

Advancing Community Cohesion Conference

**STRENGTHENING THE
ROLE OF REFUGEE
COMMUNITIES IN POLICY
DEVELOPMENT**

Paul Power
CEO, Refugee Council of Australia

21 November 2017

Confronting the problem

The problem

- Refugee policy debate heavily dominated by people with no personal experience of issues
- Refugees regularly invited to share their stories but often excluded from policy discussion

Confronting the problem

The problem

- Refugee policy debate heavily dominated by people with no personal experience of issues
- Refugees regularly invited to share their stories but often excluded from policy discussion

Inclusion of refugee reps changes discussion:

- More respect, accountability and impact
- Greater focus on human impacts of policy
- Different priorities, greater focus on concerns of refugees (rather than NGOs or governments)
- Shifts focus to role of refugees as agents of change

Creating a platform

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has:

- Supported refugee representation in UNHCR NGO Consultations (since 2007) and global resettlement dialogue (since 2012)
- Increased involvement in RCOA Board
- Created Ambassador roles for Refugee Week
- Developed schools program with former refugees as paid speakers
- Involved refugee representatives directly in political advocacy and media-based campaigns
- Brought refugee reps together to discuss joint advocacy, leading to formation of Victorian and NSW Refugee Communities Advocacy Networks
- Pushed for inclusion in DIBP-NGO dialogue
- Supporting development of international network of refugee-led networks

Key messages to NGOs

- The 400,000+ Australians of refugee background can no longer be excluded from policy debate
- Advocacy which includes refugee representatives is smarter, more engaging, more credible and more effective
- NGOs and campaigners cannot assume that their priorities are the same as those of refugee communities
- Let's cut the patronising nonsense about 'capacity building' and focus on real opportunities for advocacy and leadership
- The days of hogging the microphone are over