



## African Think Tank Inc.

WORKING WITH VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY

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### **ATT Media release**

#### **Blaming a grieving family and Community for African refugee intake?**

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ATT registers its extreme concern at the statements attributed to Immigration Minister Kevin Andrews, as published in *The Age* of 2/10/07 (*Fewer Africans to Come Here*). ATT also condemns the inflammatory tone and inaccuracy of much media coverage on African issues, as instanced by journalist Jewel Topsfield in *Behind the scenes on Sudanese refugees*' (*The Age*, 2/10/07).

Publishing negative, unsubstantiated claims about racially distinct groups inevitably heightens the risk to individuals, including children at school, of being gratuitously targeted for racist violence, and it sets in train serious problems of hostility and exclusion in daily life. Such singling out and denigration of community groups also fractures harmony within the Australian community, deter employers from taking on skilled and capable people of that ethnicity and affects teachers and students at school treating refugee children.

Despite repeated public allegations that African migrants are not integrating quickly enough, Minister Andrews has never provided evidence. The media has apparently not requested or not been given evidence. The Minister's amorphous assertion that Africans don't seem to be settling and adjusting into the Australian way of life (*The Age*, 2/10/07) would fail basic tests for verifiable truth in the scientific tradition and in law. Yet, this unsubstantiated claim underwrites policy decisions that are literally life and death issues because it is being used to justify cuts to African immigration, particularly from Sudan.

A Minister for Immigration has the responsibility to promote unity and harmony, and to use his considerable power to ensure that high standards of equity and respect are modelled and encouraged across the society.

ATT views with great concern the way that the death of Liep Gony has been used as a trigger by the media and the Minister for Immigration to criticize African communities as if those communities are to blame when one of their

beloved members is murdered. The injustice of this is shattering to refugees who have entrusted to Australia for a fair, mutually respecting and humane system.

The questions which must be answered are:

1. What is the definition of integration?
2. How do we know that integration of any individual or group has occurred?
3. How do we define and measure settling? into the Australian way of life, and how do we know that it has happened?
4. Where are the data on the integration rates of other migrant and refugee groups, relative to which the progress of the Africans can be measured?
5. A brief scan of media records indicates European and Asian migrant and refugee groups experienced more profound problems than have accompanied African migration, and that these were long-term across many years or decades. As Africans have been here in large numbers for only about 5 years, why are they being singled out for intense public scrutiny which suggests that, contrary to factual evidence, they have an inferior record of integration? and lawfulness relative to other migrant groups? Citing crime statistics, Constable James Watson of Victoria Police cites crime statistics showing that Sudanese youth are well down the list on relative law breaking activities (The Australian, 28/9/07). Why do Sudanese youth not receive credit for this, and why are they subject to unrelenting media claims that they lack lawful behaviour?

Media commentary has consistently run down African refugees and migrants, creating powerful barriers to integration by deterring the mainstream from welcoming and accepting the newly arrived communities, for which blame is then wrongfully shifted to the Africans.

When the quality press prints sub-headings such as? *Are the Sudanese really so bad?* (by Jewel Topsfield 2/10/07), and answers this prejudicial and leading question with statements about Sudanese being traumatized by war, and lacking electricity in their homeland, it becomes seriously questionable whether media commentators actually conceptually comprehend the basic tenets of what a refugee is.

It is not a crime to be born into a war and to be traumatized! Refugees would not be refugees if they had not experienced such tragedy in their homelands. In consistently linking any crime or misdemeanour involving Africans to race, the media is creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of talking down the community, particularly its young, while simultaneously denying credit where it is due. The Sudanese Lost Boys held an Appreciation Day in 2007 to thank the Australian community for its compassion. All the major media, including The Age and the Herald Sun, were invited. None attended. Yet, all major media have carried strongly negative, sensationalised stories about Africans even when there is a lack of evidence. Even human interest stories about Africans focus on deficits, always emphasizing what Africans don't have, can't do, have suffered and so, failing to convey the many positive elements and cultural assets that these people bring.

There could not be a better way to create a second-class, alienated group of Australians than to subject them to such unfair and unreasonable, and ultimately, dehumanizing treatment. The loss of market share of the traditional media to digital and the internet may be sponsoring desperation for sensationalized, newsworthy stories on topics such as race, but Australia is departing from its traditions as the compassionate country of the fair go if this grab for market share is to happen at the expense of our most vulnerable groups and their young.

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