



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration and Citizenship**

Sister Libby Rogerson IBVM  
Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in New South Wales  
PO Box 259  
ROSEBERRY NSW 2474

Dear Sister Rogerson

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 July 2008 to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, concerning the difficulties and challenges faced by newly arrived Sudanese refugees in accessing and retaining adequate housing. The Minister has asked me to reply on his behalf.

I share your concerns that refugees face particular challenges in securing long-term housing. Access to suitable and affordable housing is critical to successful settlement and provides a base from which new arrivals can engage with the local community.

While the Department has limited scope to provide housing assistance, it delivers a range of initiatives to assist humanitarian entrants integrate into Australian society.

Since 1998, the Department (through the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS)) has provided intensive initial settlement assistance to refugee and humanitarian entrants. New arrivals are provided with a number of settlement support services, including: on-arrival reception; initial accommodation and food supplies; emergency clothing; referral to mainstream agencies including Centrelink and Medicare; household goods packages; and assistance in identifying and securing long-term accommodation.

In March 2008 accommodation and utility subsidies available to entrants were enhanced in response to escalating rental prices. The IHSS now covers entrants' full rental and utility costs for the first four weeks after arrival. The IHSS also delivers tenancy training to entrants to help them understand their responsibilities and to provide them with the necessary skills to meet these responsibilities.

The Department also administers the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) which funds community organisations to link humanitarian entrants and eligible migrants with mainstream agencies such as health, education and employment services. Under the 2008-09 SGP the Department funded housing-related activities in a limited number of locations on a pilot basis. These include assisting clients to learn how to find and apply for properties; liaison with real estate agents to increase awareness of client group needs; and information sessions on tenancy rights and responsibilities.

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From 1 January 2008, refugees and humanitarian entrants who arrive with limited financial resources are eligible for an additional one-off income support payment through Centrelink. IHSS service providers facilitate Centrelink referrals for entrants and ensure that they are connected with Centrelink services within 48 hours of arrival.

A pilot expansion of free interpreting services to real estate agents, through the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), is being developed by the Department and is expected to commence in the coming months. This will support improved communication between the real estate industry and newly arrived humanitarian entrants.

The Department is also participating in an Inter-departmental Committee on Homelessness. The work of this Committee will assist in the development of a national response to homelessness and the Department has raised the particular needs of humanitarian entrants through this forum.

Thank you for bringing this matter to the minister's attention.

Yours sincerely



Kate Pope  
First Assistant Secretary  
Citizenship, Settlement and Multicultural Affairs Division

24 July 2008