

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Submission to the Senate Inquiry - Conditions and treatment of asylum seekers and refugees at the regional processing centres in the Republic of Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

Dear Senate Committee

I am writing in response to your call for submissions on the conditions and treatment of asylum seekers and refugees at the regional processing centres. I am grateful for the opportunity as a citizen of Australia to inform the committee.

Firstly, I will address parts a and b of the terms of reference "conditions and treatment" and "transparency". In Australia the general public rely heavily on the media to report the news of the day, unfortunately currently the media is denied the ability to give a balanced report in fear of being thrown in jail. The current government has taken away the rights of citizens to make informed opinions. Thankfully we have the Australian Human Rights Commission who has looked at this issue and informed (those who seek it) that there are great concerns for the well being of asylum seekers and refugees in any processing centre. They reported in 2014 that the conditions of these centres and the way that these men, women and children are treated do not meet our international obligations. If all Australians were informed there would be outrage and a call for change, but most Australians do not know the truth. When I talk with Australians they are shocked and can't believe that our government has become one of secrecy and a vehicle to inflict harm on others.

The majority of Australians are not like the racist people that gave their opinions to a survey years ago. We are a nation so diverse it is our national strength. Venture into any school and you will see children who know how to get along. They really do collaborate together, eat together, share together and value each other's point of view. But unfortunately we have an older generation as leaders who have not grown up in this wonderful diverse environment. Older Australian's still have a lot to offer but in this new world of diversity their own experiences are limiting how they think Australian's want to respond to asylum seekers and refugees. Unless the Australian speaking in this space is an indigenous person, we have all come from another place, and this gift of citizenship has a responsibility attached to it. The responsibility to speak up to ensure that harm is not inflicted on any man, women or child regardless of race or beliefs. I strongly recommend placing all those who have spent years at these centres into the community, give them back their humanity, allow them to work and learn and become the people they were born to be.

Secondly, I would like to address the term of reference part e "value of money". If this issue was considered on money alone the policy/ies would change tomorrow and human rights would be restored as the people would be released into the community and allowed to work until their applications were fully processed. But money is not the driving force behind the government's policies, it has been an ill informed belief that all Australians don't want to help others because they are "others". This is not the truth and I would strongly recommend better community engagement from all areas of government so that we can create a sustainable future for all. Because in the end we only have one planet. We need to engage and connect with each other to shape a future that will support all.

Finally, I would like to say thank you for taking the time to read and consider my recommendations. It was only by chance that today I saw the deadline, what a pity. Given the chance I would have informed my community and I am sure many, many people would have written. Australians do want change, they do want compassion, they do want governments to save money, they do want an environment that will survive beyond this generation with clean air and water, they are innovative, they are creative, they are caring, they are wonderful if given the information Australians are an amazing group of diverse people who can get along and achieve great things.

Regards Louise Edwards 31.3.2016