

President's comments:

An important article based on a comprehensive research report by Mary Crock on unaccompanied minors and trafficked children in Australia is featured in this issue of *Australian Children's Rights News*. Associate Professor Crock has a long-standing interest and commitment to refugee law and advocacy and we are privileged to be able to publish this summary of her very thorough and thoughtful account of the legal, administrative and human barriers to better treatment of young people who need, deserve and are entitled to much better treatment than Australia affords them. Australia is obliged as a signatory and ratifier of the UN CRC to provide assistance. "In June 2005 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued a "General Comment" on unaccompanied and separated children. This calls on States to take seriously their obligations under the CRC not to discriminate against these children on the basis of their alienage and lack of legal standing. The Committee called on States to accord these children access to the same services and benefits afforded to vulnerable local children in matters such as health, housing, and education."

Dr Crock has summarised the main areas where Australia needs to re-think its laws, policies and practices regarding the most vulnerable of child migrants. As she points out, "Some of these are matters that can only be addressed by our politicians; others are matters that are within the province of the bureaucrats and administrators. It is a source of great encouragement that the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) is committing itself to work at an operational level to ensure that the poor practices documented in *Seeking Asylum Alone* are consigned to the past." DCI-A echoes Dr Crock's hope that her report "will quickly become a testament to (past) historical practices. Sadly, it is not yet possible to make this claim, although substantial improvements are being made."

This month also marked the publication by UNICEF of an important report on the state of the world's

children and the executive summary of this report and the implications of womens' status and treatment for children's health, welfare and wellbeing are highlighted.

DCI-Australia also held its Annual General Meeting on 1 December 2006 in Melbourne with a record attendance at a face-to-face meeting and a useful planning discussion before the main meeting. The new Committee in the past and Executive are as follows:

President: Judy Cashmore
Vice-President: Moira Rayner
Secretary: Janet Jukes
Treasurer: Helen Bayes

Committee:
ACT: Sue Packer
Qld: Tina Previtiera
NT: Simon Quilty
SA: Vacant
NSW: June Wangmann
TAS: Peter Briffa
Vic: Diana Batzias
WA: Cheryl Vernon

I am delighted to welcome back Helen Bayes and Moira Rayner onto the Committee and the Executive. Helen was the founder and first President and driving force behind DCI-A for many years and has worked for DCI in Geneva on several occasions. Moira has also been a long-standing advocate for children's rights and after a very difficult period has now felt able to come back onto the Committee. DCI-A will be all the richer for both Helen's and Moira's contribution. Welcome back too to the continuing members of the Committee – your contributions are needed and appreciated, and a special welcome to a new member for Queensland, Tina Previtiera. Still needed is a SA representative so if a SA member is willing to play this role, please contact us.

Best wishes for a peaceful and successful 2007
Judy Cashmore
President, DCI Australia