

I am Father Paul Webb of the Catholic Diocese of Darwin. I am a retired priest and I visit the Northern Immigration Detention Centre at Coonawarra, Darwin and the Darwin Airport Lodge Detention Centre once a week for two hours each.

Whilst the living facilities are mostly satisfactory- air conditioned motel type rooms, there are not enough facilities for physical activities, such as playing soccer or basket ball.

It really is quite disgraceful that these asylum seekers are kept behind wire fences without any apparent hope of a speedy resolution of their individual cases. Many of these detainees have already spent up to a year on Christmas Island and now are spending many more months in these Detention Centres on the mainland. DIAC should lift its game and process these people much more speedily. If this were to happen much of the frustration experienced by the detainees would be resolved. It is frustration which makes some damage facilities, or climb on to the roofs or even go on hunger strikes.

It is no answer to state as press reports suggest, that no one asked these people to come to Australia. They are HERE and now this country has to deal with them in a humanitarian way. Some of my clients whom I see regularly are tradesmen from Iran - welders, chefs, fitter and turners- and who could be an asset to the work force in this country. These particular men have fled from Iran because of their involvement in clandestine Christian groups. The Religious Police discovered their existence and to save their lives they fled.

Some of the Serco guards are ill trained to act as gaolers. Some are very good and helpful but others are not. I suggest that the training of these people needs to be upgraded.

In conclusion may I reiterate that DIAC must be more efficient in processing these detainees. To be otherwise is to increase mental suffering and inhumane practices.

Revd. Dr. Paul Webb