



25 October 2011

DETENTION DISGRACE – There is an alternative to the inhumanity of mandatory detention

The detention system in Australia is broken. Last night's Four Corners program showed graphically how the current detention policy is destroying people's mental health.

There is a solution. It is being done in a small way right now. The ASRC is calling for an immediate extension of onshore, community based processing.

1. We are doing it now - the majority of people seeking asylum in Australia are processed in the community. In the first six months of 2011, 1500 people were moved from detention centres to be processed in the community and the world did not end. This is currently happening in every state in Australia and is working.
2. It is cost effective - the Government's own figures show that placing people in community detention is 90% cheaper than in immigration detention. The Government's response to the current Parliamentary Enquiry into Australia's Immigration Detention Network costs community detention at \$10,400 per person per year. This is in comparison to the cost of \$137,317¹ per year per person in immigration detention.
3. It is more humane – the human cost of placing people in arbitrary, indefinite detention is massive. As highlighted by Professor Louise Newman, there is an epidemic of high levels of psychological distress in detention centres. Mandatory detention is also contrary to the Australian Government's own Detention Values which state that 'detention in immigration detention centres is only to be used as a last resort and for the shortest practicable time'.

There are currently

- 5597 people in immigration detention.
- 1151 of this number are in community detention.
- 2035 people have been held for longer than a year in detention.
- 600 people in detention are stateless with country for return.
- 1591 are refugees waiting for security checks when ASIO have said 'it is not a requirement under the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act 1979 that irregular maritime arrivals (IMAs) remain in detention during the security assessment process'.
- 42 people face indefinite detention with no reason given as a result of unpublicized decisions.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) and other community agencies are seeking an urgent meeting with the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) to discuss implementation of the alternatives to the inhumanity of mandatory detention. The ASRC believes that after initial health and security checks, asylum seeker arrivals should be processed in the community with access to a safety net.

For media comment please call:

Pamela Curr on 0417 517 075

Jana Favero on 0438 829 651

www.asrc.org.au

¹ Government response to Joint Select Committee on Australia's Detention Network – ASRC Summary S:\Campaigns\2.0 - Research for internal use\2.7 - Immigration Detention