

As an Australian citizen, I am extremely concerned about our policies towards and treatment of asylum seekers.

I believe the excising of Australian islands (to limit our responsibilities to respond to claims for asylum) is unprincipled, if not illegal, and that our current treatment of refugees and asylum seekers defies international law.

It is my opinion that there are very few people who should be considered for detention, and that most of the people who are held in these camps should be allowed to await the outcomes of their applications in the community.

For the few remaining that may warrant detention for exceptional reasons, the detention system should be opened to scrutiny and reform to prevent the abuses that we have seen. A program of constant presence by community observers, who would mingle with the detainees, would help to ensure that community standards of care are met. It appears that the closed culture of these centres has allowed staff to develop attitudes and ways of treating detainees that are inappropriate at best. The centres should also be redesigned to mirror a society rather than a prison, with far more open access for work and activities and more contact with local communities from the same language and cultural groups as detainees.

Our mistreatment of refugees and asylum seekers extends beyond their detention. For instance, the policy that separates people on temporary protection visas from their families is grossly inhumane. These people should be allowed to have their families with them in Australia.

Adequate social support and payments should also be available for people released from detention. The current reliance on charity groups is appalling.

Such provisions are fundamental to a humane Australia, and their absence shames me as an Australian and diminishes us as a nation.

Finally, I would encourage Parliament to support extensive increases in financial and other strategic support for developing countries. World poverty and hunger are world problems. Western countries are only prevented from understanding this by their sense of invulnerability to similar circumstances.

The movement of refugees and asylum seekers has some basis in the failure of the world to deal adequately with such issues.

I sincerely hope that this Senate Inquiry can be used as an opportunity for major reform.

Yours sincerely

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