don't forget the lives we left behind.

Much later in life, I would read about the proverbial migrants arriving in Australia with a single suitcase and the clothes on their backs as a metaphor. For us it was a fact.

I stand next to my twin in matching shoes and puffer jackets absorbing the situation with introspection beyond my 12 years. Mama's one final attempt at forcing us to

Daniel on the left the day he left his homeland

wear matching outfits, which she scavenged from a strewn pile of donated clothes International Red Cross brought to the refugee camp.

She said she wanted us to appear "normal and undamaged for Australians or they might send us back". Like returning damaged products back to sender.

We were children raised in the context of war, as if pieces of matching fabric could conceal a decade of trauma.

Despite our dire circumstances, Mama refused to appear like something coming undone.

An experienced victim of war, she rose up from the floor of the refugee camp that morning, dusted her clothes, washed her hair with a bar of laundry soap, packed the detritus of our lives into this duffel and planted herself like a rock in front of us, and only then did all appear almost tolerable.

Before she could board the bus, an official in army fatigues stopped her. "Who are you? And why are you gifting three soldiers to Australia?" the officer barked at Mama. As boys, we would soon have to serve compulsory military service.

He thought my Mama would be afraid to flee with us. She looked at him and said: "I am woman. I am a mother. Who the hell are you?" Hurriedly, she ushered us into this bus. She would not let us end up like her husband; buried somewhere in an unmarked mass grave.

She didn't "gift three soldiers to Australia' but she did contribute a factory worker who made your Holden cars and now makes your submarines, a small business owner (Malbasa Tiling Ltd, employing locals and rebuilding the northern suburbs of Adelaide) and a union lawyer.

Contributing more to this country than we ever cost.

We should be rejoicing in this photo.

We just won the refugee lottery: a chance at resettlement.

But everyone looks solemn and tired after so much loss: of a home, of possessions, of property, of land, of livestock, of culture, of tradition, of a childhood, of a father, of a husband, of a country and therefore identity.

Our pale faces stare glumly at the camera, our eyes distant and empty uninhibited barely distinguishable as if the camera is trying to erase us, too.

We existed somewhere between life and death, neither claiming us fully.

My sister cannot come with us because immigration laws separate families with a stroke of a pen. We had to leave her in a war zone, heavily pregnant.

I pressed my face against the back window of the bus and watched as she grew smaller and smaller until she faded, then disappeared as the bus turned the corner.

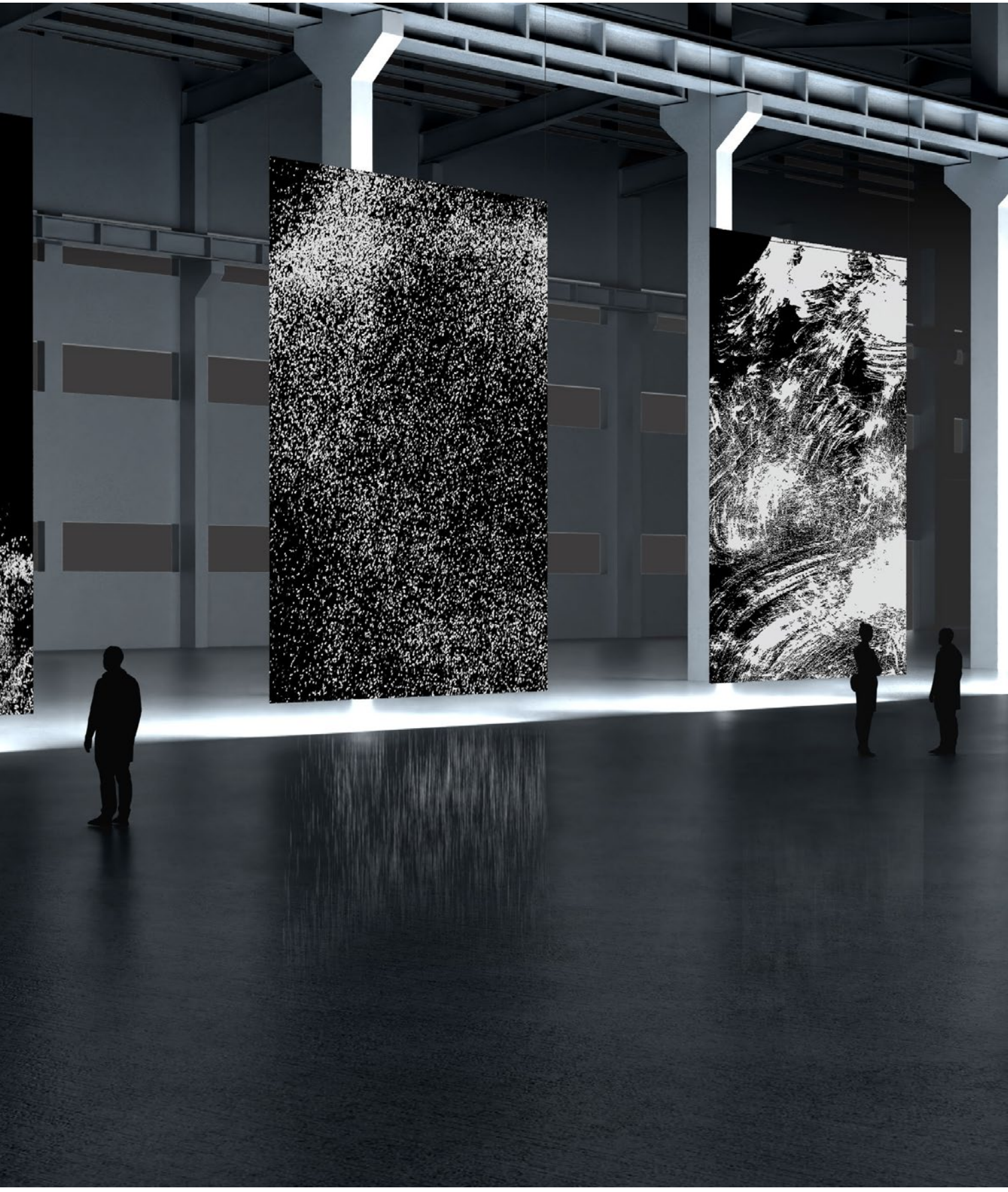
The night before this photo was taken, we spent it somewhere in a cellar emerging to find a city brought to its knees.

Against the faint morning fog, I could still see acrid, grey smoke curling in the air from the skeletons of charred buildings, pockmarked with bullet holes. Then the bus rumbled away, taking us towards a new life. R

PROFILE

Stasis Exhibition by Kenneth Lambert

Stasis aims to be a meaningful examination of the circumstances faced by refugees and asylum seeker youth in Australia. By shedding light on the realities of displacement and prolonged detention endured by vulnerable individuals and their communities, Lambert endeavours to create empathetic experiences from disintegrated interview material. Through a series of data portraits and immersive presentation, the artist encourages viewers to contemplate the human condition through technology.



In collaboration with STARTTS

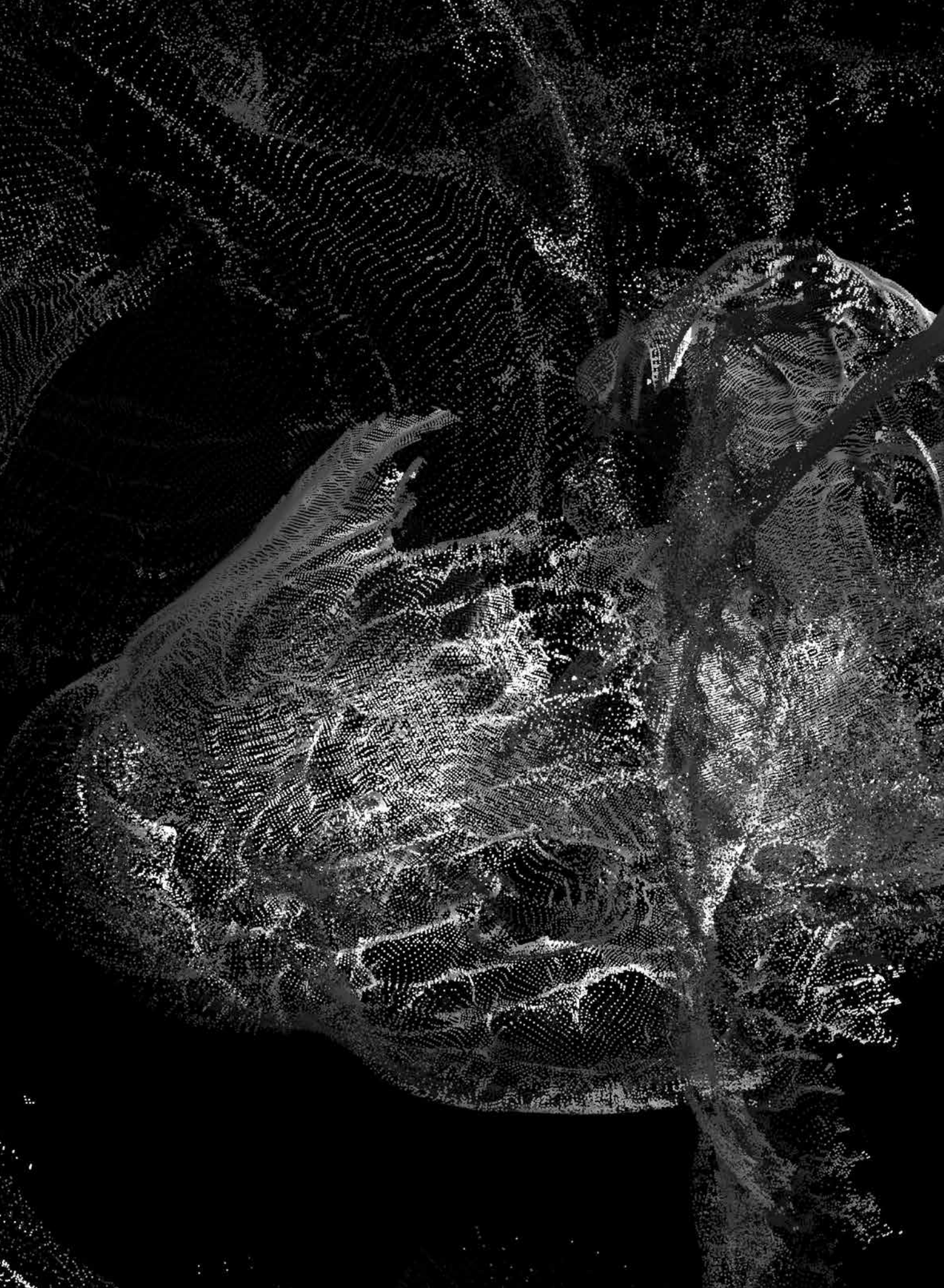
Many STARTTS clients have a strong desire to share their stories and have their stories heard. Unfortunately, all trauma, but especially interpersonal trauma, has the outcome of silence, silencing victims, silencing survivors, silencing their families, their communities and entire nations (reference Judith Herman 1998). These traumatic events are often too painful to articulate, let alone allow into conscious thought. Who benefits from this silencing? Only the perpetrators and those who benefit from their control or power. Unfortunately, survivors are caught up in a disabling tension; they continue to experience unwanted reminders, triggers and nightmares of the very memories they are so desperate to escape. These experiences are even more prevalent for people from a refugee background who have experienced torture and organised collective violence in the effort of perpetrators to destroy their selves and their communities. As a result, psychological interventions that focus on the constructing and reclaiming of the personal narrative have been found to be effective in promoting the recovery of people from a refugee background in several contexts. This process of narration in a safe and supportive environment is particularly powerful. For example, Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET; Schauer, Neuner & Elbert, 2011) has been shown as an effective treatment option for children, young people and adults from a refugee background across several contexts (Hijazi et al., 2014; Lely et al., 2019; Ruf, Schauer, Neuner, Catani, Schauer & Elbert, 2010). The novel War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy involves a powerful scene of this process as the protagonist Pierre narrates the traumatic, violent scenes he witnessed during the French-Russian war to his friends and describes the intense but cathartic impact this has. In the case of NET, it has been found that the aspect of being witnessed and the opportunity for ones story to be used in a capacity of advocacy or legal testimony has compounding benefits for survivors, who feel empowered to stand up for themselves and their community and see justice brought against the perpetrators.

As beneficial as the processes of narration, witnessing, and subsequent advocacy are, they are not accessible to all people from a refugee background. In many communities, there is pressure for survivors to remain silent and not share their stories. The first reason is that most survivors have family or community members who remain in danger either in the country of origin or a transit country. In these cases the danger posed by sharing their story publicly is simply untenable, and despite a strong desire for the World to know and to witness the suffering of their community, it is not safe to share. In other communities, there is deep hurt and shame that vulnerable community members cannot be protected. This is common in cases where perpetrators used sexual violence as a weapon of war and genocide. Even if some community members want to share this story, the perceived shame it would bring to their parents, guardians, and community is unbearable for them and results in their continued silencing.

Stasis, through its artistic processes of creating an abstracted digital image from the interview, allows the participants to share their stories on a significant platform whilst retaining the option of anonymity. They can benefit personally from the process of narration and witnessing, breaking the silence of the trauma whilst also protecting their family and community from danger. It is not the opinion of STARTTS that every survivor of torture and refugee trauma would feel ready to participate in Stasis. However, some likely individuals would benefit from sharing their stories anonymously in this unique art form. Participants may wish to identify themselves, which should also be supported.

Joshua Hall Clinical Psychologist. STARTTS

This project was created in collaboration with STARTTS and supported by Amnesty International and Australia for UNHCR.
Stasis was made possible through the support of Create NSW and the Australia Council for the Arts.



Signal to Noise

Now, more than ever, we are the data that represents us. By employing a form of digital data portraiture as a means to examine the psychological state of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia, Lambert's work provides a powerful commentary on the evolving relationship between human beings and technology, as well as the broader social and national implications of data collection and its weaponisation.

The Stasis exhibition serves as a poignant reminder that, despite the growing tendency to reduce personal identifiers to mere data points, the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees remain resoundingly human. Lambert's work conveys these individuals' emotional and psychological complexities by transforming these "disintegrated" point-cloud interview materials into empathetic visual experiences. Through this process, Stasis challenges viewers to recognise the humanity behind the numbers and statistics – points often dominating discussions of global migration and immigration. As the digital world continues to permeate every aspect of modern life, the need and desire for data anonymity have become increasingly important. This anonymity can offer some asylum seekers and refugees a lifeline, enabling them to share their stories and connect with others without fear of persecution or retaliation. However, this anonymity can also contribute to erasing their individuality, as their narratives become subsumed by the collective digital noise. Lambert's work grapples with this tension, highlighting this delicate balance between preserving personal privacy and ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable are not lost. The signal in the noise is a person.

Abstracted data, given form and volume, provides the perfect medium for Lambert to explore these themes. It anonymises the subject to the human viewer while emphasising the emotional and psychological aspects of human experience. Using binary colours, generating texture, and pattern, Lambert's data portraits convey his subjects' complex stories and emotional states while engaging with the broader issues of data fetishisation and the rise of global surveillance technologies. Merging the personal and the political, pushed through the lens of the game engine processing - Lambert's work encourages viewers to question how technology shapes our understanding of the human condition and our value on the individual.

In the modern era, increasingly defined by the ubiquity of surveillance, Stasis offers a timely reflection on the implications of this phenomenon for individuals and societies alike. By personal interviews and recontextualising these experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in Australia, Lambert's work invites viewers to consider how the growing pervasiveness of data collection, anonymisation, and migration impacts the most vulnerable among us, as well as the extent to which we, as a society, have become complicit in this invasive gaze.

Lambert's Stasis offers a powerful and thought-provoking exploration of the intersections between technology, data, and intimate portraiture in the context of global migration and immigration. By highlighting the complex interplay between human beings as data points, our desire for data anonymity, and the rise of global surveillance technologies, Lambert's abstracted works challenge viewers to reflect on the social implications of data fetishisation and how technology connects and isolates us.

Stasis serves as a timely reminder that, despite the growing reliance on digital communication and surveillance, the human experiences of asylum seekers and refugees remain profoundly personal and deserving of our empathy and understanding.

Travis Rice Curator and Futurist

HUMAN RIGHTS

The Man who didn't survive

On the morning of Monday November 16th 2009 after a year enduring deplorable conditions and sickness in a Russian jail in Moscow, Sergei Magnitsky died in his cell at the hands of his prison guards. He was 37 years old.

Sergei was no high profile political opponent or activist and no threat to the state; he was a tax auditor in a Moscow law firm, Firestone Duncan who was conducting a fraud investigation on behalf of his employer, Hermitage Capital, the largest foreign portfolio investor in Russia since 1999.

Hermitage CEO Bill Browder had expressed concerns about corporate and government misconduct, corruption and criminality that were rife in Russia. Increasingly he became a vocal critic so the Russian government barred him from entering the country in 2005. Hermitage sold its holdings and managed to get the money out of Russia. The profits were so large that Hermitage paid $230 million in capital gains tax to the Russian Taxation office.

But in June 2007, twenty policemen from Russia's Interior Ministry raided Hermitage offices only to find out it had closed its operations and the money had been withdrawn from Russian banks.

The policemen who had a search warrant alleging that a company administered by Heritage had undermined its taxes, stole corporate registration documents (Certificates of Ownership) from Hermitage's investment holding companies. But when they saw the tax payment made to the Russian government they presumably planned a rather sophisticated scheme.

Browder assigned Magnitsky to investigate the purpose of the raid. Soon he uncovered a massive and complex fraud. While the stolen documents were in the custody of the policemen, they had been used to fraudulently re-register Hermitage's holding companies. Then they used those companies to apply for a $230 million tax refund, saying a mistake had been made in the previous year's tax payment as the profits made by those companies were zero. The Taxation Office agreed and awarded them the money in December 2007. According to Browder, it was the largest tax refund in the history of Russia. The funds were presumably divided among the perpetrators.

Magnitsky testified to a Russian commission about the fraud but instead of arresting and charging the perpetrators, the policemen he accused had Magnitsky arrested and thrown in jail. They accused him of committing the massive fraud himself.

Sergei's death generated international attention and rocked US Russia relations. It triggered unofficial enquiries into allegations of fraud, theft and human rights violations in Russia. "When I learnt about his death, I really had only one choice left and that is to go after the people that killed him." Browder told a journalist. "I made a vow to his memory, to his family and to myself that I wasn't going to stop until they faced justice."

Realising there would be no justice in Russia he decided to launch an international campaign to hold those responsible and bring them into account. He

"The virtue of the Magnitsky Act is that it rejects the fiction so often presented at the G-8 and other summits that Russia is a normalising country. Russia remains in substantial part, an oil and gas bloated criminal enterprise,"

— Steve Coll in *The New Yorker.*

travelled the world to convince Western governments to pass the Magnitsky Act. Initially he lobbied for the US Congress. The Act requires the State Department to identify and sanction Russian individuals that it judges responsible for Magnitsky's death, as well as other Russians "responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights."

Those listed would be denied visas to the United States and could be subjected to asset freezes and banking bans in the West. In other words, it would stop beneficiaries from stealing from Russia and spending the money in the West. Russia retaliated by banning American adoptions of Russian children.

Initially the Obama Administration had lobbied against the bill arguing that it already tracked and denied visas to the Russians responsible for Magnitsky's death. Obama didn't want to upset or provoke Russia. But the Act received widespread bipartisan support. Maryland democrat Senator, Ben Cardin introduced a version of the Bill and five republic and democratic senators signed on as co-sponsors. It was finally signed into law in in December 2016.

In 2013 both Magnitsky and Browder were tried in absentia in Russia for tax fraud and sentenced to prison. Interpol rejected Russian request to arrest Browder, saying the case was political. In 2014 the European Parliament voted for sanctions against 30 Russian believed complicit in the Magnitsky case, this was the first time it had taken such action.

"The Magnitsky Act was the smartest approach to sanctions," wrote Vladimir Kara Murza in the *Washington Post*. "It avoided the mistake of targeting Russian citizens at large for actions of a small corrupt clique in the Kremlin and place responsibility directly where it is due. It was the most effective approach."

The Act has received widespread support in other countries as well. It promotes respect for human rights at all levels of government because for the first time it enables countries to apply targeted sanctions on any individual involved in human rights violations, from senior officials to low level officials and even non-government associates. Human Rights Watch says that it functions as deterrent forcing foreign officials at all levels that would use unlawful violence or corruption to consider repercussions from the US and other governments.

The Act also provides incentives to foreign governments to improve their own accountability mechanisms. "By cooperating with the US on Global Magnitsky investigations foreign leaders can show that they will not tolerate human rights abuses in their own country," Human Rights Watch said.

"The virtue of the Magnitsky Act is that it rejects the fiction so often presented at the G-8 and other summits that Russia is a normalising country. Russia remains in substantial part, an oil and gas bloated criminal enterprise," wrote Steve Coll in *The New Yorker.*

Following the US other countries such as Canada, the European Parliament, Estonia, England, Lithuania, Latvia, Gibraltar, Jersey, Kosobo, Czechia, Ukraine and Australia passed their own versions of the Magnitsky Act. Australia used its Magnitsky law for the first time in March 2022 to sanction 39 Russian individuals accused of serious corruption in the death and abuse of Magnitsky.

It is expected that the Act will continue to spread throughout the world as a model for the fight against high level international corruption and human rights violations. The decision of unfreezing the money of Russian oligarchs to redirect it to the construction of Ukraine could be the final triumph of the Magnitsky Act.

There is no doubt Sergei Magnitsky did not die in vain.

EULOGY

Vale Yasmina Nasstasia

Our friend and colleague, Yasmina Nasstasia, passed away this year. She was a gentle and compassionate soul with a deep commitment to healing human hurts.

She joined STARTTS at one of the most challenging times for our organisation, a much smaller one then, but suddenly tasked with supporting Australia's commitment to provide a safe haven to 4000 people displaced by the Kosovo conflict.

We needed good people with excellent clinical skills, commitment and the humanity, adaptability and resourcefulness both to empathise with people who had survived horrendous situations just days before arriving in Sydney, and to turn this empathy into interventions that could help them start their long journey to healing.

Yasmina possessed those qualities in spades, and excelled at this task. She was also able to identify that the gargantuan job STARTTS and other agencies had taken on with Operation Safe Haven was having a big impact on the people tasked with carrying it out. She made it her research topic, and her findings expanded our understanding of the vicarious traumatisation and compassion fatigue that are known occupational hazards for those professionals working to help survivors of traumatic events. Yasmina's work helped us build a more robust and sustainable service. We will be forever in her debt.

Yasmina then became STARTTS' Counsellor/Project Officer in the Hunter region, where she was soon much loved and appreciated by clients and colleagues alike. She organised youth camps, led groups and delivered training, while collaborating with local stakeholders. Her knowledge and practice wisdom was invaluable in establishing STARTTS' services in regional NSW.

Yasmina then left STARTTS to move to Newcastle University, where she was a clinical supervisor in the clinic and coordinated Clinical Psychology placements as part of the post graduate clinical psychology training program. She completed her PhD, focusing on the impact of exercise on depressive symptoms among young people. She also maintained a private practice. Then, just before the COVID-19 pandemic, Yasmina took up an academic position at the Federation University in Ballarat, Victoria. While she enjoyed her academic position, in the longer term, she wanted to return to Newcastle to continue in her private practice and be with her family.

Yasmina fell ill in September 2022, and lost her battle with cancer on February 26 this year.

She is survived by her mother and three sisters and the love of her life, Agatha. Yasmina's and Agi's love was obvious to all, especially in the last few months of Yasmina's life. Agi's gentleness, devotion and care, the way she held Yasmina physically and emotionally and cherished every moment with her, were inspiring. The message of "Love is Love" could not be communicated any more clearly. Many at STARTTS feel grateful to have been Yasmina's friends and colleagues for so many years and will always remain in awe of her and Agi's love and life story.

Yasmina will be remembered as an incredibly gentle, compassionate and generous soul, always ready to offer a helping hand, a listening ear or a comforting touch. Her legacy remains with us at STARTTS, and we will always remember her fondly.

Jorge Aroche & Jasmina Bajraktarevic-Hayward

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