

To the parliamentary committee inquiring into Australia's immigration detention network,

I am studying to become a secondary teacher at the moment, and have been reflecting on the emphasis (rightly) of educating young people to become active, informed *global* citizens. Underlying this curriculum focus is the recognition that the individual decisions and choices that we make daily do have an impact, not only in our local environment but globally. We are saying to our students that each and every one of us has the capacity to create change to improve the world.

To my utter dismay and disillusionment, I won't be able to say, when I teach a unit on the global refugee crisis, surely one of our most pressing global concerns: "Let's look at Australia's progressive, informed and compassionate policy in response to asylum seekers!"

Instead I have to try to explain why in Australia we put asylum seekers in mandatory detention centres, *for indefinite periods of time*, including children, younger even than the students I will be teaching, and some of whom do not have a parent or guardian to support them in such traumatic circumstances. What is that teaching our young people about our global responsibilities? Basically it's saying that what we teach at school is nonsense, because when you get out into the 'real world', it's all about 'protecting' your bit of turf, and too bad for the people who have suffered immense losses due to war, persecution, climate change, etc. Too bad that they were born in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Despite some improvements in policy approach over the past five years, put forward by the previous Howard government and the current government, indefinite mandatory detention remains, at great cost to the physical, emotional and psychological health of detainees, (which of course means that even though they may be granted asylum in Australia, they will then have to deal with the scars of this added trauma), and with the knowledge that this violates our international obligations. And despite the fact that it does not stop people from seeking asylum in Australia.

I fully support the recommendations put forward by the Centre for Policy Development and urge the government to act on these immediately:

1. Phase out mandatory detention within two years, transitioning to a risk-based detention policy applicable to all asylum seekers regardless of their manner of arrival and including currently excised locations. This will end the prolonged use of Christmas Island and involve a repeal of the excision laws.
2. Refocus the legal framework for detention to match the mainstream legal framework for all other forms of detention in Australia.
3. Use detention specifically for mandatory health, identity and security checks, with a 30 day time limit for adults (with additional detention on judicial order) and a 14 day time

limit for children.

4. Create new accommodation centres with greater flexibility for different security levels, in urban or regional hub locations, for ease of service delivery, better oversight and reduced cost.
5. Appoint an independent child guardian for Unaccompanied Minors in the immigration regime.
6. Release all children (and their carers) from mandatory detention before the end of 2011.

Please take the politics out of this critical issue, and accept that we have a moral obligation to vastly improve our support of the world's refugees. We need to take responsibility for the very fact that we are part of this world, we do exist in isolation and therefore we have a role to take on, as do all the richer, more fortunate countries in the world.

Then I will be able to say to my students: Australia is a leader in the global community, for its support and protection of people who are **seeking refuge**.

Yours faithfully

Bronwyn Ritchie