

Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Speech for the UNHCR World Refugee Day - Presentation of Canberra
Refugee Support Scholarships
Tuesday 20 June 2017, 9am to 10am

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. I acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

I would also like to acknowledge the following distinguished guests:

- Ms Natasha Yacoub, representing UNHCR Regional Representative, Mr Thomas Albrecht
- President of Canberra Refugee Support, Mr Douglas Hynd
- Mr Geoff McPherson AM, former President of Canberra Refugee Support and our guest of honour this morning
- Business and community partners from across Canberra, who are sponsors of this wonderful scholarship program
- MLA's who are present this morning
- ABC Radio Canberra presenter, Ms Alex Sloan, our MC
- Ladies and gentlemen

I'm honoured to be here with you all this morning to mark this very special occasion.

On the 20th of June each year, we take the time to observe the significance of the United Nations World Refugee Day.

For all of us, it is an important time to reflect on the plight and lives of refugees and asylum seekers across the world.

We reflect on what they have faced to escape oppression and find freedom and their journey to a new place to call home.

World Refugee Day is also a time to recognise refugees and asylum seekers for their personal successes. They demonstrate how hope of a better life can truly make a difference.

This morning many hopes will become reality through this very special Canberra Refugee Support Scholarship Program.

On behalf of the ACT Government may I offer my gratitude and sincere thanks to the members of Canberra Refugee Support, the Canberra business community, our community partners and the Office for Multicultural Affairs, who all provide sponsorship for the scholarship program.

We thank them for their generosity and willingness to make a financial investment in the education and development of people.

At the same time I would like to note that the day to day work of Canberra Refugee Support – providing advocacy and assistance to new refugees, helping them find new furniture or clothing, or enabling them to navigate what must be a dizzying new life in Canberra – is not government funded. What Canberra Refugee Support does, it does because their members and volunteers believe in being good neighbours.

The scholarships that will be awarded this morning are not just about encouraging new learning and covering the costs of those undertaking study – they are also creating a brighter future for refugees and their families.

The transformative nature of education is something that crosses cultures, languages, faiths – we can all appreciate the joy of learning, and the importance of the skills it gives us.

To all of our scholarship recipients this morning, whether you are very young, teenagers or an adult, I wish you every success.

May we all continue to hope that you find that brighter future,
and a safer life, in Canberra.

Thank you.

Ends.