The Oromo fight for recognition in their new home

Cultures | Sally Spalding

FOR the Oromo people, Refugee Week in Australia stirs up powerful memories.

“IT is a time for us to reflect that we are not mentally settled in Australia but that we are physically settled here,” said Lensa Dinka, a Southern Health nurse.

Speaking with two other Oromo friends she described how she came to Australia in 1999. I was at university in Ethiopia and our graduation was due but the government would not let us finish our study,” she said. “It was hard to live there peacefully so I escaped and worked on the Sudanese border for some years, educating people as a teacher.”

Student Ayantu Deme’s time in Australia has been short. “I have been here 10 months but I am always worried about the people I have left at home and if we are safe,” she said.

Mrs Deme came here with her daughter and wants to study at university after completing a course in English as a second language.

Aliye Geleto, who was arrested with his activist father when he was a teenager, said: “We were beaten and harassed and my Dad was buried alive, but he survived.”

He came to Australia under UNHCR conditions from Kenya and since arriving in Melbourne he has completed two masters degrees, in IT and law, and is studying for his third in engineering.

Mr Dinka runs the Oromo radio program on 8ZZZ. “We have to tell people we are the second largest indigenous population in Africa because nobody knows about us,” he said.

“We are a new community fighting for our identity and we need to protect our community and our culture. The three Oromo members were part of a recent delegation to Canberra to alert the Federal Government of their existence in Australia.”

Ayantu Deme, Aliye Geleto and Lensa Dinka are speaking up for the Oromo community.

Picture: IAN COOK. MD200500