

Submission on Australia's Immigration Detention Network

I have been visiting detainees at The Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre for approximately 6 years.

At present, the detainees I am visiting are Hazara men from Afghanistan all of whom have been in detention for long periods, mostly for at least one year.

One of these men, was flown down to Melbourne where I was able to visit him and then he was suddenly flown back to Darwin early one Monday morning. Contact with him since then has been extremely difficult. During one of our conversations, at a time when there were troubles at Villawood, I remember distinctly him saying he would never run away from the detention centre as that would be the wrong thing to do. He would stay in the centre even if the gate were left open. He wanted to do the right thing by the authorities to whom he had applied for a visa.

I have become very aware of the long process involved in determining the outcome of these applications for a visa and I cannot understand why it takes so long. Their legal representation seems to vary from person to person and the whole tortuous process fills them, and me, with despair. On my visits, I can see this despair more and more in their blank faces and sad eyes. They ask me what they have done wrong and I have no answer.

Another factor that puzzles them, and me, is the seemingly arbitrary nature of the process with some people being granted a visa and others, arriving on the same boat, still waiting for a decision.

My understanding is that most of these men are eventually granted a visa to live in Australia and I cannot understand why this takes such a long time. Given the cost of the whole process, I would have thought it would make economic sense to speed up the interviews etc. by employing more staff and facilitating the processing of these visa applications.

It is ridiculous for the Australian Government to claim Afghanistan is safe enough for these people to return given the ongoing violence carried out by the Taliban against Hazara people.

I request that you give urgent consideration to these matters and allow these traumatised people to live in the community. People who are released from detention are anxious to rebuild their lives and give something back to what they hope is a compassionate, caring and understanding country. I hope they will not be disappointed as that is the kind of country of which I want to be a citizen. Given our history of welcoming immigrants over so many years, I always thought it was.

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