

To the Secretary of the Joint Select Committee:

I wish to make a short submission . I have not visited people in detention, but I have corresponded by letter with Hazaras incarcerated on Nauru for three years under the Howard Government's 'Pacific Solution' and have been closely associated with several Hazara families in Dandenong and Hampton Park (Victoria) since their release from Nauru. I came to know about and understand the trauma of the long detention heaped upon the suffering and personal dangers which caused them to flee Afghanistan.

Over the time of my association with these loveable people I have researched their history as a long-persecuted minority in Afghanistan and the present-day persecution which makes them the major group to flee their country. More often than any other groups of people they are found to be genuine refugees in need of protection. Yet they are demonised by both sides of government as jumpers of imaginary queues who prevent others from finding a place in Australia. They do not come by plane, as do the overlooked 98% of asylum seekers because there is no possibility of getting a passport to fly in a country that does not issue birth and marriage certificates, for example. These salient facts are not publicised, of course.

Every Hazara person whom I know has a personal tragedy to tell. They are immensely grateful to Australia and are hard-working contributors to our economy and our culture. Their children study hard at school, devouring the education that would be forbidden them in Afghanistan and aspire to professional careers that can only benefit our country.

I know these people as *people*, and I despair of a Government and Opposition mindset and policies that deny them their humanity and their reality and allows the media to condition the minds of the public with terms like 'queue-jumpers, ;illegals' and 'boat people'. Like a species apart. Vote-catchers for both sides of politics.

The effects on already traumatised people of long periods of incarceration without hope are well documented, yet the Government sends survivors of torture who suffer mental breakdown because of this incarceration to solitary confinement for further punishment. Refugees in detention are treated like criminals in goal. Should there be any doubt about the causes of disturbances in detention centres?

The impact of long-term detention on families must be traumatic and have long-term effects on the children, particularly. My wish is for the Government to become more honest and open in its treatment and discussion of refugee matters.

Sincerely,