



MEDIA RELEASE – 27 November 2018

The Refugee Experience in New Zealand – Public Forum

A Forum on the Refugee Experience in New Zealand – including two extraordinary stories of survival as a Holocaust refugee in the 1950s and as a refugee from war torn Eritrea in 2008 – offers compelling historic and contemporary perspectives on how New Zealand has responded to and treated refugees.

At the National Library of New Zealand in Wellington on Tuesday, 4 December from 5:30-7pm, the Forum will be moderated by journalist and refugee advocate, Tracey Barnett. The Forum is part of the *Social Justice Speakers* series being held in conjunction with the Children’s Holocaust Memorial Exhibition.

Inge Woolf came to New Zealand from Europe as a child refugee of the Holocaust, Ibrahim Omer from Eritrea. Both have made significant contributions to New Zealand life and society, and both grew up as children surrounded by war and conflict, but are now strong peace advocates.

A child soldier at 15, who was smuggled across the Sudanese border, Ibrahim tells of soldiers being told to shoot to kill if someone crossed the border, “I decided then and there, I wanted to live, or die trying.”

The Forum is especially relevant today says Deputy Chair of the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, Dianne Davis, “How we respond to refugee crises on our doorstep such as Nauru and Manus will say a lot about the New Zealand character and soul. Being a refugee stays with someone forever; on Nauru and Manus you have deeply traumatised people in desperate need of medical and psychological care. We should not demonise those seeking refuge within our region, but commit to policies based on genuine compassion and mutual responsibility”.

For Holocaust refugee, Inge Woolf, the situation on Nauru and Manus is clear, “I’m beyond words thinking how a government in this day and age can treat people like this, children in particular. I just think how damaged those children must be, living in those conditions. By contrast, New Zealand has been really effective working with our refugee communities to ensure they become valuable citizens”.

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