

Don Chipp Foundation Ltd

ACN 008 618 488

PO Box 5089 KINGSTON ACT 2604

Human Rights Seminar: Opening Statement¹

By Dr Nina Burridge

Let me begin by telling you a little bit about the Don Chipp Foundation.

It's a foundation similar to the Evatt Foundation and the Menzies Foundation. It's very new – it was only created at the 25th anniversary of the party itself. It was an initiative of Senator Natasha Stott Despoja.

You have in your folders, a little bit about the Foundation and its charter. It's based on the premise of looking at issues in our community and researching issues in our community, which fit in with the Australian Democrats vision, and as Arthur mentioned, our basic underlying principles are of honesty, tolerance and compassion. And of course it's name after the founder of the Australian Democrats, and some who is still working to keep the bastards honest, and he says in his book that has just been released, on the current political situation.

The Foundation really got off the ground about August last year. I am its first chairperson. It does get funded by the Australian Government, through the Department of Finance and Admin, and we acknowledge that.

It gets a small amount of funding from them, and we are seeking to expand the work of the foundation by encouraging partnerships in research. What we did this year in April was to seek expressions of interest for small grants, we don't have a huge amount of funds, and we selected out of a dozens or so applications which can through from community groups and academics. We selected five of those for about \$5,000 each. Quite by coincidence, all of those grants were related to refugee issues. In some ways that was a very good thing. It wasn't our intention to fund all refugee research projects, but it seemed like a good theme when the projects feel into their places so we decided to fund five of those. Four of those projects are being showcased today. Clearly we didn't fund all the research that is underway, particularly the ones that David and Phil are working on, as they are far bigger projects. We just funded a very small amount, and I'm very grateful to them for coming today to participate today in our forum.

Can I say that in the current political climate I'm hearted by the response to this seminar at a very difficult time in the year for people. It shows that... It's a very hard time to be activists and researchers in this area because we feel a sense of frustration at the result of the last federal election, at the result in the Senate. And perhaps the

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level of indifference that seems to be out there in the general community about disadvantaged people. And perhaps the refugee cause now mirrors the indigenous problem in this country. There has been a problem with indigenous issues all along – have been out of sight and out of mind. And what we try and do at the Don Chipp Foundation is to put this back on the agenda, and hopefully some of the media will pick us up today.

I won't go on because we have a very tight schedule.

It's fair to say that at this particular time that in government circles, both in the government and in the opposition, we lack leadership on this particular issue and it's a great tragedy that the soul of the nation just doesn't seem to be coming through. We need to be able to say to people you have to look after those people in our community who are the most disadvantaged. That's where the true spirit of a nation lives. And hopefully today we'll be able to hit somewhere in terms of public perception of that issue.

The first report today comes from Phil. The Edmund Rice Centre has been involved in working with education and social justice issues. The report is based on the deportation of asylum seekers and the impact of that. From there we go onto a similar theme with Dr David Corlett from La Trobe University. And then we look at a particular project we funded in Queensland which was a database to capturing information about refugees. And we finish off with Denise Lynch in terms of looking after children of refugees.

The one project we haven't showcased today, and I think it's a very important one, relates to the work of the RRT, The Refugee Review Tribunal, and the decisions of the Refugee Review Tribunal. Anne Heseltine from Curtin University is working on that one, and we will await the results of that some time next year, that to me will be a very interesting one.

At 2.40pm we will have a break. We will also have a media conference, and I thank Ngarita Rossell for organizing it. It's to highlight the plight of particularly Iranian refugees who are in the process of being deported at the moment. And we have a refugee to speak on that issue Rosita Shahbazifar, who will be coming in at about 2.00pm to be involved with that. We'd like you to grab a cup of tea and stay for the media.

No more from me.