

** Many thanks for your welcome.

I would like to say a special Hello to The Honourable David Cunliffe, the Minister of Immigration, the Mayor of Lower Hutt, David Ogden, Community Leaders – and to everyone here Salaam to you.

Thank you, everyone, for being here tonight to celebrate together the WRD and the opening of the Walk with ME exhibition.

The World Refugee Day is a very special day for us. A day to remember and salute the courage of the world's refugees. It is also a day for all our fine community to come together and celebrate the work, support and assistance that has been provided for all refugees including the former refugee communities from many corners of the World.

Now.....you may wonder why I have this photo of a Trolley Bus in my hand! [...much loved in Wellington]

One morning, I was waiting in Newtown for the busand, while I was waiting I began to think of my journey into Courtenay Place and the tasks of the day ahead.

It occurred to me...that the Bus was a very good symbol of HOPE...our World Refugee Day Theme this year.

When we board we subconsciously live out HOPE.

- I hope the bus will come
- I hope it will get me to my goal. ...Courtenay Place.
- I hope it will be a fast trip.
- I hope it will be safe.
- I hope it will be smooth and not bumpy ride.

This HOPE, that we don't even think about, is determined by many, many people behind the scenes. For example:

- Designers of the bus
- Planners of the bus route
- Council staff. Office staff. Government agencies.
- Engineers, printers of the tickets.
- Drivers.
- Mechanics.
- Inspectors.
- Overhead wires... electricity production and so on.

I have used the analogy of a trolley bus here because I'm a Wellingtonian but those of you from here in the Hutt Valley could picture in your mind the CityLine bus services ...So, you can imagine the many, many people, and the great effort of those involved behind the simple journey of a bus, along with the HOPE people have that their journey will reach its destination and they will get there safely and in one piece.

For WORLD REFUGEE DAY, it is our opportunity to recognise and say THANK YOU to the many, many people behind the scenes who are involved with and for Refugees in countless tasks. Often these tasks are daunting but no one complains, they just get on with it often tired and unnoticed. I cannot find the words to express our gratitude.

I can but say, on behalf of the many refugees who have found a safe haven and a warm, welcome in this land, Aotearoa, New Zealand, a big THANK YOU.

We are all aware of the complex issues involved with living out the values of "Hospitality and Welcome" to those whose lives have been shattered through no fault of their own.

Be assured many "new New Zealanders" will not forget your open hearts. Sometimes the Bus trip from Newtown into Courtenay Place is not so easy. They are digging up Adelaide Road...the journey is rough. The bus goes via Mount Victoria and gets caught up in tight and narrow streets.....and the journey is long and stressful to say the least.

The journey of refugees is often bumpy and long, but in every step of our journey, we carry with us an unshakable hope that we will arrive soon at Courtenay Place.

A constant challenge that faces us all is to examine and reflect on what makes the journey bumpy and long for new settlers.

Ever since our first ancestors stood upon these shores, the same challenge of Welcome has been present.

When you next see a trolley bus, think of refugees and their journey in Aotearoa NZ.. At present time, much work is being done at Government level, scrutinising and examining Immigration Policies and always hoping for continuous improvement. A policy which enables our journey to become shorter and smoother!

We all live in HOPE.

We are already very appreciative of the inter-sectoral action plan taken by Central, and Local Govt, NGOs and refugee communities in Wellington region for the common good of all.

Next week, we are launching that action plan of refugee health and wellbeing in Wellington region.

Keep on keeping on!! Arohanui
Thank you.