Submission to Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Migration Amendment (Strengthening Biometrics Integrity) Bill 2015

Introduction

The Combined Refugee Action Group (CRAG) is based in Geelong, Victoria, and brings together people from a variety of backgrounds –Community and Faith Groups, Unions, Refugee Support Groups, Social Justice and Social Action Groups, students and individuals - united by the shared aim of advocating for just, humane and welcoming policy towards asylum seekers and refugees. We have around 600 people on our membership list, as well as a following of over 1,600 on social media. CRAG advocates for policies that are informed by, and aligned with, the UN Refugee Convention and Protocol, and that are developed in partnership with our regional neighbours, to ensure the safety of vulnerable asylum seekers. CRAG joined a police-estimated crowd of 15,000 people in Melbourne on Sunday 29-03-15 to walk for justice for refugees and asylum seekers and to oppose the harsh, cruel, punitive policies of the Australian Government.

Concerns regarding this Bill

The Migration Amendment (Strengthening Biometrics Integrity) Bill 2015 makes adjustments and repeals to the Migration Act to allow the extended use of biometric data (finger prints, iris scans, voice recordings, photographs, signatures etc.) to determine identity at Australia's borders.

While it appears that the Bill's intention is to increase the likelihood that known criminals and terrorists are prevented from entering Australia through normal migration channels, we are very concerned that Minister Dutton has stated that this Bill will help the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to deal with asylum seekers who are awaiting refugee determinations.

We are concerned that the increased emphasis on biometric data may lead to asylum seekers and refugees being returned, or detained indefinitely, if it is not possible to source baseline data to compare to data collected on/ after, arrival. This could lead to human rights abuses through refoulement and arbitrary detention.