

Feb. 8th 2017

Re: Proposed MITA building programme

A year ago, when I first visited MITA with some friends, I saw that visitors from many community groups would collect bags of wool and other craft supplies, board games and puzzles for the detainees to while away their time in detention. Our church Op Shop provided a lot of these items. We also used to bring a variety of fruit and feta to share and for the detainees to enjoy later in their rooms. This is no longer permitted.

We used to bring in clothing and footwear for detainees. Now they have to make a written application to SERCO and Border Protection for their approval. The items then have to be delivered at specific times that are not aligned with visiting hours. This means a long inconvenient journey for many just for deliveries.

We have seen these friendly happy people become more and more depressed as time goes on. Due to the feeling of hopelessness for their future they are having trouble sleeping and appear to be existing on strong anti depressants and sleeping tablets. They have been separated from their

friends into different compounds and are now unable to leave their own compound, so when asked about the welfare of others they are unable to reply.

My friends and I co-operated with another group on arranging a Christmas party last December for the detainees. At our Christmas party a lot of preparation and money had been expended to make it a happy occasion for our friends in detention. For some reason, only the men were sent in first and enjoyed the meal and the carol singing. The women were brought to the door before the men were finished and were humiliated by being denied entry and herded back to their compounds. They decided they no longer wanted to be part of the festivities which was a huge disappointment to the visitors and the women themselves who had dressed up for the occasion. A huge waste of time and money on what should have been a joyful time spent together.

Furthermore an agreement had been reached with Border Protection that on this occasion, the detainees would be able to take a box of fruit to their rooms after the meal and carol singing, but this was vetoed by one of the guards until at length the arrangement was okayed. This feeling of being at the whim of the guards places a pall on both detainees and the visitors alike.

The thought that these unhappy individuals should be subjected to further inhumane restrictions by increasing the security of this facility is appalling. This sends the wrong message to the guards, that these people deserve to be treated like the worst criminals. This can only lead to further feelings of

hopelessness and possibly violence. These people are being denied their human rights to freedom and a safe environment.

The outlay of security fences, cameras, locks etc is at the expense of the needs of the detainees and can only cause further despair to those who are incarcerated and those in the community who endeavour to support them.

I am very much against the MITA building programme.

Your sincerely,

Alexandra Elliott