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AUSTRALIA

# Justice for Africans

**Graham Matthews**  
21 March 2009

**Soubhi Iskander is a leading member of the Sudanese Australia Human Rights Association, a committee based in Sydney's west, that campaigns for the rights of Sudanese refugees. SAHRA is also an affiliate of the Socialist Alliance.**

Iskander spoke to *Green Left Weekly* about the racist discrimination faced by African refugees, following the announcement of a national inquiry into racism and the exclusion of Africans in Australia, to be launched by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC).

"It's nice that there is a committee that is launching an investigation" into racism against Africans, Iskander said, "because we have been waiting for that for a long time."

Asked what issues the committee should investigate, Iskander pinpointed the police as the most important. "The police seem to believe that Africans are more criminal than whites", he said. "They are treated in a very inhuman way. We at SAHRA have many complaints from people who are being mistreated by the police.

"The second issue is housing", Iskander said. "Often landlords will not rent houses to Africans because they think that they are filthy, will destroy the house or leave it in a mess or whatever."

When Africans are offered a lease, it's often at an inflated price, Iskander explained. He cited three examples, where "for a three-bedroom house, because they were African, they had to pay \$420 a week, which forced them to have two families living in the one house, just to pay the rent", he said.

"The third issue", that HREOC should examine "is the issue of the treatment of Africans at work", Iskander explained. "They are not given work according to their qualifications, but are usually forced to work as security guards or in labouring work.

"There is also discrimination by banks", Iskander said. "Africans cannot secure loans easily. I know people, who are working, who were refused loans from the banks so they had to get it from the private providers, who demand very high interest rates."

Iskander said that SAHRA is campaigning for housing justice for African refugees in west and south-west Sydney. "We have learned from our friends in Queensland that they have the

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same problems also”, he explained. Having written to Blacktown, Fairfield and Liverpool councils explaining the plight of African refugees and asking for some assistance, however, SAHRA has heard nothing.

“As Africans we don’t demand any privileges”, Iskander explained. “We just want to be treated the same as other Australians.”

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