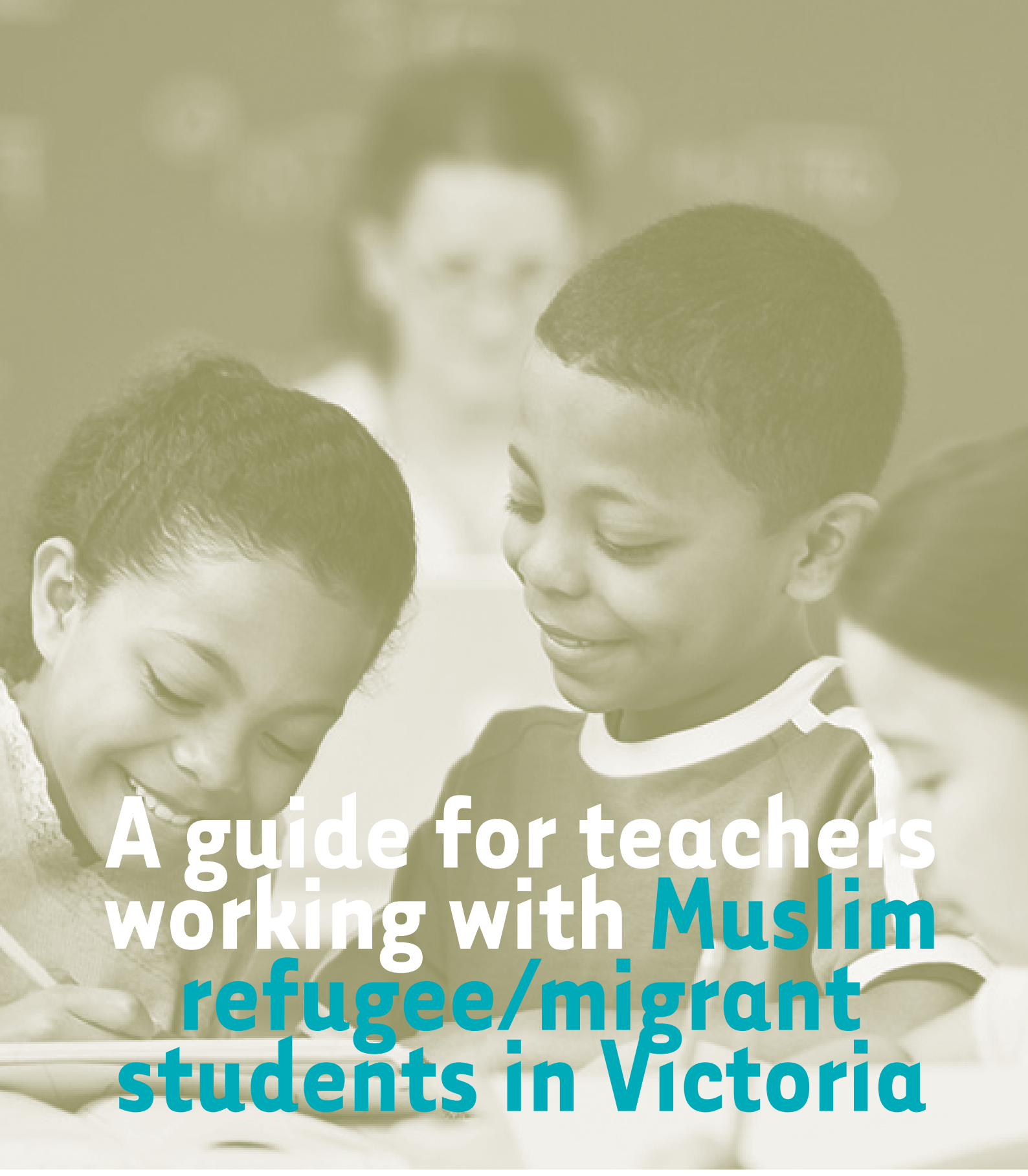

A guide for teachers working with Muslim refugee/migrant students in Victoria

Developed by the **Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights**

Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights
Equality without Exception

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Introduction to Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights

The Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights (AMWCHR) is a community welfare organisation established and managed by Muslim women for Muslim women. The Centre was established in 1991, as a non-religious organisation reflecting the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and sectarian diversity of Muslim women living in the state of Victoria.

The AMWCHR is founded on the belief that meaningful change in the status of Muslim women is to be achieved through the improved situation of Muslim women individually and building their capacity collectively. To this end, the Centre aims to facilitate Muslim women's full participation and integration into Australian society by:

- developing and delivering programs and services to meet the needs of Muslim women in a manner consistent with their values and that of their community;
- empowering Muslim women through information, skill development, support and advocacy;
- promoting social justice, access and equity in the provision of services to Muslim women,
- contributing to the development of knowledge about Muslims at all levels of government, amongst professionals and within the general community;
- promoting the complexity and diversity of Muslim women's identities, and building an interconnectedness between women through increased awareness of their common and diverse challenges;
- promoting women's right to equality, justice, and self determination as envisaged by Islam; and
- working to eliminate discrimination against Muslim women both within their community and in the broader social, economic and political spheres of Australia

The AMWCHR's work has been well recognised by various levels of government, the service system and by the community. Current work priorities include:

- settlement of newly arrived women into Victoria
- poverty and housing
- violence against Muslim women
- capacity building and leadership development
- education and training
- economic participation

The AMWCHR works toward these priorities by:

- providing a generalist and housing support service;
- undertaking a community education campaign on citizenship and Australian law;
- providing parenting education sessions;
- leadership development of Muslim women (3 year community education campaign);
- identity development and communication skill development among young women;
- research into school retention rates among young Arab and Muslim young women;
- working against racial, religious and gender based crimes and vilification against Muslim women; and
- lobbying and advocacy on behalf of Muslim women.

Contents

Islam and Muslims

the global Muslim population is highly diverse – in terms of language, nationality, socioeconomic status, cultural practices and to an extent, even in terms of religious practices, interpretations and beliefs. Every country has its own history and culture which mediates its practice of Islam; this varies in time and is subject to the political, social and economic changes within the country and sometimes globally. Because of this, it is important to establish the specific geographic and sectarian contexts of behaviour and beliefs rather than referring generally to them as "Islamic".

What may be considered Islamic in one Muslim context may be considered alien in another. This renders overarching generalisations about 'the Muslim community', especially the Muslim diaspora, both unrealistic and impractical. However, there are some basic beliefs and practices that are common to all or most Muslim cultures, although differences in the specifics still exist. This section aims to provide a brief overview of these basic, common practices as well as to outline some of the areas where there are key differences.

Origins/History of Islam

It is believed that Islam was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (whose name will be followed by the initials PBUH, standing for "Peace Be Upon Him", a common blessing given to him by Muslims) just outside the city of Mecca (or Makkah), which is part of the modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia, around AD 610. Islam has its lineage in Judaism and Christianity. It therefore acknowledges and pays respect to all of the prophets of the Old Testament and names Jesus as the most beloved of the prophets.

Muslims believe that the message given to Muhammad is not a new revelation but rather one that has been revealed progressively over time, that commenced with the Jews, continued to the Christians and finally to the Muslims. Jews and Christians are described as "People of the Book" in the Qur'an because they are considered recipients of the same revelation of the One God.

Islam's relationship with Judaism and Christianity is complex; on one hand it reiterates and supports many of the beliefs and practices of both religions, on the other it introduces new doctrines and significantly different practices sometimes leading to tensions with its predecessor. Nevertheless, the similarities between the monotheistic faiths surpass their differences.

Prophethood

According to Islamic belief, God revealed his message for mankind to Muhammad (c. 570–632) and other prophets, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus (Peace be Upon Them). It is an article of faith among the vast majority of Muslims that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is the final prophet chosen and sent by God to mankind as His messenger.

It was at the age of 40, while meditating in a cave called Hira, just outside Mecca, that Muhammad (PBUH) is said to have received his first revelation from God, announced to him by the archangel Jibril (or Gabriel). This event is dated around AD 610. Although Islam believes in a line of prophets beginning with Adam, the first man, it did

not adopt from Christianity the belief that Jesus was the son of God because Muslims believe that God is indivisible.

Muslims believe Muhammad (PBUH) was mortal and while some miraculous events took place in his life, they are not generally attributed to him. Muhammad (PBUH) is not only important as the source of Qur'anic revelation, but also as the source of many of the cultural and religious practices of Muslims today. In the early days, the history of the Prophet's (PBUH) life, his behaviour, deeds and sayings were memorised by his companions and passed on orally, forming the foundation for the sunna, the behaviour of the Prophet (PBUH) (see section 2.3).

The Qur'an

The Qur'an is the holy scripture of Islam. It comprises the complete collection of revelations by God to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), beginning around AD 610 and ending with Muhammad's (PBUH) death in AD 632. The word Qur'an literally means "that which is recited", because the revelations received by Muhammad (PBUH) were repeated verbatim by those around him.

Although there are differing views, many Muslims believe the Qur'an was finally put into written form around AD 650. The Qur'an contains 114 chapters (or surahs) written in Arabic, using both allegorical and prescriptive approaches to revelation. Its structure is not chronological nor is it ordered according to the importance or the theme of revelations. As with other religions, there are various approaches to the interpretations of the text.THE Qur'an is the holy scripture of Islam. It comprises the complete collection of revelations by God to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), beginning around AD 610 and ending with Muhammad's death in AD 632.

The five pillars

The key duties required of Muslims form the five pillars of Islam. Although different levels of importance may be placed on them by Muslim individuals and communities, most will recognise them as duties of a Muslim:

- **Bearing witness to the oneness of God** (Tauheed) and to Muhammad being his messenger – this denotes the centrality, unity and indivisibility of God
- **Prayer** (Salat) – all Muslims who have attained puberty are required to perform prayers in a prescribed manner five times each day
- **Almsgiving** (Zakat) – this is an obligatory religious tax, generally estimated at 2.5% of a Muslim's annual savings and is to be used to assist the poor and needy
- **Fasting** (Sawm) – all Muslims who have reached puberty and whose health permits (e.g. women who are lactating, menstruating or pregnant are exempt from fasting, as are travellers) are required to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse from dawn to dusk in Ramadan, the ninth month of the lunar year
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca** (Hajj) – in the 12th month of the lunar calendar all Muslims are required to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime if they are physically and financially able to

do so. Pilgrims participate in special rites held there during the 12th month of the lunar calendar.

Events and festivals

There are many events and festivals that Muslims celebrate based on the Islamic lunar calendar, founded in AD 622 when Muhammad and his followers escaped from Mecca to the city that became known as Medina. This event is called the Hijra (migration) and so the calendar is called Hijri and is often denoted by the initials AH (Anno Hegirae, Latin for "years of the Hijra").

The Islamic lunar calendar is approximately 11 days shorter than the Gregorian solar calendar, which is why the Gregorian dates for Islamic festivals move by roughly that amount each year. The following are common celebrations for most Muslims:

- **Ramadan** – The month of fasting in which the Qur'an was originally revealed. Ramadan is a very festive time in many Muslim countries, especially at dusk, when the fast is broken. In some countries, daily requirements such as work are altered to ease the burden of fasting from dawn to dusk. In Western countries, some Muslims may find fasting more difficult and isolating as it is not supported by the social system.
- **Eid ul Fitr** – The completion of the period of fasting is marked by Eid ul-Fitr (the festival of breaking the fast) and is traditionally announced at the sighting of the new moon. During this time, there is celebration and gifts of new clothes or money are given to children. In some Muslim communities, the celebration continues over a period of two or three days.
- **Eid al-Adha** – Eid al-Adha, or the festival of sacrifice, symbolises Abraham's reprieve from sacrificing his son to God. This festival occurs at the end of Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and Muslims typically celebrate by slaughtering either a goat, cow or sheep and donating food to those who cannot afford to eat well and undertaking other charitable acts.
- **Ashura** – Ashura is an important historical date for all Muslims, but is commemorated mainly by Shias. Ashura falls on the 10th day of Muharram (the first month of the Islamic calendar), marking the day on which the massacre of many important members of the Prophet's (PBUH) family, and particularly his grandson, Hussein, occurred. Shias typically hold mass processions to remember and sometimes re-enact the brutal killings, which can involve penitential rites such as self-flagellation. The whole month is considered important, but the first 10 days, during which the massacre occurred, are the most significant. Some Sunni's commemorate Ashura by fasting on the day.
- **Eid Milad al-Nabi** – The Prophet's (PBUH) birthday falls on the eve of the 12th day of Rabi' al-Awwal, the third month of the Islamic calendar.
- **Laylat al-Qadr** – Lailat al-Qadr, often translated into night of greatness, commemorates the night in which the Qur'an was revealed in its entirety to the Prophet (PBUH). This night is considered by many to be one of the holiest nights of Ramadan. The precise date of this

event is unknown, but Muslims generally observe the last 10 days of Ramadan by additional pray, especially at night.

Food and drink

Islam places certain restriction on the consumption of certain food and drink. It is generally believed by Muslims that these restrictions are based on the harm that certain foods may cause to the body. Foods that are specifically prohibited (haram) are: meat from a swine in all its forms, including its fat; intoxicants (alcohol, drugs).

Some Muslims will even avoid medicines containing alcohol if they can; the flesh, offal, fat and other by products of animals that have died other than at the hand of a Muslim or using Islamic rites, or that are strangled or have been slaughtered through beating; faeces and urine, placental tissue, blood. For food to be halal (allowed), all the raw materials and ingredients used must also be halal; halal animals must be slaughtered according to Islamic rites; and the act must be performed by a mentally sound Muslim who has severed the blood and respiratory channels of the animal, using a very sharp cutting tool such as knife.

Sects

The major sectarian division in Islam is that between the Sunnis and Shias. Sunnis form about 85% of the global Muslim population and Shias (or Shiites) most of the remaining 15%. The Sunnis (who call themselves "the people of tradition and community") are often considered to be the mainstream in Islam, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the four Caliphs (or deputies, successors to Prophet Muhammad as rulers of the Muslim community) after his death.

The Shias (who call themselves "the people of the house"), on the other hand, are often seen as diverging from the mainstream. It would be more correct to say that both groups formed because of Ali, Muhammad's son-inlaw and cousin, and the question of his right to succeed the Prophet (PBUH) as leader. Later, especially around the time of Uthman (or Osman)'s caliphate, political differences arose, leading to the first major civil war between Muslims.

Over time, these splits have expanded into social, political and theological differences. The main beliefs and principles of Islam remain the same in both streams. Over the years, further sub-sects have developed within these two overarching sects, such as the Ismailis within the Shia sect. It is difficult to do justice to the breadth of sectarian differences within Islam and their individual practices. The majority of Muslims in Australia are Sunni, but there are also significant populations belonging to the Shia, Alawi, Alevi, Ismaili, Druze, Bohra and Ahmedi sects.

The diversity that now exists extends not only to theological differences but also to cultural ones. It is important to note that some minority Islamic sects have faced substantial persecution from mainstream Islam in Muslim countries. As a result, some sects do not always identify themselves with mainstream Muslims or Islam.

SimilarImany mainstream Muslims do not accept some of these groups as Muslim. In Pakistan, for example; the government has pronounced the Ahmedis non-Muslims, despite the fact that Ahmedis themselves

identify as Muslims. Significant Shia minorities exist in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Saudi Arabia. Shias

Leadership

Islam does not have a hierarchy of clergy nor any intermediaries between God and the individual, as in some other faiths. There is no overarching authority to establish or proscribe religious practices or interpretations of scripture across social, cultural, national and sectarian divides.

An imam is a person who leads the congregation in prayer. He is not a priest. There is no ordination and no sacraments or rites which only a religiously qualified person can perform. Imams may be married and have families like any other Muslim. In theory, any respectable person with sufficient religious knowledge can act as an imam and in cases where a mosque is left without a formally appointed imam, a member of the congregation can fulfil the function as necessary.

Imams tend to be people who have undertaken religious studies, at an Islamic university such as al-Azhar in Egypt. In some Muslim countries, imams and other mosque officials are appointed, paid and supervised by the government and may be expected to support the government in its policies. This is increasingly the case in countries where governments define themselves as Islamic.

In other countries, religious scholars may gain supreme political power and dictate not only the moral and religious code of the country but also select who can stand for elections and how government is to operate. In many countries, imams are appointed by local mosque committees which pay their salary, and they have no relationship to the operations of the state. In sects that do not have a tradition of attending mosques, imams operate as teachers and counsellors and live off donations from their community.

In Australia, imams frequently find themselves called upon to act as community counsellors and arbiters on questions of religious law, community representatives and welfare officers as well as prayer leaders. At times, this has caused significant problems for Muslim communities and for imams, because they are forced to respond to issues for which there is no religious precedent or for which they do not possess expertise.

There is no official training institute for imams in Australia and no system to regulate the teachings and conduct of imams. While the absence of a hierarchy is one of the liberating aspects of Islam, it also means different imams may preach widely varying forms and interpretations of the faith, and this can prove bewildering for anyone trying to understand Islam in Australia, much less globally. This also means that trying to find a definitive 'answer' to a complex social problem is not realistic. At times it has also created conflict among Muslims.

Muslims have developed various models and traditions on the role of imams in an increasingly complex world of diaspora communities and Islamic states. In Australia, where Muslims come from a multitude of countries and religious traditions, there has not been agreement

among the Muslim population as to what role imams will play and if a formal Islamic structure will represent Muslims.

Generally, imams have provided some form of leadership for their respective ethnic/sectarian communities or their immediate geographical community. In 1990 the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils chose Sheikh Taj al-Din al-Hilali as the Mufti of Australia to federally represent all Muslims. However, many state Islamic organisations and individual Muslims disputed the development of such a position on theological, cultural and political grounds. The nature of the opposition is quite complex, but it is important to note that at this time many Muslims in Australia do not support the establishment of a formal overarching Islamic figurehead.

Islam and women

The issue of women's role, status and rights of women in Islam is one of the most contested areas of interpretation among Muslims. There are a great number of verses within the Quran that strongly promote the equality and good treatment of women, but there are also some verses may be interpreted as situating women as dependent on and possibly inferior to men. depending on the how these verses are interpreted. This complexity and controversy emerges from a number of factors: the context of Islam's revelation; the fact that women occupied a marginal position in 7th century Arabia; and that the language of the Qur'an is classical Arabic which is no longer in use today.

Women's rights

Many verses of the Qur'an address both men and women, providing a strong sense of presence to women who had had no voice in Arab society prior to Islam's revelation. In addition, the Qur'an explicitly reproaches those who mistreat women and instructs men time and time again to treat all women with dignity, respect, kindness and justice. The definition of Islam, and therefore the status of women, have varied considerably historically and continues to be subject to political, social and economic change.

Every country has its own history and culture which mediates its practice of Islam, this varies in time and is subject to the political, social and economic changes within the country and sometimes globally. Because of this, it is important to establish the specific geographic and sectarian contexts of women's situation and oppression rather than referring generally to them as "Islamic".

What may be considered Islamic in one Muslim context may be totally unheard of in another. In many places and within many communities, women's rights have been greatly eroded over time and today many women do not enjoy the basic rights awarded to them by Islam as more and more misogynistic interpretations of the faith have taken hold.

Women's fundamental rights to respect, dignity and protection have been clearly laid out in the Qur'an. They also have the right to choose their husbands, reject any suitors; to not be married without their consent and/or before the prescribed age (which varies according to culture, country and Islamic school of law); the right to dowry that is theirs to use as they wish;

and the right to place conditions in their marriage contracts. Religiously, Muslim women are not required to take their husbands' names, although the colonial influence in many Muslim countries has resulted in this Western practice being adopted widely.

The role of the mother is encouraged and greatly respected for women. One of the most famous sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is "Heaven lies under the feet of the mother". The importance attributed to mothers is further demonstrated in Islamic custody law.

Where divorce proceedings involve what are deemed young children, usually seven and under for boys and nine and under for girls (though this may vary significantly across cultures), the mother has the right to full custody. After this, the father has the right to custody if he so desires. If the children are in their teens, they have the right to decide who they wish to live with.

Whichever parent the children are living with, visitation rights are granted to the other parent. Fathers remain financially responsible for their children throughout, even if the mother should remarry. The importance attached to motherhood is taken by some Muslims to mean that women belong solely in the home and that their only meaningful responsibility is to take care of their families. This interpretation has no basis in the Qur'an. In fact, the Qur'an requires both men and women to pursue knowledge and contribute towards the creation of a just society.

In In Islamic law, women also have the right to divorce no matter which party initiates it. However, legally acceptable grounds for divorce vary considerably across cultures, sects and legal schools. Generally, a woman may apply for divorce on a number of grounds and if her case is considered valid by the court she is granted a divorce. If insufficient grounds exist as deemed by the Courts, but the woman still wishes to divorce her husband, she may initiate divorce proceedings under the category known as khul or khula (this is not available in all Muslim countries).

Many Muslim countries and communities continue to withhold women's right to divorce, so that many women cannot be religiously or legally divorced without their husband's consent. If a woman includes the right to divorce in her marriage contract, then she can divorce her husband without recourse to the courts. However in Muslim communities, it has been far more culturally acceptable and easier for men to initiate divorce proceedings than women for whom it is often fraught with difficulties.

In several passages of the Qur'an, Muslims are counselled and reminded of their obligation to gain knowledge. Reliable sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) support the importance of education for men and women. In addition, there are several examples in Islamic history of women who were educated and even scholars, and who were well known and respected for this knowledge and their ability to impart it to others. Islam's unambiguous support for education has been important to efforts to improve national literacy levels in many countries.

In addition, married or single, a Muslim woman has the right to earn her own money, own property and run a business. There is no injunction forbidding or restricting women from being employed. It is important

to note that Islam states that the space of the home belongs to women, not that women belong to the space of the home. As a clear example of this right, the Prophet's (PBUH) first wife, Khadija, owned and ran her own business and before their marriage, the Prophet (PBUH) was one of her employees for many years. In Islam, a woman's possessions before marriage do not automatically transfer to her husband. She has the right to independent ownership and full rights over all money she earns herself, including the dowry she receives upon marriage.

A Muslim woman also has the right to inheritance, although her share is half that of any brothers she may have. Islamic scholars have argued that this distinction reflects the social and economic circumstances of the early Muslim period. Generally, only men are obliged to provide for their natal families as well as their wives and children, whereas women may use their money as they please. Even when a woman is financially better off than her husband, technically, it is he who must provide for her and the family.

Although women's political participation has been ignored by many historians, Islamic history demonstrates that Muslim women were encouraged to participate politically during the time of the Prophet (PBUH), that many undertook various forms of political activism with the sanction of Islam. Muslim women's right to vote and elect their leaders is demonstrated by the fact that the Prophet (PBUH) was instructed in the Qur'an to receive pledges of allegiance from the women before he became the accepted leader of the Muslims. Women were also consulted on who should become leader of the Muslims after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). The Qur'an does not mention maleness as a criterion for people to become judges or leaders; yet in many Muslim-majority and/or Islamic countries this is a controversial issue. There is much diversity in women's political participation in Muslim-majority countries. In some Muslim-majority countries women attained the full franchise early in the nation's development (e.g. Turkey) while others did not grant this right until much later (e.g. Kuwait).

Some Muslim-majority countries have no women as ministers (e.g. Saudi Arabia), some do not have any women in their parliaments either. On the other hand, other Muslim-majority countries (e.g. Tunisia, Eritrea and Pakistan) have comparable numbers of women in their parliaments to many Western nations. Both Pakistan and Turkey have had women prime ministers.

Despite these rights, however, parts of Islamic law (the Shariah) contain key gender differences which are seen as discriminatory: a woman's inheritance is half of her brother's; a man is obliged to financially support the family, while a woman does so only by choice; a man can divorce his wife by pronouncing it three times, while a woman must go to court; a man can, technically, take four wives; a woman cannot have more than one husband at a time; and when giving evidence on financial matters in court, one man is considered equal to two women in testimony.

There are four explanations given by scholars for the gender differences that are apparent. The first, based on a literal and/

or conservative interpretation of the Qur'an, is that these differences exist because women are considered inferior to men. This belief is often based on a particular verse of the Qur'an which has been interpreted to mean that men are superior to women as 'they have been given more'. Other scholars vehemently reject these translations and strongly challenge the notion that Islam attributes a superior status to men over women.

These scholars assert that the 'given more' refers only to physical strength or financial means/resources, which only reflects the gender dynamic of Arabia at that time which gave men the responsibility of physically protecting and providing food, shelter and clothing for their families. In their view this does not in any way extend to superiority or advantage over women simply because they are male.

The second explanation holds that Islam while women are equal to men, they are different and that the differences in the rights accorded to them reflect this. Thus, for example, a woman's inheritance is half that of her male sibling, this is because women are not religiously obliged to financially support their families and they are not considered well suited to this responsibility as their male counterparts.

A third argument is based on the belief that the interpretations of scripture have from the very beginning been male oriented and male-dominated, and therefore incorrect in relation to women. The fourth argument contends that those verses are epoch-specific, reflecting only the socio-political wisdom, context and gender relations of the time, and that that as social conditions have changed, so should Muslims' approaches to these matters.

As with Western feminism, Muslim women have been actively involved in analysing the power relations and structures that dominate their lives. Early Islam witnessed the installation of a broad range of human rights for women Muslim which were eroded soon after the death of the Prophet (PBUH), when the existing patriarchal structures of the time were reasserted.

This demolition of rights is the foundation from which Muslim women legitimise their push for reform in Islamic practice. There is now a growing movement of Muslim women willing to speak out and demand the rights given to them by Islam both at an individual and collective level. This movement seeks not only to re-establish rights already awarded in the early Islamic period but also to establish those rights as the foundation from which other rights can develop to facilitate women's progress in current societies.

Due to the failure over time of Islamic leaders, governments and individual men to guarantee women these rights and to adhere to the original principles of Islam, more and more Muslim women are establishing themselves as Islamic scholars, Islamic feminists and leaders in their communities.

Modesty and segregation

Islam emphasises developing a sense of balance, moderation and control in relation to basic human drives and desires. Modesty is part of this process and both men and women are prescribed to be modest in behaviour, thought and

physical appearance, especially regarding the opposite gender. Many Muslim women understand sexual modesty as being aimed at avoiding sexual objectification and sexual harassment.

The extent to which this modesty manifests in Muslim's style of dress and its form depends on a number of factors such as personal choice and interpretation, socio-political context, the traditions of various families, communities and sects and laws. Some Muslims believe that attire designed to conceal all or certain parts of the female body is recommended by Islam as a means of practicing modesty for women. In addition to this, veiling has come to represent for some women a commitment to God and Islam beyond the required prescription for modesty. Other Muslims do not believe that in modern society veiling is the only path to modesty nor that it is necessary to be a believing Muslim.

The hijab (head scarf covering at least the hair) is the most commonly visible expression. Although there are various cultural appropriations of the hijab, its literal meaning is 'curtain' or 'barrier', and was originally used in the home of the Prophet (PBUH) to protect the privacy of the female residents there from the constant stream of visitors. In another part of the Qur'an, the Prophet's (PBUH) wives were also advised to cover their heads when in public so that they could be recognised as the Prophet's (PBUH) wives and thus, protected from harassment by other men.

This was an important demarcation because in the Prophet's (PBUH) time, many women lived in slavery and were, thus considered sexual property by men. Another verse in the Qur'an asks Muslim women to pull their existing head coverings (since the covering of the head was a pre-Islamic practice) over their chests. Some Muslims interpret this verse to mean that Muslim women were asked to extend the head covering over their chests, while others understand it as asking women to start covering their chests instead of their heads.

Other less common forms of veiling are:

- **Chador** – long shawl which completely covers women's hair and body,
- **Nikaab**- veil that also covers all or part of the face,
- **Burqa** – all encompassing robe that covers the head, face and body down to the ankle.
- **Abaya** – Robe covering the whole body except the face (although it may be accompanied by a separate scarf to cover the face).

In Australia, dress code remains a matter of choice for many Muslim women but it is difficult to draw conclusions about Muslim women around the world. The hijab has become a ready political symbol and the question of whether or not women should be allowed to wear it has become a highly politicised issue rather than a matter of personal choice.

In many anti-colonial countries with strong revivalist groups and movements, particularly in some Middle Eastern and North African countries such as Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Iran, various forms of veiling are mandatory. On the other hand, in some Western or Muslim countries, such as Turkey, Tunisia and France laws exist to curb the use of the hijab in public offices and even schools. In addition, some

individual families and groups may also encourage, pressurise or force women to dress in certain ways. The question of the use of veiling to oppress women therefore is difficult to answer without an analysis of the context in which Muslim women live.

The concept of segregation in Islam has evolved from notions of modesty and the restriction on placed on sexual relations outside of marriage. However, in many Muslim communities it has become a practice at almost every level of interaction even though the Qur'an, hadiths and many historical facts clearly indicate that gender segregation did not exist during the Prophet's (PBUH) time. For example, one of his own wives, Khadija was a well-known businesswoman, requiring her to interact with many men outside her own family.

In addition, one of his other wives, Ayesha is said to have participated in council meetings and in the community generally. Many women of the time attended prayers and religious meetings together with men and many fought side by side with men during wars. Further, it is argued by many scholars that if Islam had meant for there to be gender segregation, it would not have urged them both to be modest in front of one another.

This is further reflected during Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) where women perform all the rites side by side with men. To what extent segregation is adhered to depends largely on individuals, families, communities and countries. In Australia, this practice is not common, however the Islamic schools and colleges will usually segregate boys and girls within the same classroom.

Violence against women and Islam

Today, like women around the world, Muslim women experience various forms of gender-based violence, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, genital mutilation, harassment, etc. Although feminist wisdom suggests that domestic violence occurs at comparable levels across all societies, it is commonly assumed that violence against women is more acceptable in Islamic societies.

Muslims and non-Muslims like have used one verse from Qur'an to support the belief that violence against women is at least acceptable if only as a last resort in Islam. However, this verse is highly contested by many religious scholars, Islamic feminists and Muslim activists, first because of differing translations of the word for "hit" or "tap"; second, because time and again, the Qur'an urges harmony, love and respect between a husband and wife; in fact many sayings attributed to the Prophet (PBUH) deal directly with the issue of domestic violence and clearly instruct men to treat their wives with love and to not inflict any violence on them; third, the verse, even when read literally talks about tapping women with a miswaak (twig used as a toothbrush at the time) as a last resort to resolving a conflict, which is seen by many as symbolic gesture – nowhere does the Qur'an suggest beating, hurting or inflicting injury of any kind.

Unlike many other issues, the majority of Muslims do not subscribe to the view that Islam promotes or condones domestic violence. In view of this, the process of working and advocating against violence against women has been a fairly straightforward process from the Islamic

perspective and Muslim women activists and reformers have used Islam in this regard.

There are Muslims, however, who view domestic violence as a private matter and believe that for the sake of preserving the marriage and family, both considered important institutions in Islam, a degree of tolerance should be exercised on the part of women, thus complicating service and societal responses to families experiencing violence.

The response to violence against women varies considerably across the Islamic world with some countries tolerating domestic abuse, while others have enshrined in law men's right to violence against women. Other countries such as Tunisia and Egypt have actively legislated to prevent and punish domestic violence offenders.

Children and families in Islam and Muslim communities

Children

Like most other religions, Islam sees procreation as the basis for marriage. Love, affection and caring for children play a crucial role in Islam. Hence, the Qur'an refers repeatedly to the protection of children, particularly those who are orphans because this was a common occurrence, as was the fostering of children, in that society at the time. In the Qur'an, children are seen as a vulnerable group, who require additional care and protection by adults and society.

The Prophet (PBUH) was especially kind and attentive to children; he is even known to have let his granddaughter sit on his shoulders while he prayed. Even in the 7th Century, the Prophet was able to read the emotional and psychological needs of a child. This is recounted in a story of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sitting with a child in his lap. The child urinated over the Prophet Muhammad and the father immediately scolded the child.

Muhammad restrained the father and advised him: "This is not a big issue. My clothes can be washed. But be careful with how you treat the child. What can restore his self-esteem after you have dealt with him in public like this?" Separate from the above prescription very little is said about children in Islam that reflects our understanding of childhood today. In 7th Century Arab tribal society, childhood was a very small period of an individual's life, without the period of adolescence we recognise to be so important today. Hence, adulthood historically arrives in the early teens for Muslims.

Family and parenting

As in other communities, marriage and the family are considered extremely important social institutions in Muslim communities. Marriage is seen as a means to harmony, stability, security and the satisfaction of mutual needs. For many Muslim families, marriage is the gateway to adulthood. In many Muslim families, marriages continue to be 'arranged' by parents; even when this is not the case, parental consent and approval are generally considered important.

Theoretically, even with arranged marriages, the willingness of both parties is considered essential. However, as in many traditional communities, parental pressure is sometimes applied in seeking consent.

Sexual relationships before or outside marriage are socially disapproved of and religiously forbidden.

Traditionally, the Muslim family is extended, with children, their parents and their grandparents often living together. The advantages of this system include financial saving, stability and physical and psychosocial support, particularly in times of need. Today, however, with the cultural changes brought about by globalisation, migration, etc., nuclear families are increasing in number, although many Muslim families continue to live as extended or semi-extended families, even in Western societies.

Placing the elderly in homes continues to be uncommon within Muslim communities as adult children are expected to care for their parents, grandparents or at times even their elderly aunts and uncles who do not have other carers. As with other traditional cultures, age brings with it greater respect and esteem within many of the cultural groups to which Muslims belong. The elderly often occupy a position of authority within their families, even if the authority is more symbolic than practical in nature.

Starting a family is considered an important goal of marriage. Traditionally, expecting and new mothers are cared for by their own mothers, mothers-in-law or other elder women in the family. However, this is often not possible for migrants as they leave their extended families behind.

Children are a central part of the family in most Muslim cultures. Male-child preference is still unfortunately common in many cultural groups of which Muslim migrants are also a part. Parental approval and consent is considered important in life decisions. Academic and career achievement is encouraged and highly valued, especially for boys, sometimes accompanied by significant parental pressure.

Religious education and practice (prayer, fasting, etc.) are encouraged in Muslim children to varying degrees depending on the importance attached to it by the family and/or community members.

Traditional gender roles are the norm in many migrant communities with men as the primary earners, often seen as heads of the family and women as the primary carers and homemakers. The mother is typically responsible for the day-to-day care of children.

The importance of the role and responsibility of the mother is underscored in Muslim cultures, sometimes to the extent that mothers are burdened with full responsibility for all aspects of their children's and families' lives. Women in the extended family – grandmothers, aunts, older sisters, especially in 'joint family' settings – are also often actively involved in parenting.

Parenting styles are influenced by a multitude of factors, including the parent's wellbeing, the child's temperament, and the family's circumstances among many other things.

The indulgent parenting style, common in some Muslim communities, is characterised by a high degree of parental affection, acceptance, emotional expressiveness, nurturance and permissiveness, with more emphasis on interdependence than independence. Co-sleeping with parents, sometimes for the first few years is not

uncommon. Authoritarian parenting styles are also common in many Muslim families/communities, manifested as high parental expectations of obedience, conformity and preservation of honour.

Authoritarian parenting serves a function when families are living in war zones, or in periods of civil upheaval and in refugee camps. Parental control over children in such contexts can be crucial to ensuring safety, stability, containment and emotional and psychological sense of assurance.

At times, some Muslim migrants' parenting style may also appear to outsiders as being uninvolved or neglectful, for example parents who do not appear to be involved in their children's lives or indeed aware of the emotional/psychological life of their child. Generally this evolves from parents whose parenting style has not adapted to the nuclear family set up and continue to parent as if they exist in an extended family scenario.

It is important that professionals do not confuse the lack of skill to parent in a nuclear family context with a lack of interest in children. Many parents are not aware of the additional skills they will have to acquire as a result of missing an extended family, such as filling and managing a child's time. This is ordinarily a responsibility and skill that multiple family members share.

It may also be that parents simply do not know how to replace the role of the extended family in the child's life or feel that they do not have the emotional resources to parent in the way required in a nuclear family. This may also be an effect of parental exposure to trauma or loss resulting in a temporary difficulty in parenting due to depression, anxiety, grief, etc.

Muslims in Australia

Indonesian Muslims were trading with the indigenous coastal communities prior to Australia's settlement by the British Empire. The first Muslims to migrate to Australia were Muslim sailors and convicts who lived under the rule of the British Empire in the 1700s, followed in the 1800s by Afghan cameleers.

Significant Muslim migration to Australia commenced after World War 2, with large numbers of Turkish and other European Muslims escaping the post-war devastation across Europe and the Middle East. In the 1970s, Lebanese and other Muslims started to arrive, seeking protection from war and other forms of protracted civil unrest. Since that time, there has been a steady stream of Muslim migration to Australia invariably because of war and poverty.

The precise number of Muslims in Australia is unknown because many Muslims do not register their religion for fear of persecution or a lack of understanding of the purpose of data collection by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Also, some Muslim minority sects do not identify with mainstream Islam because of a history of persecution. The number of Muslims registered by the ABS in 2011 is 476,300 Australia-wide. Australian Muslims make up about 2% of the Australian population, with 40% of Australian Muslims born in Australia, making them the single largest category among an

otherwise extremely diverse community. Around 60% were born overseas in countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iraq, Bangladesh, Iran, Fiji, Cyprus, Somalia, Egypt and Malaysia. Less than 20% of Australian Muslims were born in Middle Eastern or Arab countries.

Muslims belong to a diverse range of language groups, including Arabic, Turkish, Farsi, Bosnian, Bahasa Indonesia, Bengali, Malay, Dari, Albanian, Hindi, Kurdish and Pushto. It is important to note though that English is the most common language among Muslims. Most Australian Muslims are Sunni but there is a significant minority of Shias and smaller numbers of Bektashis, Ahmedis, Alawis, Alevis and Druze.

There are a range of organisations providing religious, educational and welfare services to Australian Muslims. There are some 85 mosques around Australia, about 25 Islamic schools and, about 70 imams. There are also a number of Islamic societies in each state and territory, providing welfare services to Australian Muslims. There is, however, no single spokesperson representing the interests of all Muslims, because of the diversity of the community. A number of Muslims access ethno-specific organisations for assistance, such as migrant resource centres.

There is no single model for Muslim community organisation in Australia. Many organisations exist to provide support to their immediate community members in the form of social events. Other organisations have a purely religious purpose, but do not undertake further works for the public good. Other organisations work towards the integration of their communities into Australian society and to improve the wellbeing of their communities. Generally these organisations are social welfare providers and may receive government funding to undertake this work.

It is important to note that although many organisations have formed to provide some form of service to their community or to act as a crucible for the promotion of particular form of Islam, the influence and support of these organisations can be difficult to gauge.

Issues for Muslims in Australia

The range of difficulties and barriers Muslims face in Australia varies considerably. Muslims who have recently migrated to Australia will experience significantly different challenges than those who have resided in Australia for a decade or longer. Some of the barriers Muslims experience upon arrival in Australia and their settlement include:

- **Limited English-language skills** – a difficulty in itself but one that creates secondary disadvantages in locating employment, housing and other necessities.
- **Homelessness** – the housing situation for newly-arrived immigrants can be precarious upon their arrival, but also well into their settlement period.
- **Income** – immigrants who have come from war-torn countries experience considerable difficulties securing any form of employment. Immigrants who have overseas qualifications face a significant battle to have their

qualifications recognised and many must undergo retraining if they are to have any chance in the labour market.

- **Muslim communities** face higher levels of unemployment and are, on average, economically disadvantaged compared to other Australians. They are more likely to work in blue-collar occupations, even though they have a very similar educational profile to other Australians.
- **Gaining access** to and understanding the educational sector in Australia is a struggle for many communities. Families struggle to organise schooling for children and themselves. Schooling is not only made difficult by limited English-language proficiency, but in some instances humanitarian entrants may have no history of schooling because of civil strife in their country of origin. Schooling is further made difficult by periods of unstable housing or unemployment.
- **Health service** utilisation is generally low and immigrants often have little awareness of preventive health and screening programs.
- **Lack of understanding** of and access to mainstream services and systems, which may facilitate the process of settlement and integration into Australia.
- **Fear and mistrust of the legal system** and police – often a result of experiences in their country of origin, while some communities have had negative interactions with the system in Australia.
- **Lack of family and kinship networks** and difficulty building new networks isolate communities and leave them prone to other forms of disadvantage and social concerns.
- **Geographic isolation** – an increasingly common phenomenon as many Muslims settle in rural Australia.
- **Post-traumatic stress** due to experiences of torture and trauma significantly impact on families as they attempt to settle and integrate into Australia.
- **Long-settled communities** find it hard to assimilate recent migrants and to reconcile political and cultural differences between themselves and newly arrived migrants.
- **Racism** – xenophobia has always been an issue for Muslims like other immigrants who have arrived in Australia. Unfortunately, racial and religious intolerance of Muslims has become entrenched, particularly in response to some of the high profile cases involving Muslims. This issue is covered in more detail below.

Muslim women and girls in Australia

- Economic dependence and financial insecurity;
- Women who have lost their husbands/families in the process of migration often learning to live without male/family protection and support for the first time. Many of these women have migrated as sole mothers and must adapt to Australia as they help their children to do so. This often contrasts sharply with the extended

family arrangements for childcare and domestic life typical in many Muslim countries;

- Loss of family, extended network of kin, friends and other supports will markedly affect women's emotional and psychological wellbeing as well as impacting on their physical health; this can lead to a persistent sense of isolation, powerlessness and loss of confidence;
- Depression and anxiety or guilt about leaving home and the loss of home. Depression and anxiety associated with a failure of the settlement process and fear may dominate lives of many women and their children;
- Limited mobility because of communication and/or lack of money and transport along with cultural constraints on their free movement invariably increases their sense of social isolation;
- Post-traumatic stress; torture and trauma. Humanitarian entrants are more likely to have suffered rape, sexual assault and sexually specific torture prior to their arrivals than other migrant women;
- Mental health services rarely used because of limited awareness and cultural stigma and isolation
- Overseas-born battered women are significantly more disadvantaged than other victims of family violence. Overseas-born women are over-represented in domestic homicides. This disadvantage is often a result of the failure of services and shelters to provide information and options to immigrant women in ways that are accessible;
- Many immigrant women have minimal knowledge of the legal system's provision of remedy and protection to domestic violence victims;
- Migration experience can contribute to abuse in the home. In addition, violence tends to be treated with greater secrecy in diaspora communities in the early stages of their migration;
- Women who have married an Australian citizen and whose residency status is precarious do not speak out about violence because of fear of deportation;
- Problems for Australian Muslim women generally;
- Poor representation in the tertiary education system;
- Under-representation in key community representative and advocacy bodies;
- Over-representation in media coverage and general public discourse on Islam and Muslims;
- Race and gender-based violence discrimination and victimisation;
- Limited information about educational and career pathways;
- Limited availability of information on the needs of Muslim women.

Muslim children in Australian schools

Whether as refugees or migrants, Muslim children in Australia may face a unique set of difficulties in school, which can affect their adjustment, performance and ultimately their integration.

A refugee is defined by the United Nations Convention as someone who has left their country of origin and cannot return to it 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1992). Governments may be the persecutor, or they may be unable or unwilling to protect their citizens. A refugee differs from a migrant in that migrants choose to leave their country of origin to seek residence in another country and may return if they wish.

Arriving in a new country can be an exciting and challenging experience for refugee and migrant children. Adjusting to a new culture, new customs, new friends, new language, different public transport systems are just some of the major adjustments that have to be made in a new country. For many refugee children though, this is not the first time they would have faced such overwhelming challenges. Prior to migration, many may have experienced persecution based on their religion and/or ethnicities, survived armed conflict, terrorism and militant insurgency, and generally have been exposed to extreme uncertainty and vulnerability.

They may have lost family and community members, witnessed torture and/ or death, been separated from their loves ones, forced to leave their family, friends and homes behind. Some may have fled to another city or country and spent time in a refugee camp with minimal access to food, shelter, healthcare and education, and very low levels of personal safety and security.

Once they arrive in Australia and the immediate risk of trauma is eliminated, families experience relief at having access to basic rights and services. However as the transition into their community and Australian society commences, so do a host of social and cultural challenges that can affect their experience, confidence, school performance and identity within their school, family and community. In order to better understand children from refugee and Muslim backgrounds, it is important to take a deeper look at some of the common concerns and issues that could arise:

Cultural and gender differences

Many refugee/migrant Muslim children come from countries that are generally more traditional and conservative in some respects than mainstream Australian families. Strong family values often translate as the family's needs, goals and image being seen as being more important than the individual's. As a result, families may be seen as applying more control and pressure on students to make certain decisions such as those related to subject selection, career choices, participation in school activities, excursions, etc.

Compliance with parental demands is expected and enforced to varying degrees. Traditional notions of parental control and authority appear to be linked to two factors: the parents' own past experiences, such as having lived in poverty and crisis, exposure to conflict or other trauma, etc., and/or to the fear of not being able to parent effectively in their new host country without family support, and losing their sense of religious/cultural identity and community in the process.

As discussed earlier (see Children and families in Islam and Muslim communities) and children above), many Muslim cultures adhere to traditional gender norms to varying degrees, which may have implications for their education, interactions and participation in school. While respect for elders is expected from both boys and girls, the latter are more culturally bound by this expectation and are more likely to face more pressure and restrictions.

In addition to schoolwork, girls in many traditional cultures are also expected to help out with household chores, taking care of family members' (including their brothers') needs and social/community responsibilities along with their mothers. As a result, their school work may suffer and participation in school events may be limited (discussed in more detail below). For many girls this can be a source of confusion, frustration and, consequently, conflict, as once they arrive in Australia, they begin to see that gender roles can be more fluid and responsibilities shared.

Education

There is great variation in Muslim children's education and school performance both prior to migrating to Australia and in Australian schools. Many may have had some access to primary and secondary school, but this may have been disrupted constantly or from time to time due to the law and order situation, security concerns, conflict, displacement, migration, etc.

In some families and communities, boys' schooling may have been prioritised over girls', especially when resources are limited as marriage and raising a family may be seen as much more important than education for girls. Even with mandatory secondary schooling in Australia, some Muslim families may not encourage girls to focus on educational achievement. Boys, on the other hand, are often expected to work hard, and in some cases, forego participation in extracurricular activities so as not to take them away from their academic performance.

The migrant experience values working hard and being self-disciplined, and many Muslim children, both girls and boys, are expected to excel at their studies. Parents who have not been able to pursue their own educational dreams because of socio-economic issues or living in crisis, etc., may especially value education for their children, sometimes placing excessive pressure on their children and schools. At times this translates into allowing few or no outlets and opportunities for fun and leisure, which may be seen as a waste of precious study time.

On the other extreme are parents who appear uninvolved with their children's school performance and participation. This is often a result, not of a lack of concern and importance attached to education, but of other stressors in the family's life, such as socio-economic issues, isolation, single parenting and residual effects of past exposure to conflict, loss or trauma, which may limit parental attention.

Participation in school outings/ excursions

Muslim families lay varying levels of emphasis on the concept of segregation. Many Muslim girls are boys are allowed to freely mingle with each other and with their non-Muslim peers of the opposite sex and

participate in social school events and outings. Other Muslim families may place varying levels of restrictions.

Typically, however, this concern is extended only to girls' mobility and interaction with boys. With a strong emphasis on chastity before marriage and maintaining a reputation of a 'good girl', girls' participation in social activities with boys may be discouraged, limited or in rare cases, forbidden by many families (see Sexuality and Relationships below for more detail). Even all-girls outings which involve going to public places without a chaperone may be of concern for some.

Understandably then, the concept of having friends of the opposite sex and further still, dating are considered inappropriate and are, therefore, unacceptable in most migrant Muslim families and communities, particularly for girls. Whether due to family pressure, fear of social/family disapproval or personal values, some Muslim girls may, therefore opt out of certain kinds of school activities such as dances, excursions (especially overnight trips), formals or proms.

Apart from a desire to maintain gender segregation, parental fear in this regard often centres around the belief that such trips may not be adequately supervised and that girls and boys may be allowed to freely interact, thus increasing opportunities for dating and/or sexual relationships.

Sexual relationships and sex education

With religious restrictions on sexual relationships outside marriage, openly talking about sex and sexual issues remain for the most part a taboo in many Muslim cultures. While like all young people, Muslim students are curious about, seek information about and talk about sex with their peers, it is not a topic that is generally discussed openly in families, with their parents or in front of elders. In some cultural groups, however, young people may be exposed to sexual discussions among groups of their own sex, such as during weddings and child birth; however, they are not expected to publicly display their knowledge or interest in the issue.

Traditionally, in many cultures, sexual information is imparted around the time of marriage, based on the assumption that the couple, especially the bride-to-be, has limited information. Religiously, both are expected to have no prior sexual experiences (if this is their first marriage), but culturally this expectations holds far more importance for girls. The implications of sexual relations before marriage (and later, outside marriage) are generally significantly more serious for girls. Today, even though most parents are aware that their children of marriageable age are likely to be have much more sexual information prior to marriage, and therefore may not be formally imparted, sexual topics are still not considered appropriate for discussion.

This general discomfort with sexual topics also extends to sex education in schools. Many Muslim families may not considerate it appropriate for their children to learn about and openly discuss sex so early on, especially in mixed groups as it they may be equated with the permission to indulge in sexual activity.

The anxiety around young people, especially girls, developing relationships before marriage, may mean that early marriage

may be encouraged in many families. Although this is no longer the case in many families, traditionally, marriages are 'arranged' by parents or family elders, but what this arrangement means may vary for different families and communities. In some, the potential couple are allowed to 'date', get to know each other or at least meet before marriage; in others varying degrees of pressure may be applied, especially on girls, to consent to marrying the person of their families' choice. In secondary schools, therefore, teachers may find that Muslim girls, as well as girls from such traditional cultures, may often discuss potential suitors, engagements and marriage, with varying levels of interest, anxiety and/or distress.

Hyper-masculinity

Adolescence is a generally a difficult and confusing time for all girls and boys physically, psychologically, socially and sexually. When this normal confusion – regarding identity, image, achievement, sexuality, etc., is combined with psychosocial migration and settlement issues in young people, such as a need for belonging, a confused identity, of identity, a difference in gender norms between home and the wider culture, exposure to popular sexual culture in Australia versus cultural/religious restrictions on sex, this can be a much more significant source of confusion and insecurity for many young people, especially boys.

Unable to work through these conflicts, some of these boys may exhibit what may be termed 'hyper-masculine behaviour. Examples of such behaviour include an air of arrogance and apparent disdain for others and aggressive behaviour, including sexually forceful or aggressive humour and/or behaviour. Often, this aggression and defiance are a front to cover the conflict between a normal sexual interest, sexual insecurity, the cultural/religious taboo around sexual issues, widespread exposure to uncontained sexual information and a lack of appropriate information.

Aggressively pursuing girls, being sexually active or pretending to be so and indulging in popular boy behaviour that may objectify women and girls, are often attempts to create an image of 'real manhood' or a sense of belonging in a society that is considered highly sexualised. Such behaviour may also be aimed at vigourously asserting a heterosexual image and pre-empting any impressions of homosexuality. Guilt and shame around sexual interest, reinforced by religious/cultural restrictions, may create more confusion and insecurity, further complicating boys' identity and image development and contributing to problem behaviour.

Child abuse

Research on family violence against children in migrant/refugee families in Australia is very limited. While there is no reason to assume that culture and migration is linked with increased rates of child abuse and family violence, the nature and dynamics of child abuse in migrant/refugee families and their response to this abuse, including its reporting, may be shaped by cultural and/or the socio-economic contexts within which migrants live. Parenting style is one factor that has been associated with physical child abuse.

When under stress some families become authoritarian in their parenting. The parental control characteristic of this

style can, at times, translate into the use of corporal punishment to discipline children. It is important to note here, however, that corporal punishment is by no means a parenting strategy unique to certain cultural/religious groups. Research around the world, including developed countries, clearly indicates that despite the significant investment in community awareness, many parents continue to use physical punishments to discipline their children.

High rates of parental stress have also been linked with emotional and physical child abuse and neglect. Risk factors include low income settings, poverty, unemployment, single parent homes, substance abuse, lack of housing, and limited social support networks. As discussed earlier, many migrants/refugee families, including Muslims, live in these circumstances as a result of both pre and post-migration circumstances and may therefore be at risk of high rates of parental stress. In addition to the typically identified forms of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect, certain kinds of social issues affecting children, such as early marriages and international child abductions in custody cases are also seen in Muslim migrant communities.

The categorisation of these issues as forms of child abuse is unfortunately not always seen as abuse by some communities. This stems from several factors, including difficulties in understanding the complex, multifaceted cultural, socio-economic and political context in which these issues occur as well as the practical, legal and social implications of including them in the definition of abuse.

Children as witnesses of family violence have received significant attention in recent years.

One immediate risk faced by children in families with insecure visa statuses, which is the case with many Muslim migrant/refugee families, is that they are often used by the violent partner (usually the father or stepfather) to manipulate and control the victim (usually the mother). For example, the violent partner may abduct the children and take them to his home country or he may threaten or actually harm the children for the same purpose. Even when children are not its direct victims, they are significantly affected by the violence they witness towards their mothers. A guide for workers on working with Muslim women on family violence, developed by the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights highlights specific forms of family violence that Australian Muslim women face.

These include husbands using their wives' insecure migration status to physically, socially, emotionally, financially and/or spiritually abuse them for example:

- threatening harm to their children or families in their home countries; threatening them with deportation if the abuse is reported
- hiding/destroying her or her children's legal documents; restricting her mobility; giving her incorrect legal/migration information about migration
- taking her money, forcing her to work or preventing her from working
- not allowing her to learn English or learn new skills

- polygyny(commonly known as polygamy); providing incorrect religious information.

Many migrant women experience great difficultly leaving and are less likely to report violent relationships, because of fear, misinformation, limited English and lack of support. As a result, scores of migrant children are exposed to violence in their homes.

Gender inequality and discrimination also account for some forms of child maltreatment and neglect in migrant Muslim communities. Forcibly limiting girls' education and mobility, forced marriages and some forms of child sexual abuse are examples of this.

Research on child abuse in the migrant/refugee communities in the U.S and Canada indicates that migrant families may be at increased risk of reports to child protection services. Possible reasons cited for this include their visibility, punishing children in public rather than in private, misunderstandings with professionals, and parenting norms that conflict with those of the dominant culture.

At times immigrant parents may not even fully understanding what is expected of them and, therefore, fail to comply with unwritten cultural expectations. Language and cultural barriers may also make it difficult for immigrant families to access resources and services and comply with treatment plans. These issues are further exacerbated by a lack of understanding of the social welfare system, which may be different from or not exist in their home countries, as well as a shortage of interpreters and translated material and perceived or actual racism and discrimination.

Many immigrant families are reluctant to seek or accept formal assistance from medical and social service institutions given past experiences of oppression, fear of being deported, and general distrust of authority figures. This may be especially true in cases of sexual abuse where notions of family privacy, taboos related to disclosing sexual issues and filial piety may impede migrant children from disclosing sexual abuse, especially incest.

Defining the precise nature of child abuse and child maltreatment is a complex matter even among professionals, including the perceptions of immigrant communities further complicates the matter. Abuse that involves physical aggression is frequently viewed as abuse in most communities. However, there is less agreement regarding less severe forms of abuse as well as emotional and psychological abuse and neglect. While child sexual abuse is considered the most severe form of abuse among all cultural groups, it is an extremely sensitive issue within Muslim communities.

Most communities tend to limit or avoid talk about sex and sexuality, including sexual violence. Notions of privacy, virginity before marriage and respect for elders and the community makes the disclosure and reporting of sexual abuse very difficult. Assessing the issue and addressing the needs of victims and their families is, therefore, significantly challenging.

Impact of Trauma on Children

Many Muslim students in school, especially those from refugee backgrounds, are likely to have been exposed to highly stressful or even traumatic events prior to arriving in

Australia. Trauma is defined as a physical or psychological threat or assault to a child's physical

integrity, sense of self, safety or survival or to the physical safety of another person significant to the child. Children may experience trauma as a result of a number of different circumstances, such as abuse, exposure to domestic violence, natural disaster, war,/armed conflict (including as child soldiers), abandonment, community violence, law enforcement, assault, kidnapping, severe bullying, violent loss and serious illness or medical procedures.

Post traumatic stress is traumatic stress that persists after a traumatic incident has ended and continues to affect a child's capacity to function. If post-traumatic stress continues and the child's neurophysiologic responses remain chronically aroused, even though the threat has ended and the child has survived, then the term post traumatic stress is used to describe the child's enduring symptoms.

Because trauma affects the child's ability to self-regulate, both physically and emotionally, post traumatic symptoms in children may encompass symptoms such as difficulty eating/sleeping/breathing; a heightened startler response and hyper alertness; agitation and over arousal, or under arousal, withdrawal or dissociation; avoidance of eye contact and/or physical contact; fear of responses to certain sights, sounds or other sensory input that remind the child the traumatic experience(s); and preoccupation with re-enactment of the traumatic experience.

Psychological trauma may occur during a single traumatic event (acute) or a result of repeated (chronic) exposure to overwhelming stress. Children exposed to chronic trauma generally have significantly worse outcomes than those exposed to acute accidental traumas. In addition, the failure of caregivers to sufficiently protect a child may be experienced as betrayal and further contribute to the adversity of the experience and effects of trauma.

Traumatic stress may be transmitted by parents to their children. Parents who suffer from untreated post-traumatic stress disorder often have difficulty establishing a secure attachment with their children; they may viscerally transmit their own feelings of anxiety, rage, helplessness, and in doing so, colour the child's internal mode of self and the world.

A child/student who has been traumatized remains in an aroused state of fear and finds it difficult to process verbal information, and it becomes difficult to follow directions, recall what was heard, make sense out of what is being said and focus on, attend to, retain and recall verbal information.

In addition to these primary learning functions that can be altered during or immediately following traumatic exposure, cognitive deficits may also be apparent. These include poor problem solving, (unable to think things out or make sense of what is happening), low self-esteem (how one thinks of oneself – victim-thinking) and hopelessness (loss of future orientation) have all been clearly linked to negative (traumatic) life events (Stein & Kendell, 2004; LeDoux, 2002; Schore, 2001; Teicher, 2000; Yang & Clum, 2000). Trauma has been shown to significantly compromise

cognitive development. It is important to explore the possibility of trauma with students who are under-performing.

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Useful information for teachers to consider

Praying

The midday prayer time often falls during school hours. This means that students who want to pray will need access to a clean and private space to perform this prayer. Such a space need not be used exclusively for prayers, but may be a temporary space given to students for a short period each day, such as a classroom that is empty during lunch times, so as to not miss any class time.

Student absences

During the time of the two main festivals, Eid-al-Fitr and Eid-al-Adha, Muslim students may be absent from school. Students and their families may also request leave in order to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj).

School Uniforms

Some students, especially girls and/or their families may not be comfortable wearing certain kinds of school or sports uniforms because of their interpretation of modesty. Short sleeves or skirts, shorts, etc., may be an issue for some families, and they may request variations that satisfy their cultural/religious needs.

Country Profiles of Migrant and Refugee Students

These country profiles provide brief information on the countries of origin or background of some of the Muslim students. Main political and social conflicts of each country have been highlighted to deepen the context of migration and/or seeking asylum by their families.

Sources of information

UNHCR

www.unhcr.org; www.refworld.org

Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship www.immi.gov.au/media/statistics/country-profiles

Victorian Multi-Cultural Commission

www.multicultural.vic.gov.au

BBC News Country Profiles

www.bbc.co.uk/news/world

Infoplease

www.infoplease/country/profiles

Wikipedia

www.wikipedia.com

Afghanistan

Ethnic Groups: The main ethnic groups are Pashtun, 42 percent; Tajik, 27 percent; Hazara, 9 percent; Uzbek, 9 percent; Aimak (a Persian-speaking nomadic group), 4 percent; Turkmen, 3 percent; and Baloch, 2 percent.

Languages: More than 30 languages are spoken in Afghanistan. The official languages are Dari (Afghan Persian) and Pashtu.

Religion: Virtually the entire population is Muslim. Between 80 and 85 percent of Muslims are Sunni and 15 to 19 percent, Shia. The minority Shia are economically disadvantaged and frequently subjected to discrimination. Small numbers of Hindus and Sikhs live in urban centers.

Political background: The political history of the modern state of Afghanistan begins in 1709, when the Hotaki dynasty was established in Kandahar followed by Ahmad Shah Durrani's rise to power in 1747. In the late 19th century, Afghanistan became a buffer state in the "Great Game" between the British and Russian empires. Following the 1919 Anglo-Afghan War, King Amanullah began a European style modernization of the country but was stopped by the ultra-conservatives.

He also abrogated slavery of Hazaras, but till 1978, they were treated as third class citizen due to linguistic, racial and religious prejudices. It is noteworthy to mention that the Hazaras were subjected to such unjustified and inhuman treatment despite the fact that they are the aboriginal inhabitants of Afghanistan. During the Cold War, after the withdrawal of the British from neighboring India in 1947, the United States and the Soviet Union began spreading influences in Afghanistan, which led to a bloody war between the US-backed mujahideen forces and the Soviet-backed Afghan government in which over a million Afghans lost their lives. This was followed by the 1990s civil war, the rise of the Taliban government who used an extremist interpretation of Islam to assert repressive control of society.

The economy remained in ruins, and most government services ceased. The Taliban eventually fell in 2001 which leads to the current civil war. In December 2001, the United Nations Security Council authorized the creation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to help maintain security in Afghanistan and assist the Karzai administration.

Three decades of war has made Afghanistan one of the world's most dangerous countries, including the largest producer of refugees and asylum seekers. While the international community is rebuilding war-torn Afghanistan, terrorist groups are actively involved in a nationwide Taliban-led insurgency, which includes hundreds of assassinations and suicide attacks.

Education and Literacy: In 1979 some 90 percent of Afghanistan's population was illiterate. In 2006 an estimated 57 percent of men and 87 percent of women were illiterate, and the lack of skilled and educated workers was a major economic disadvantage.

Beginning with the Soviet invasion of 1979, successive wars virtually destroyed the education system. Most teachers fled the country during the Soviet occupation and the subsequent civil war. By 1996 only about 650 schools were functioning. In 1996 the Taliban regime banned education

for females, and the madrassa (mosque school) became the main source of primary and secondary education.

After the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, the interim government received substantial international aid to restore the education system, but for the next six years the Taliban attacked public schools wherever possible. In 2007 increased Taliban activity forced the closure of 35 percent of the schools in the southern provinces. The Taliban opened some fundamentalist schools in regions that they controlled. In 2004 and 2005, informal community education programs began in nine provinces.

In 2008 about 9,500 schools reportedly were operating, at least some in every province. The Ministry of Education estimated that in 2006, 8 million children were in school, including nearly 3 million girls.

Despite renewed emphasis on educating girls, in 2008 the ratio of girls to boys in secondary schools was one to three or four, as rural families continued the tradition of educating only males. Since the end of the dogmatic Taliban era in 2001, public school curricula have included religious subjects, but detailed instruction is left to religious teachers.

Life under Taliban rule: Under the Taliban regime, Sharia law was interpreted to forbid a wide variety of previously lawful activities in Afghanistan. One Taliban list of prohibitions included: pork, pig, pig oil, anything made from human hair, satellite dishes, cinematography, musical equipment, pool tables, chess, masks, alcohol, tapes, computers, VCRs, television, anything that propagates sex and is full of music, wine, lobster, nail polish, firecrackers, statues, sewing catalogues, pictures, Christmas cards.

They also got rid of employment, education, sports for all women, dancing, clapping during sports events, kite flying, and characterizations of living things, including drawings, paintings, photographs, stuffed animals, and dolls. Men had to have a fist size beard at the bottom of their chin. Conversely, they had to wear their head hair short. They had to wear a head covering.

The Taliban were condemned internationally for their brutal repression of women. In areas they controlled the Taliban issued edicts which forbade women from being educated; girls were forced to leave schools and colleges. Those who wished to leave their home to go shopping had to be accompanied by a male relative, and were required to wear the burqa, a traditional dress covering the entire body except for a small screen to see out of. Those who appeared to disobey were publicly beaten.

Employment for women was restricted to the medical sector, because male medical personnel were not allowed to treat women and girls. One result of the banning of employment of women by the Taliban was the closing down in places like Kabul of primary schools not only for girls but for boys, because almost all the teachers there were women. Taliban restrictions became more severe after they took control of the capital. In February 1998, religious police forced all women off the streets of Kabul, and issued new regulations ordering people to blacken their windows, so that women would not be visible from the outside

Afghans in Australia: People from Afghanistan first settled in Australia when camel drivers participated in the land explorations of the 1860s, the first of whom joined the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition. In all, approximately 3,000 Afghans, mainly men, migrated to Australia during the latter half of the 19th Century. From the 1920s, when motor vehicles began to replace camel transportation, many returned to Afghanistan while others stayed on and found employment in other areas or became small property owners.

This first wave of Afghanistan-born migrants also introduced Islam to Australia. Most of the Afghanistan-born in Australia had arrived in the last decade or so, as refugees under the Humanitarian Program.

At the 2006 Census there were 5,242 Afghanistan-born persons in Victoria (31.3% of Australia's total), increasing by 61.5% from 3,245 persons in 2001. Only 2.4% of the Afghanistan-born in Victoria had arrived in Australia prior to 1986; 24.0% arrived between 1996 and 2001; and 41.5% arrived between 2001 and 2006. The Afghanistan-born mainly resided in Casey (32.6%) and Greater Dandenong (32.0%). There were 5,978 persons who identified with Afghan ancestry.

Iraq

Ethnic groups: In 2006 an estimated 75 to 80 percent of the population was Arab and 15 to 20 percent, Kurdish. Other significant minority groups, together constituting less than 5 percent of the population, were Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Turkmens.

Languages: Arabic is the majority language, Kurdish is spoken by approximately 15-20% of the population, South Azeri (called Turkmen locally), Neo-Aramaic and others by 5%.

Religion: Islam accounts for 95% of the population, while Christianity or other religions for just 3%. It is estimated that around 65% of the population in Iraq are Shia and around 35% are Sunni. Christians have inhabited what is modern day Iraq for about 2,000 years. Assyrians, most of whom are adherents of the Chaldean Catholic Church, Syriac Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East account for most of the Christian population, along with Armenians belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church. More than half of Iraqi Christians have fled to neighbouring countries since the start of the war, and few plan to return.

Political Background: Britain granted independence to the Kingdom of Iraq in 1932, though the British retained military bases and transit rights for their forces. King Ghazi ruled as a figurehead after King Faisal's death in 1933, while undermined by attempted military coups, until his death in 1939. Ghazi was followed by his underage son, Faisal II. 'Abd al-Ilah served as Regent during Faisal's minority.

On 1 April 1941, several officers of the armed forces staged a coup d'état and overthrew the government of 'Abd al-Ilah. During the subsequent Anglo-Iraqi War, the United Kingdom invaded Iraq for fear that the government might cut oil supplies to Western nations because of his links to the Axis powers. The war started on 2 May and an armistice was signed 31 May.

In 1958 a coup d'etat known as the 14 July Revolution led to the end of the monarchy. After 10 years of military rule, the government was overthrown by the Ba'ath Party in 1968. Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr became the first Ba'ath President of Iraq but then the movement gradually came under the control of Saddam Hussein, who acceded to the presidency and control of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), then Iraq's supreme executive body, in July 1979.

After the success of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Saddam Hussein invaded Iran a year and a half later, initiating the Iran–Iraq War (or First Persian Gulf War). The war ended in stalemate in 1988, largely due to foreign support for Iraq.

Between half a million and 1.5 million people from both sides died in the 1980–1988 war, with economic loss of more than $500 billion for both sides. In 1981, Israeli aircraft bombed an Iraqi nuclear materials testing reactor as part of Operation Opera which became widely criticized because of Israel's involvement in a foreign conflict. In the final stages of Iran–Iraq War, the Ba'athist Iraqi regime led a genocidal campaign that targeted Iraqi Kurds, and led to the killing of 50,000 to 100,000 civilians.

In August 1990, Iraq invaded and annexed Kuwait. This subsequently led to military intervention by United States-led forces in the Second Gulf War. The coalition forces proceeded with a bombing campaign targeting military targets. Shortly after

the war ended in 1991, Shia Muslim and Kurdish Iraqis led several uprisings against the regime, but these were successfully repressed by Hussein. It is estimated that as many as 100,000 people were killed. The US, UK, France and Turkey claiming authority under UNSCR 688, established the Iraqi no-fly zones to protect Kurdish and Shiite populations from attacks by the Hussein regime's aircraft.

During the late 1990s, the U.N. considered relaxing the Iraq sanctions because of the hardships suffered by ordinary Iraqis. Studies dispute the number of people who died in south and central Iraq during the years of the sanctions.

In October 1998, U.S. President Bill Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Act, calling for "regime change" in Iraq, and initiated Operation Desert Fox.

Kurdish Peshmerga became the northern front of the invasion and eventually defeated Ansar al-Islam in Northern Iraq before the invasion and Saddam's forces in the north. The battle led to the killing of a substantial number of militants and the uncovering of what was claimed to be a chemical weapons facility at Sargat. In October 2002, the U.S. Congress passed the Joint Resolution to Authorize the Use of United States Armed Forces Against Iraq, and in November the UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1441.

On March 20, 2003, a United States-organized coalition invaded Iraq, with the stated reason that Iraq had failed to abandon its nuclear and chemical weapons development program in violation of U.N. Resolution 687. However, according to a comprehensive U.S. government report, no weapons of mass destruction have been found.

Following the invasion, the United States established the Coalition Provisional Authority to govern Iraq. The occupation years saw intense violence between Sunnis and Shias, death squads being a major threat to stability and security. By 2007, the violence had increased to the point of being described in the United States' National Intelligence Estimate as a civil war. On December 30, 2006, Saddam Hussein was hanged. Some of his closest associates were also executed. Ali Hassan al-Majid (aka Chemical Ali) was executed in 2010 for his role in the Halabja poison gas attack in 1988. There have since been many attacks on Iraqi minorities such as the Yezidis, Mandeans, Assyrians and others..

Current Situation: Since the toppling of Saddam Hussein in May 2003, coalition military forces, Iraqis involved with reconstruction, and the general public have been endangered by a variety of bombings, kidnappings, and executions conducted by insurgent forces believed to be primarily Sunni and of both domestic and foreign origin. Their particular targets have been Iraqi police and military personnel and trainees, but in 2006 civilians increasingly were targeted. Many terrorist acts have been unattributed, and many apparently independent militias are known to have participated in them.

Under these circumstances, ordinary citizens lived at the mercy of a vicious war between local fighters and occupation forces. The result of this was more than a million injured and dead, most of whom were innocent bystanders. Most

armed operations in Iraq came out from certain governorates and certain areas in Baghdad. Militants. The occupation and Iraqi government forces would enter these areas and make random arrests of people, especially young men between the ages of 17 and 30. As a result, there were tens of thousands of detainees held for years with no charges, many of whom died in prison under torture.

The UN High Commission for Refugees has estimated that nearly two million Iraqis have fled the country after the Multi-National invasion of Iraq in 2003, mostly to Syria and Jordan. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates an additional 1.9 million are currently displaced within the country.

In 2007, the U.N. said that about 40% of Iraq's middle class is believed to have fled and that most are fleeing systematic persecution and have no desire to return. Refugees are mired in poverty as they are generally barred from working in their host countries. In recent years the diaspora seems to be returning with the increased security; the Iraqi government claimed that 46,000 refugees have returned to their homes in October 2007 alone.

Iraqis in Australia: The Iraq-born were first counted as a separate birthplace group at the 1976 Australian Census. Large numbers arrived in Australia as refugees after the Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988. Numbers continued to increase after the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991, often via refugee camps in neighbouring countries. More recent arrivals have also been accepted as skilled migrants and through family reunion. The Iraq-born community in Australia is culturally diverse, with settlers from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds including Arabs, Kurds,Turkmen, Chaldeans and Assyrians.

At the 2006 Census, there were 8,615 Iraq-born persons in Victoria (26.5% of Australia's total), increasing by 41.4% from 6,093 persons in 2001. Only 5.6% of the Iraq-born in Victoria had arrived in Australia prior to 1986; most (89.5%) had arrived between 1991 and 2006. The Iraq-born community were mainly concentrated in the northern suburbs in Hume (52.0%); Whittlesea (10.8%); and Moreland (8.7%). There was a small but significant Iraqi-born community in the rural centre of Shepparton. There were only 4,806 persons who identified with Iraqi ancestry, due to there only being a relatively small number of second generation and also because many Iraq-born had identified with other ethnic origins such as Assyrian, Kurdish, Armenian and Arabic ancestries.

lebanon

language: Arabic is the official national language. A law determines the cases in which the French language may be used The majority of Lebanese people speak Lebanese Arabic, while Modern Standard Arabic is mostly used in magazines, newspapers, and formal broadcast media. Almost 40% of Lebanese are considered francophone, and another 15% "partial francophone," and 70% of Lebanon's secondary schools use French as a second language of instruction. By comparison, English is used as a secondary language in 30% of Lebanon's secondary schools.

Religion: Lebanon is the most religiously diverse country in the Middle East. It is estimated that the population is 59.7% Muslim and 39% Christian, with other religions and non-believers accounting for the remaining 1.3%. Over the past 60 years, there has been a steady decline in the ratio of Christians to Muslims, due to higher emigration rates of Christians, and a higher birth rate in the Muslim population. A demographic study conducted by the research firm Statistics Lebanon found that approximately 27% of the population was Sunni, 27% Shi'a, 21% Maronite, 8% Greek Orthodox, 5% Druze, and 5% Greek Catholic, with the remaining 7% mostly belonging to smaller Christian denominations.

Brief Political Background: The earliest evidence of civilization in Lebanon dates back more than seven thousand years, predating recorded history. Lebanon was the home of the Phoenicians, a maritime culture that flourished for over a thousand years (c.1550–539 BC). In 64 BC, the region came under the rule of the Roman Empire, and eventually became one of the Empire's leading centres of Christianity. In the Mount Lebanon range a monastic tradition known as the Maronite Church was established.

As the Arab Muslims conquered the region, the Maronites held onto their religion and identity. However, a new religious group, the Druze, established themselves in Mount Lebanon as well, a religious divide that would last for centuries. During the Crusades the Maronites established strong ties with the Roman Catholic invaders, ties that influenced the region into the modern era.

The region eventually came under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, a political situation that lasted for centuries. Following the collapse of the Empire after World War I, the five provinces that constitute modern Lebanon were mandated to France. The French expanded the borders of Mount Lebanon, which was mostly populated by Maronites and Druze, to include more Muslims.

Lebanon gained independence in 1943, establishing a unique political system "confessionalism" – that is a power-sharing mechanism based on religious communities.

Lebanon's history since independence has been marked by alternating periods of political stability and turmoil interspersed with prosperity built on Beirut's position as a regional centre for finance and trade.

In May 1948, Lebanon supported neighbouring Arab countries against Israel. During the Arab-Israeli war, some 100,000 Palestinians fled to Lebanon, while Israel did not permit their return at the end of hostilities. Palestinians, previously prevented from working at all due to denial of citizenship, are now forbidden to work

in some 20 professions after liberalization laws. Today, more than 400,000 refugees remain in limbo, about half in camps.

The government of Lebanon had been dominated by Maronite Christians since the state was created as a safe haven for them by the French colonial powers. However, the country had a large Muslim population and many pan-Arabist and Left Wing groups which opposed the pro-western government.

The establishment of the state of Israel and the displacement of the hundred thousand Palestinian refugees to Lebanon (around 10% of the total population of the country) changed the demographic balance in favour of the Muslim population. The Cold War had a powerful disintegrative effect on Lebanon, which was closely linked to the polarization that preceded the 1958 political crisis, since Maronites sided with the West while Left Wing and pan-Arab groups sided with Soviet aligned Arab countries.

The militarization of the Palestinian refugee population, with the arrival of the PLO forces after their expulsion from Jordan during Black September, sparked an arms race amongst the different Lebanese political factions and provided a foundation for the long-term involvement of Lebanon in regional conflicts.

Fighting between Maronite and Palestinian forces began in 1975, and Left Wing, pan-Arabist and Muslim Lebanese groups later allied with the Palestinians. During the course of the fighting, alliances shifted rapidly and unpredictably: by the end of the war, nearly every party had allied with and subsequently betrayed every other party at least once. Furthermore, foreign powers meddled in the war, such as Israel and Syria which supported and fought alongside different factions. Peace keeping forces, such as the Multinational Force in Lebanon and UNIFIL, were also stationed in Lebanon.

The Lebanese Civil War was a multifaceted civil war in Lebanon, lasting from 1975 to 1990 and resulting in an estimated 120,000 fatalities. Today approximately 76,000 people remain displaced within Lebanon. There was also a mass exodus of almost one million people from Lebanon.

The Taif Agreement of 1989 marked the beginning of the end of the fighting. In January of that year, a committee appointed by the Arab League began to formulate solutions to the conflict. On March 1991, parliament passed an amnesty law that pardoned all political crimes prior to its enactment.

Recent Political History: The internal political situation in Lebanon significantly changed in early 2000s. After the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the death of Hafez Al-Assad (former President and Prime Minister of Syria) in 2000, the Syrian military presence faced criticism and resistance from the Lebanese population.

On 14 February 2005, former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated in a car bomb explosion. Leaders of the March 14 Alliance accused Syria of the attack, while the March 8 Alliance and Syrian officials claimed that the Mossad was behind the assassination. The Hariri assassination marked the beginning of a series of assassinations that resulted in the death of many prominent Lebanese figures.

On 12 July 2006, Hezbollah launched a series of rocket attacks and raids into Israeli territory, where they killed three Israeli soldiers and captured a further two. Israel

responded with airstrikes and artillery fire on targets in Lebanon, and a ground invasion of southern Lebanon, resulting in the 2006 Lebanon War. The conflict was officially ended by the UNSC Resolution 1701 on 14 August 2006, which ordered a ceasefire. Some 1,191 Lebanese and 160 Israelis were killed in the conflict. Beirut's southern suburb was heavily damaged by Israeli airstrikes where Hezbollah military infrastructure was deeply embedded among the civilian population.

On 9 May 2008, Hezbollah and Amal forces, sparked by a government declaration that Hezbollah's communications network was illegal, seized western Beirut, leading to the 2008 conflict in Lebanon. The Lebanese government denounced the violence as a coup attempt. At least 62 people died in the resulting clashes between pro-government and opposition militias.

On 21 May 2008, the signing of the Doha Agreement ended the fighting. As part of the accord, which ended 18 months of political paralysis, Michel Suleiman became president and a national unity government was established, granting a veto to the opposition. The agreement was a victory for opposition forces, as the government caved in to all their main demands.

In early January 2011, the national unity government collapsed due to growing tensions stemming from the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which was expected to indict Hezbollah members for the Hariri assassination. The parliament elected Najib Mikati, the candidate for the Hezbollah-led March 8 Alliance, Prime Minister of Lebanon, making him responsible for forming a new government. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah insists that Israel was responsible for the assassination of Hariri. A report leaked by the Al-Akhbar newspaper in November 2010 stated that Hezbollah has drafted plans for a takeover of the country in the case an indictment against its members is issued by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

The 2012 Syrian civil war threatens to spill over in Lebanon, causing more incidents of sectarian violence and armed clashes between Sunnis and Alawites in Tripoli. As of 13 February 2013, more than 182,938 Syrian refugees are in Lebanon.

Lebanese in Australia: The Lebanese community is one of the longest established non-European groups in Australia. Early immigrants were predominantly Christians engaged in trade and commerce and were widely dispersed throughout Australia, with about half living outside metropolitan areas. The community grew rapidly following the Arab-Israeli war in 1976 and continuing conflict in Lebanon. Although most of the Lebanese migrants had settled in Australia before 1981, small numbers continued to arrive after that date.

At the 2006 Census, there were 14,949 Lebanon-born persons in Victoria (20.0% of Australia's total), increasing by 5.5% from 14,168 persons in 2001. Over half (55.0%) of the Lebanon-born community in Victoria had arrived in Australia prior to 1986. The Lebanon-born were mainly concentrated in the inner city suburbs in Moreland (19.0%) and Darebin (9.4%), and in the outer northern suburbs in Hume (16.0%) and Whittlesea (8.1%). There were 34,754 persons who identified with Lebanese ancestry, including second and later generations.

References: Victorian Multi-Cultural Commission,

Myanmar (Burma)

Burma was colonized by Britain following three Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824–1885). British rule brought social, economic, cultural and administrative changes. With the fall of Mandalay, all of Burma came under British rule, being annexed on 1 January 1886. Throughout the colonial era, many Indians arrived as soldiers, civil servants, construction workers and traders and, along with the Anglo-Burmese community, dominated commercial and civil life in Burma. Rangoon became the capital of British Burma and an important port between Calcutta and Singapore.

Burmese resentment was strong and was vented in violent riots that paralysed Yangon (Rangoon) on occasion all the way until the 1930s. On 1 April 1937, Burma became a separately administered colony of Great Britain . A major battleground, Burma was devastated during World War II. By March 1942, within months after they entered the war, Japanese troops had advanced on Rangoon and the British administration had collapsed. A Burmese Executive Administration headed by Ba Maw was established by the Japanese in August 1942.

Following World War II, Aung San negotiated the Panglong Agreement with ethnic leaders that guaranteed the independence of Burma as a unified state. In 1947, Aung San became Deputy Chairman of the Executive Council of Burma, a transitional government. But in July 1947, political rivals assassinated Aung San and several cabinet members. On 4 January 1948, the nation became an independent republic, named the Union of Burma. Unlike most other former British colonies and overseas territories, it did not become a member of the Commonwealth.

On 2 March 1962, the military led by General Ne Win took control of Burma through a coup d'état and the government has been under direct or indirect control by the military since then. Between 1962 and 1974, Burma was ruled by a revolutionary council headed by the general, and almost all aspects of society (business, media, production) were nationalized or brought under government control under the Burmese Way to Socialism which combined Soviet-style nationalisation and central planning with the governmental implementation of superstitious beliefs. A new constitution of the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma was adopted in 1974. During this period, Burma became one of the world's most impoverished countries.

There were sporadic protests against military rule during the Ne Win years and these were almost always violently suppressed. On 7 July 1962, the government broke up demonstrations at Rangoon University, killing 15 students.

In 1988, unrest over economic mismanagement and political oppression by the government led to widespread pro-democracy demonstrations throughout the country known as the 8888 Uprising. Security forces killed thousands of demonstrators, and General Saw Maung staged a coup d'état and formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). In 1989, SLORC declared martial law after widespread protests. The military government finalised plans for People's Assembly elections on 31 May 1989. SLORC changed the country's official English name from the "Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma" to the "Union of Myanmar" in 1989.

In May 1990, the government held free elections for the first time in almost 30 years and the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of Aung San Suu Kyi, won 80% of the seats. However, the military junta refused to cede power and continued to rule the nation as SLORC until 1997, and then as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) until its dissolution in March 2011.

On 23 June 1997, Burma was admitted into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). On 27 March 2006, the military junta, moved the national capital from Yangon the new capital Naypyidaw, meaning "city of the kings".

In August 2007, an increase in the price of diesel and petrol led to a series of anti-government protests that were dealt with harshly by the government. The protests then became a campaign of civil resistance (also called the Saffron Revolution) led by Buddhist monks, hundreds of whom defied the house arrest of democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi to pay their respects at the gate of her house.

The government finally cracked down on them on 26 September 2007. The crackdown was harsh, with reports of barricades at the Shwedagon Pagoda and monks killed. The military crackdown against unarmed Saffron Revolution protesters was widely condemned as part of the International reaction to the 2007 Burmese anti-government protests and led to an increase in economic sanctions against the Burmese Government.

In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis caused extensive damage in the densely populated, rice-farming delta of the Irrawaddy Division. It was the worst natural disaster in Burmese history with reports of an estimated 200,000 people dead or missing, and damage totalled to 10 billion dollars (USD), and as many as 1 million left homeless. In the critical days following this disaster, Burma's isolationist government hindered recovery efforts by delaying the entry of United Nations planes delivering medicine, food, and other supplies.

In early August 2009, a conflict known as the Kokang incident broke out in Shan State in northern Burma. For several weeks, junta troops fought against ethnic minorities including the Han Chinese, Va, and Kachin. From 8–12 August, the first days of the conflict, as many as 10,000 Burmese civilians fled to Yunnan province in neighbouring China.

Reforms and transition towards democracy

A Burmese constitutional referendum was made in May 2008 and general elections were held. Allegations were raised in regard to polling station irregularities, and the United Nations (UN) and a number of Western countries condemned the elections as fraudulent. The military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party later declared victory, stating that it had been favoured by 80 percent of the votes; however, the claim was disputed by numerous pro-democracy opposition groups with an assertion that the military regime engaged in rampant fraud to achieve such a result. The military junta was dissolved on 30 March 2011.

Since the 2010 election, the government has embarked on a series of reforms to direct the country towards liberal democracy,

a mixed economy and reconciliation; although, the questioning of the motives that underpin such reforms has not ceased.

Civil War and Persecution of Minorities: Civil wars have been a constant feature of Burma's socio-political landscape since the attainment of independence in 1948. These wars are predominantly struggles for ethnic and sub-national autonomy, with the areas surrounding the ethnically Burman central districts of the country serving as the primary geographical setting of conflict.

In October 2012 the number of ongoing conflicts in Burma included the Kachin Conflict, between the Kachin Independence Army and the government; a civil war between the Rohingya Muslims, and the government and non-government groups in Arakan State; and a conflict between the Shan, Lahu and Karen minority groups, and the government in the eastern half of the country.

A widely publicised Burmese conflict was the 2012 Rakhine State riots, a series of conflicts that primarily involved the ethnic Rakhine Buddhist people and the Rohingya Muslim people in the northern Rakhine State—an estimated 90,000 people were displaced as a result of the riots. The Burmese government previously identified the Rohingya as a group of illegal migrants; however, the ethnic group has lived in Burma for numerous centuries.

Burmese in Australia

Following independence from Britain in 1948, many Anglo-Burmese left Burma to escape economic hardship due to unemployment and forced retirement. A small number (about 3,500) migrated to Australia between 1947 and 1959. A further 2,500 persons arrived between 1965 and 1972.

More recent arrivals were mainly spouses and relatives of the Anglo-Burmese in Australia, as well as students and refugees who came to Australia via Thailand. Western Australia was the preferred state due to a pre-existing community of support. At the 2006 Census, there were 1,797 Burma (Myanmar)-born persons in Victoria (14.5% of Australia's total), increasing by 50.9% from 1,191 persons at the 2001 Census. One-third (32.3%) of the Burma (Myanmar)-born in Victoria had arrived in Australia prior to 1986; and 50.9% had arrived more recently between 2001 and 2006, mainly under the Humanitarian Program.

The Burma (Myanmar)-born community was distributed throughout metropolitan Melbourne, with slight concentrations in Greater Dandenong (10.8%); Wyndham (10.6%); and Hobsons Bay (9.2%). There were 1,690 persons identified with Burmese ancestry, including second and later generations. The Burma (Myanmar)-born also identified with other ancestries such as English, Karen, Chinese and Indian ancestries.

Somalia

language: Somali and Arabic are the official languages of Somalia. The Somali language is the mother tongue of the Somali people, the nation's most populous ethnic group. It is a member of the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family, and its nearest relatives are the Afar and Saho languages.

Religion: Most Somalis are Muslims, the majority belonging to the Sunni branch of Islam and the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, although some are adherents of the Shia Muslim denomination. Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, is also well-established, with many local congregations of the various Sufi orders. Christianity is a minority religion in Somalia, with no more than 1,000 practitioners (about 0.01% of the population).

Political History: Somaliland became British and Italian colonies in the 1880's, although it was ruled solely by the British from 1941 to 1950. In 1960, Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland were united to form an independent Somalia. Years of fighting between rival warlords and an inability to deal with famine and disease have led to the deaths of up to one million people.

Comprised of a former British protectorate and an Italian colony, Somalia was created in 1960 when the two territories merged. Since then its development has been slow. Relations with neighbours have been soured by its territorial claims on Somali-inhabited areas of Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti.

In 1970 Mr Mohamed Siad Barre proclaimed a socialist state, paving the way for close relations with the USSR. In 1977, with the help of Soviet arms, Somalia attempted to seize the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, but was defeated with the help of Soviet and Cuban backing for Ethiopia, which had turned Marxist.

In 1991 President Barre was overthrown by opposing clans. But they failed to agree on a replacement and plunged the country into lawlessness and clan warfare.

The conflict destroyed Somalia's crops during 1992 and brought widespread famine. Food flown in by international agencies was looted by the warring militias. Many of its citizens have also been displaced ever since. Spikes in violence have caused additional waves of displacement over the years.

By December 1992 the situation was such that the UN actively intervened, sending a force of 35,000 troops in Operation Restore Hope. During the rest of the decade the situation got worse rather than better.

From late 1994 the capital, Mogadishu, was divided between the two most powerful of the warring factions. In each a leader declared himself the president of the nation and organized a supposedly national government. In March 1995 the remaining UN forces were evacuated from the coast under the protection of an international flotilla.

Following the outbreak of the civil war, many of Somalia's residents left the country in search of asylum. At the end of 2009, about 678,000 were under the responsibility of the UNHCR, constituting the third largest refugee group after war-afflicted Iraq and Afghanistan, respectively. Due to renewed fighting in the southern half of the country, an estimated 132,000 people left in 2009, and another 300,000 were displaced internally. Former UN Secretary General

Boutros Boutros Ghali and Ahmedou Ould Abdallah, UN special envoy to Somalia have referred to the killing of civilians in the Somalian Civil War as genocide.

In 2011, the Horn of Africa also experienced its worst drought in 60 years and five regions within Somalia were declared famine zones. This caused hundreds of thousands of Somalis to leave their homes in search of food. In February 2012, the UN announced that the food crisis in southern Somalia was over due to a scaling up of relief efforts and a bumper harvest, but warned that general conditions were still fragile. Aid agencies subsequently shifted their emphasis to recovery efforts, including digging irrigation canals and distributing plant seeds. Long-term strategies by the national government in conjunction with development agencies are believed to offer the most sustainable results.

Islamist insurgency: In 2000 clan elders and other senior figures appointed Abdulkassim Salat Hassan president at a conference in Djibouti. A transitional government was set up, with the aim of reconciling warring militias.

But as its mandate drew to a close, the administration had made little progress in uniting the country. In 2004, after protracted talks in Kenya, the main warlords and politicians signed a deal to set up a new parliament, which later appointed a president. The fledgling administration, the 14th attempt to establish a government since 1991, has faced a formidable task in bringing reconciliation to a country divided into clan fiefdoms.

Islamist insurgency In 2006 Islamists gained control of much of the south, including the capital, after their militias kicked out the warlords who had ruled the roost for 15 years. With the backing of Ethiopian troops, forces loyal to the interim administration seized control from the Islamists at the end of 2006.

Islamist insurgents – including the Al-Shabab group, which later declared allegiance to al-Qaeda and in 2012 announced its merger with the global Islamist terrorist group – fought back against the government and Ethiopian forces, regaining control of most of southern Somalia by late 2008.

Ethiopia pulled its troops out in January 2009. Soon after, Al-Shabab fighters took control of Baidoa, formerly a key stronghold of the transitional government. Somalia's parliament met in neighbouring Djibouti in late January and swore in 149 new members from the main opposition movement, the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia. The parliament also extended the mandate of the transitional federal government for another two years, and installed moderate Islamist Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad as the new president. However, the government's military position weakened further, and in May 2009 Islamist insurgents launched an attack on Mogadishu, prompting President Ahmad to appeal for help from abroad.

Al-Shabab consolidated its position as the most powerful insurgent group by driving its main rival, Hizbul Islam, out of the southern port city of Kismayo in October 2009. They withdrew from Mogadishu in August 2011, and lost their last urban in October 2012.

In a sign of growing confidence, Somalia's first formal parliament in more than 20 years was sworn in at Mogadishu airport, marking an end to the eight-year transitional period. Parliament chose

Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, an academic and civic activist with little political experience, as president in September 2012. He in turn appointed an economist and businessman, Abdi Farah Shirdon Saaid, prime minister with a brief to stamp out nepotism and clan rivalry.

Somalis in Australia

The Somalia-born in Australia are a new community, mostly arriving since the onset of civil war in Somalia in 1991. Previously, there were only a small number of Somalia-born students in Australia. The peak period for arrival from Somalia was 1994 to 1998 when about 55% of the current Somalia-born community arrived in Australia, mainly as young adult refugees or through family reunion.

At the 2006 Census, there were 2,626 Somalia-born persons in Victoria (60.8% of Australia's total) increasing by 13.6% from 2,311 persons in 2001. Only 4.6% of the Somalia-born in Victoria had arrived in Australia prior to 1991. The community was mainly concentrated in the local government areas of Moonee Valley (19.1%); Banyule (15.0%); Darebin (12.7%); and Melbourne City (10.9%). There were 3,992 persons who identified with Somali ancestry.

Sudan

Ethnic Groups: The Arab presence is estimated at 70% of the Sudanese population. Others include the Arabized ethnic groups of Nubians, Copts, and Beja.

Language: The most widely spoken languages in Sudan are Sudanese Arabic, Najdi and Hejazi Arabic and Chadic Arabic. Nubian language is also spoken in the North. Before 2005, only Arabic was the official language. In the 2005 constitution, Sudan's official languages became Arabic and English.

Religion: 97 percent of the population adheres to Islam. Almost all Muslims are Sunni, although there are significant distinctions between followers of different Sunni traditions. There are significant but long-established groups of Coptic Orthodox and Greek Orthodox Christians in Khartoum and other northern cities. There are also Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox communities in Khartoum and eastern Sudan, largely made up of refugees and migrants from the past few decades.

In 1955 a civil war began between Northern and Southern Sudan. The southerners, anticipating independence, feared the new nation would be dominated by the north. Historically, the north of Sudan had closer ties with Egypt and was predominantly Arab or Arabized and Muslim while the south was predominantly non-Arabized and animist or Christian. It had been illegal for people living north of the 10th parallel to go further south and for people south of the 8th parallel to go further north since 1924. The law was ostensibly enacted to prevent the spread of malaria and other tropical diseases that had ravaged British troops, and to facilitate spreading Christianity among the predominantly animist population while stopping the Arabic and Islamic influence from advancing south. The result was increased isolation between the already distinct north and south and arguably laid the seeds of conflict in the years to come.

The resulting conflict lasted from 1955 to 1972. The 1955 war began when Southern army officers mutinied and then formed the Anya-Nya guerilla movement. A few years later the first Sudanese military regime took power under Major-General Abboud. Military regimes continued into 1969 when General Gaafar Nimeiry led a successful coup.

In 1972, a cessation of the north-south conflict was agreed upon under the terms of the Addis Ababa Agreement, following talks which were sponsored by the World Council of Churches. This led to a ten-year hiatus in the national conflict with the south enjoying self-government through the formation of the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region.

In 1983, the civil war was reignited following President Nimeiry's decision to circumvent the Addis Ababa Agreement. Nimeiry attempted to create a federated Sudan including states in southern Sudan, which violated the Addis Ababa Agreement that had granted the south considerable autonomy. He appointed a committee to undertake "a substantial review of the Addis Ababa Agreement, especially in the areas of security arrangements, border trade, language, culture and religion". Southern troops rebelled against the northern political offensive, and launched attacks in June 1983. In September 1983, the situation was exacerbated when Nimeiry imposed new Islamic Shari'a laws on all of

Sudan, including the non-Muslim south, followed by the imposition of martial law in May 1984.

Since 1983, a combination of civil war and famine has taken the lives of nearly 2 million people in Sudan. It is estimated that as many as 200,000 people had been taken into slavery during the Second Sudanese Civil War.

In 1995, former U.S. President Jimmy Carter negotiated the longest ceasefire in the history of the war to allow humanitarian aid to enter Southern Sudan, which had been inaccessible owing to violence. This ceasefire, which lasted almost six months, has since been called the "Guinea Worm Ceasefire."

The war went on for more than twenty years, including the use of Russian-made combat helicopters and military cargo planes that were used as bombers to devastating effect on villages and tribal rebels alike. Sudan's independent history has been dominated by chronic, exceptionally cruel warfare that has starkly divided the country on ethnic, racial, religious, and regional grounds; displaced an estimated four million people (of a total estimated population of thirty-two million); and killed an estimated two million people. It damaged Sudan's economy and led to food shortages, resulting in starvation and malnutrition. The lack of investment during this time, particularly in the south, meant a generation lost access to basic health services, education and jobs.

Peace talks between the southern rebels and the government made substantial progress in 2003 and early 2004. The peace was consolidated with the official signing by both sides of the Nairobi Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 9 January 2005, granting Southern Sudan autonomy for six years, to be followed by a referendum about independence. It created a co-vice president position and allowed the north and south to split oil deposits equally, but also left both the north's and south's armies in place. John Garang, the south's peace agreement appointed co-vice president, died in a helicopter crash on 1 August 2005, three weeks after being sworn in. This resulted in riots, but peace was eventually restored. The United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) was established under the UN Security Council Resolution 1590 of 24 March 2005. Its mandate is to support implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and to perform functions relating to humanitarian assistance, and protection and promotion of human rights. In October 2007 the former southern rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) withdrew from government in protest over slow implementation of a landmark 2005 peace deal which ended the civil war.

The southern region became independent on 9 July 2011, with the name of South Sudan. Despite this result, many crucial issues are yet unresolved. The threats to people of South Sudan after referendum are numerous, with security topping the list. Other threats include disputes over the region of Abyei, control over oil fields, the borders, and the issue of citizenship.

As of April 2012, Sudan and South Sudan continue to be in conflict over the oil town Heglig and hostility continues to inflate as both nations scramble to bulk up their military forces.

War in Darfur

Just as the long north-south civil war was reaching a resolution, some clashes occurred in the Muslim western region of Darfur in the early 1970s between the pastoral tribes. The rebels accused the central government of neglecting the Darfur region economically. Both the government and the rebels have been accused of atrocities in this war, although most of the blame has fallen on Arabic speaking nomads militias known as the Janjaweed, which are armed men appointed by the Al Saddiq Al Mahdi administration to stop the longstanding chaotic disputes between Darfur tribes.

According to declarations by the U.S. government, these militias have been engaging in genocide, the UN and African Union does not agree with the genocide label; the fighting has displaced hundreds of thousands of people, many of them seeking refuge in neighbouring Chad. The government claimed victory over the rebels after capturing a town on the border with Chad in early 1994. However, the fighting resumed in 2003.

On 9 September 2004, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell termed the Darfur conflict a genocide, claiming it as the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century. There have been reports that the Janjaweed has been launching raids, bombings, and attacks on villages, killing civilians based on ethnicity, raping women, stealing land, goods, and herds of livestock. So far, over 2.5 million civilians have been displaced and the death toll is variously estimated from 200,000 to 400,000 killed. These figures have remained stagnant since initial UN reports of the conflict hinted at genocide in 2003/2004.

On 5 May 2006, the Sudanese government and Darfur's largest rebel group, the SLM (Sudanese Liberation Movement), signed the Darfur Peace Agreement, which aimed at ending the three-year-long conflict. The agreement specified the disarmament of the Janjaweed and the disbandment of the rebel forces, and aimed at establishing a temporal government in which the rebels could take part. The agreement, which was brokered by the African Union, however, was not signed by all of the rebel groups. Only one rebel group, the SLA, led by Minni Arko Minnawi, signed the agreement. Since the agreement was signed, however, there have been reports of widespread violence throughout the region.

A new rebel group has emerged called the National Redemption Front, which is made up of the four main rebel groups that refused to sign the May peace agreement. Recently, both the Sudanese government and government-sponsored militias have launched large offensives against the rebel groups, resulting in more deaths and more displacements. Clashes among the rebel groups have also contributed to the violence. Recent fighting along the Chad border has left hundreds of soldiers and rebel forces dead and nearly a quarter of a million refugees cut off from aid. In addition, villages have been bombed and more civilians have been killed.

Sudanese in Australia

The Sudanese refugees who have arrived in Australia under the Humanitarian Programme to date are victims of the second civil war between the north and the south. Many entrants have been living in refugee camps in surrounding countries such as the Kakuma and Dadaab camps in Kenya and camps around Gambella in Ethiopia and in northern Uganda. A significant number of Australia's humanitarian intake from Sudan are from the north of the country and have arrived in Australia via Cairo.

At the 2006 Census, there were 6,205 Sudan-born persons in Victoria (32.6% of Australia's total), increasing by 28.7% from 987 persons in 2001. Most (80.4%) of the Sudan-born in Victoria had arrived in Australia between 2001 and 2006. The Sudan-born community had distinct concentrations in the suburbs of Greater Dandenong (26.6%) and Brimbank (19.7%). There were 6,222 persons who identified with Sudanese ancestry. The Sudan-born also identified with other ancestries such as Arabic, Egyptian, English, Eritrean, Ethiopian and Dinka.

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Equality without Exception

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