

Speech by
AKOI GUONG

Event: South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs
Commission **Youth Advisory Committee**

Multicultural Breakfast

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Speech by **AKOI GUONG**

South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission Youth Advisory Committee **Multicultural Breakfast** 12 April 2008

My name is Akoi Guong.

I am honored to be invited to speak to you today about some of the issues concerning the Sudanese youths and to provide some possible solutions to these issues. I came from Sudan years ago as a refugee, alone.

I work with the African Youth Network and the MRC Youth Reference Group. I am the General Secretary of the Sudanese youth in the Sudanese community Association. I am currently working three days a week as a Youth Worker and an Assistant Case Coordinator at the Migrant Resource Centre. I work with Sudanese youths and refugee new arrivals. I am also doing my second year of a Bachelor of social science degree at the University of South Australia

I have spoken to youths at schools, popular night clubs and disco hangouts. And some are having difficulties in all aspects of their life - education, family, employment and social.

I would like to focus on 3 main issues: 1. education and employment, 2. police and 3. family. These issues are interlinked and need to be seen as a whole.

Many young people are becoming isolated and dropping out of school, finding it hard to connect with their parents as the parents do not have the Australian experience and as a result are seeking comfort in fringe

groups. This has led some to delinquent behaviour such as excessive drinking, violence and petty crime.

At schools, there is limited support provided with language and many cannot keep up. There are problems with bullying and communication with the use of idioms and slangs by Australian students.

At home they do not find positive role models in their parents who are unemployed with low English proficiency. Some of them have sole parents who face challenges. Others have accommodation problems.

Moreover, jobs and training opportunities are big issues. Culture shock, struggle with their identity, cultural differences and lack of their own space to go after school are what they experience. Again, learning to drive is a big issue as many who are 18 and above want a licence to go to look for work. It is very expensive and puts a lot of financial burden on the young people and their parents.

I have been contacted many times by the police and have had a couple of meetings with them. Their concern is how we deal with these issues. There are about 30 young people who are in the spotlight of the police, some cases are minor and some are serious. We have got one big community, under one umbrella community association which has its office in Prospect. The community resides across the State, in the Northern suburbs - Kilburn, Modbury, Klemzig, Pooraka and Para Hills.

I suggest that mentoring should be offered to those who are 'at risk'. There is a need for people who can volunteer in different areas of Adelaide.

I suggest initiatives such as friendship group outings to festivals, formal meetings, and soccer tournaments to increase in every council, and computer classes, and cultural activities to be introduced in school and assignment help session in most of the school. Also some free driving lessons to help those in low income status and wanted to work. Some of these suggestions may involve other CALD youth members who may make friends and provide positive influences by sharing their communities' stories with new arrival youth to provide inspiration and a positive outlook.

I suggest that these activities could be of benefit to *all* vulnerable youth, not just Sudanese.

As for the appropriateness of cross-cultural mentors, I feel that if service providers worked *with* Sudanese youth leader and the community rather than *to* the community. It is important that they feel a part of the solution rather than just the problem.

There is a Chinese proverb that says: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

Mentors are in a position to empower these youth and to assist them to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills so that they can stand on their own two feet.

I want to end on a positive note. Currently there are 300 Sudanese youths who are doing tertiary studies and the future for our community is very promising for many of us.

When you do nothing, you feel overwhelmed and powerless. But when you get involved, you feel the sense of hope and accomplishment that comes from knowing you are working to make things better.