

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 24 FEBRUARY 2009

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(39) Output 1.5: Detention

Senator Hanson-Young asked:

Children in Detention

- 1) Could you provide a breakdown on how many children are in detention and the length of time these children have been held for?
- 2) What is the nationality of these children?
- 3) Have the children been separated from their families?

Answer:

The Government's policy, as was clearly enunciated in the Government's Key Immigration Detention Values announced by the Minister in July 2008 is that children will not be held in immigration detention centres. While there will be occasions when children will be accommodated in low security facilities within the immigration detention framework, such as immigration residential housing (IRH) and immigration transit accommodation (ITA), the priority will always be that children and their families will be promptly accommodated in community detention (or "residential determination" as it is known under the *Migration Act 1958*). This arrangement allows children and their families to move about in the community and receive support from non-government organisations and state welfare agencies, as necessary.

1 and 2) As at 12 March 2009, there were 32 minors in immigration detention.

There was one accompanied minor being accommodated in an IRH. He had been in immigration detention for 17 days and was from Bulgaria.

There were 31 minors in community detention from the following countries:

- 19 from Afghanistan
- 3 from Albania
- 1 from Iran
- 4 from Iraq
- 3 from PRC
- 1 from Sri Lanka.

- Eighteen of the 31 were unaccompanied minors (that is, they arrived without any family) being accommodated in the community on Christmas Island and cared for by Life Without Barriers.

- Three of the 31 are unaccompanied minors in community detention in Adelaide. The mother of these minors deserted the family and the three minors are cared for by Families SA, who have been appointed guardians by the court.
- The other minors are living with their families in community detention.
- The 31 in community detention have been detained for the following periods:
 - 24 minors – 0 to 3 months
 - 2 minors – 3 to 6 months
 - 0 minors – 6 to 12 months
 - 4 minors – 12 to 24 months (includes three minors cared for by Families SA)
 - 1 minor – 24 to 36 months

3) No, the Department does not separate children from their families during their immigration processing.

The Department ensures accompanied minors remain with family members during initial screening processes and further immigration accommodation arrangements and processing. This may include prioritising the adult member's immigration processes to expedite their case and immigration status parallel to that of the minor they're accompanying, enabling them to remain accommodated together.