



There's no place like home

A new documentary examines Australia's treatment of refugees. **Kim Fisher** reports.

In Australia, we like to think that we give everyone the obligatory "fair go", including refugees who need solace and protection. However, many refugees are deported from Australia, despite the threat of persecution or danger in their countries of origin.

A new SBS documentary, *A Well-Founded Fear*, shines a light on the often ignored side of Australia — the way we treat these refugees.

Producer and co-director Anne Delaney followed Phil Glendenning, director of The Edmund Rice Centre, a refugee advocacy group, in his five-year search for the asylum seekers Australia rejected.

Delaney says she was inspired by the work Glendenning does for these people in need, as well as the lack of knowledge surrounding the subject, including her own.

"I had a long-term interest in asylum seekers so I met Phil and I knew that the whole issue of deporting people was in the agenda but I didn't realise the extent of it," she says. "When I started to investigate it, I was horrified by what turned up about what was happening to these people."

Delaney says she was shocked by the callous attitude the Government took when assessing people in need of refuge. Glendenning's claims have been dismissed by the Government in the past, which Delaney says stems from them not monitoring refugees once they are deported.

"They were essentially saying that the allegations being made were

unsubstantiated and I thought, 'How do they know that?'," she says. "It all started to fit together and I thought a documentary film needed to be made to clarify one way or another whether Phil Glendenning was right in the allegations he was making."

A Well-Founded Fear has already prompted change, before going to air, with Immigration Minister Chris Evans asking his department to investigate claims made by the film that a number of Afghan asylum seekers were killed by the Taliban when their applications were rejected by the Government and they were sent home.

Delaney says this is a step in the right direction, and hopefully the beginning of a change.

"I think it's a fantastic move but I think it's only the first step," she says. "I think that one of the heartening things is that he has taken the allegations seriously, which is really different to how the previous government handled similar allegations."

Delaney says the previous government did not want Australians to know the conditions of refugees and how they were assessed, which has led to most of us being in the dark about the issues.

"I think the places that these people come from are not the average destinations Australians go to, so I think that makes it difficult," Delaney says.

"Obviously, the Government has had an interest in not publicising any of this."

Legally, the Australian Government cannot turn away refugees who face danger or persecution if they return to their home country.

Delaney says the previous government improperly assessed refugees and deported them without tracking if they were safe on their return.

"They just washed their hands of these people instead of supporting them," she says. "The big question for me always has been, if we don't know what happens to these people when they get sent back, we'll actually never know whether or not the Government is making the right decision about sending them."

Delaney says working on *A Well-Founded Fear* has raised questions for her on how refugees are assessed and what the Government considers persecution or an unsafe place to live.

"If they go back and suffer persecution in one way or another, that raises the question about how we're assessing people under the refugee convention," she suggests.

"I think a big blowtorch needs to go on to this issue."

Delaney says her ultimate goal for *A Well-Founded Fear* is to raise the awareness of average Australians of what is going on. "I don't think the Australian public knows very much about it," she says. "It's uncovering material about Australia's past, which, at the time, they really didn't want uncovered."

A Well-Founded Fear is on tomorrow at 8.30pm on SBS.



In Kabul: Director of photography Marden Dean with Phil Glendenning.

'If they go back and suffer persecution, that raises the question about how we're assessing people under the refugee convention.'



Grief: Zehra's son disappeared soon after being returned to Afghanistan.