

# MACEDONIAN AGENDA



**16 essays on the development of Macedonian culture in Australia. Includes cultural values, language, religion, arts, identity, women's issues, the elderly, immigration, politics, the "child refugees", human rights and more**

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Victor Bivell**

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*Front cover: February 2, 1960, Bitola Railway Station, Macedonia:  
Mr Aleksandar Kolupacev is farewelled by his village, Gjavato, as he  
sets out for a new life in Port Kembla, Australia.*

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# Declaration Of The "Child Refugees"

## The Association of Refugee Children From The Aegean Part of Macedonia

*This is the declaration of the first gathering in Australia of the child refugees from the Aegean part of Macedonia, held in Melbourne on January 10 to 12, 1992*

We, the former child refugees from the Aegean part of Macedonia, present citizens and residents of Australia, participants in this our first mass gathering held in Melbourne, Australia from 10-12 January 1992, look back to that distant year 1948, when, as part of a total number of 28,000 children aged between two and fifteen, we were forced to flee our homeland and loved ones in order to save ourselves from the bombardments and programs which were being carried out against the progressive forces and the Macedonian partisans at the height of the civil war then raging in Aegean Macedonia and Greece.

To this very day we have been denied the right to return to our homeland by successive Greek regimes on account of the preservation and promotion of our Macedonian identity.

We, the innocent victims of that war, look back solemnly to that tragedy in memory of the catastrophe which affected thousands of children, which wrote thousands of sad pages in our national and personal history, in order that it never be forgotten. However, we also look back to that tragedy because of our ardent and sincere wish that such events, which unfortunately still rock the world to this very day, never occur again.

This process of re-experiencing the pain that we felt 44 years ago is at the same time an affirmation of the indestructible spirit of our people which raises its voice not only in defence of its own human rights, but also those of all people throughout the world who are deprived of them.

Inspired by our desire that the message of this gathering be a voice of protest against all these injustices done to mankind in whatever part of the world, and in the name of humanity, democracy and cooperation between all peoples, we, the exiled child refugees from Aegean Macedonia, hereby make before the Australian Government, Australian and world democratic forces, the United Nations (UN), the European

Community (EC), the Council of Europe, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and those countries which accepted and gave us asylum after the flight from our homeland - the CIS (USSR), Rumania, Hungary, Poland, Czech and Slovak Republic, Albania, Bulgaria, Germany (then East Germany) and Yugoslavia - the following DECLARATION AND DEMANDS:

**WE DEMAND**

(1) An immediate end to the policy of forced assimilation of Macedonians in Greece and Bulgaria, including the cessation of the settlement of ethnic Greeks from the former USSR and Albania in Aegean Macedonia, Greece;

(2) The repeal of all discriminatory Greek legislation such as Law No. 106841 of 28.12.1982 (which denies the return to Greece of all political refugees who are not "ethnic Greeks"), Law No. 1540/85 of 10.4.1985 (which also prevents the return of property to political refugees who are not "ethnic Greeks") and the 1983 law with which degrees obtained in the then Socialist Republic of Macedonia ceased to be recognized on the grounds that the "Macedonian language is not internationally recognized", a false claim given that the UN does recognize the Macedonian language;

(3) The free return of all Macedonians, including all former child refugees, former partisans and their children, to Greece, whether for purposes of resuming residence or for family or humanitarian visits. The abolition of visas for Macedonians from the Macedonian Republic wishing to visit Greece for short-term stays;

(4) The immediate cessation of discrimination in the fields of education and employment as well as in cultural, social and political life against Macedonians in Greece, Bulgaria and Albania;

(5) The enactment of legislation (including constitutional recognition) in Greece, Bulgaria and Albania which expressly recognizes the ethno-specificity of the Macedonian people and its history, language and culture and accords it the status of an official minority;

(6) Recognition of the Macedonian Orthodox Church by Greek, Bulgarian and Albanian state and ecclesiastical authorities;

(7) The creation of conditions which enable Macedonians in Greece, Bulgaria and Albania to participate freely in the political life of their respective countries, including representation at all levels of government and the civil services;

(8) Measures which enable Macedonians in Greece, Bulgaria and Albania to receive their primary and secondary education and if possible, their tertiary education, in the Macedonian language on an equal footing

with instruction in the national language;

(9) Administrative and legal measures by Greece, Bulgaria and Albania which provide for the use of the Macedonian language in local administration and in decentralized government services and recognition of Macedonian personal, place and geographical names in official documentation;

(10) Greece, Bulgaria and Albania to introduce measures in respect of the mass media, including full access for Macedonians to local, regional and central public and commercial broadcasting systems and the free production and dissemination of Macedonian-language papers, literature and written works;

(11) Measures which ensure the free use of the Macedonian language when directly participating in cultural facilities and activities in Greece, Bulgaria and Albania;

(12) Adoption of measures by Greece, Bulgaria and Albania which ensure free movement across state borders for Macedonians for the purposes of cultural maintenance, family and humanitarian visits, and in pursuit of the goals of freedom of association;

(13) Immediate recognition by the Greek authorities of the Committee for the Defence of Macedonian Human Rights and the "Centre for Macedonian Culture" in Lerin (Florina). Immediate recognition by Bulgaria of OMO "Ilinden", VMRO "Ilinden" (Independent) and all other genuinely ethnic Macedonian organizations. Cessation of reprisals against Macedonian human rights activists and members of the abovementioned organizations in Greece and Bulgaria;

(14) An immediate end to the aggressive and negationist policies practised against the Republic of Macedonia and the Macedonians which live within its borders by Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia which represent a danger for the continued existence of our nation state. The cessation of Greek Government-dictated campaigns of destabilization of Macedonian communities in Australia, Canada, USA and Western Europe.

We resolutely condemn the senseless adventurism of the present Serbian leadership whose expansionist policies not only threaten the continued existence and independence of the Republics of Macedonia, Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia & Hercegovina, but peace throughout Europe as a whole.

We appeal to the progressive and democratically-minded governments and peoples of the world to recognize the independence of the Republic of Macedonia. Such recognition represents a moral obligation for all well-intentioned people who truly respect the right to self-determination.

We firmly believe that the realization of the abovementioned demands

shall contribute to Macedonia being transformed from an apple of discord between the Balkan States into a uniting force which will bring about conditions for lasting peace and stability in the Balkans and the promotion of the processes of European integration and cooperation. We strive for a Europe without frontiers, however without recognition of the Macedonian people and nation there will be no peace in the Balkans or Europe as a whole.

Let Australia's policy of multiculturalism which has created conditions in which we, the former child refugees, are able to preserve and develop our rich Macedonian culture, serve as a shining example to Greece, Bulgaria and Albania and to all the countries of the world where human rights are trampled and violated.

Let the world know about the terrible tragedy that we experienced as children. May our tragedy motivate all progressive-minded people throughout the world to unite in a strong front in the struggle against all forms of injustice and denial of basic human rights and degradation of the aspiration to freedom and peace.

Long live Macedonia, long live the Macedonian people and its noble, universal struggle.