

Refugee Services Aotearoa, Annual General Meeting

Report from Board Chairman Brian Lynch

15 December 2010

Item 5: Chairman's Report

I am in a more comfortable position tonight as your chairman than was the case fourteen months ago at the time of the 2009 Annual General Meeting. The agency is set on a steadier course than could be claimed when last we met, having then just come through the most traumatic period in its history. Much has been accomplished since. There are no grounds for complacency because the medium-term outlook has its share of challenges. But definite progress has been made, not least on the financial front as the annual accounts show.

As Chair it is pleasing to work in the interests of an organisation equipped with:

- a modern constitution
- a strengthened membership base
- a functioning senior management framework
- ably led by Heather as a highly competent and well regarded chief executive
- more secure funding,
- and dedicated staff and volunteers .

And not least, it has been a pleasure to work with a strong and talented board .One that among its members has a good representation of former refugees, all of whom make an effective contribution. To my board colleagues I express my warm appreciation for your sterling efforts during the year; both Davids, Druis, Khadra and Mahad. Margaret has been on overseas assignment for much of 2010 but we look forward to welcoming her back around the table early in the New Year.

There are seven specific areas where I believe there is a credible case for saying that Refugee Services truly lifted its performance in the year under review.

- A healthy and transparent relationship between the board and CEO
- A clearer separation of governance and executive responsibilities
- The turnaround in the financial situation with a modest surplus achieved
- A greater level of comfort given to our principal funders and close links with them
- Soundly based operating and accountability systems are now in place
- Board and senior management collaborated in an exercise to set the strategic direction
- Agency activities have a strong outcome focus as the basis for a robust business plan

Mention in the fourth point of our key funding sources is an opportunity to publicly acknowledge the positive relationship with the Ministry of Social Development and the Immigration Division of the Ministry of Labour. True, they have kept us on our toes in wanting regular and accurate reporting against agreed objectives. But working under that sort of discipline is not a bad thing; it has been a good test of the new operating systems and reinforced the value of having a credible business plan.

I want to also make reference to an important project that has consumed a lot of Heather's time in recent months and quite a bit of mine. It is a government-driven exercise with twin objectives. One is to settle the future of the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre, and there are several possible options in that context.

The other is to identify and put in place a genuine cross-government response to the challenges posed by refugee resettlement. The result here will have clear expectations of how future success will be reliably measured in five core phases: selection, reception, initial resettlement, progress towards integration, and final integration.

Heather is a member of the reference group on the project and is playing a full part. I have been involved on the project steering team as the representative of the network of non-government organisations with a serious interest in refugee resettlement.

I mention the exercise now to alert you that announcements are likely to emerge in the New Year following Cabinet consideration of the recommendations to be submitted to it over the next week or so. I am not able at this point to anticipate the Government's decisions. But I can predict that those decisions will be critically important for the future engagement that Refugee Services' and other non-government organisations have as service delivery agents in this field.

That Refugee Services was invited to be centrally involved in the project is a tribute to the profile the organisation has earned as the lead agency in the area of refugee resettlement. Heather and her team of professionals and volunteers have worked tirelessly and to great effect in building that reputation and attaching prime importance to maintaining close links with the refugee community.

Thank You.

Brian Lynch

Board Chair

Refugee Services Aotearoa

Wellington, 15 December 2010