

I'm sending this email as my submission towards the Senate Inquiry into DIMIA & Immigration Detention.

I have visited the Melbourne office of DIMIA with a couple of different asylum seekers and was shocked with some of the treatment given. There are no doubt some DIMIA officers who are considerate, friendly and approachable but there are others who are very intimidating and try to make life as difficult as they can for asylum seekers. Two examples -

1. Asylum seeker on Bridging Visa E had work rights cancelled because a friend had written a letter of support to Minister querying Minister's rejection of appeal. By telephone he had been advised he'd have his work rights reissued if he brought in a signed letter addressed to the Minister withdrawing letter written by friend. On fronting up to DIMIA Compliance Dept. another officer advised he could not accept it as it was written to the Minister and thus should be posted to the Minister and then wait for a reply before having his work rights reissued. Luckily I was there at the time and was able to request to see the officer who had given the advice over the telephone, they were happy to receive letter on behalf of Minister, enter it into the system and offer work rights immediately, without the long delay advocated by other officer. For someone with English as a second language, this was very intimidating and would have caused a great deal of distress if I hadn't been there to demand their rights.

2. Again with the Compliance Dept entered their office and stood with a female asylum seeker waiting to be attended. A couple of others were already being served thus waited for our turn, another officer comes out and asks my friend whether she had rung the bell for service, she said "No", he points to a sign and chastised her for not ringing bell for service! I explained to him the sign states "Please ring bell for service if no-one's in attendance"! Once again very intimidating and making vulnerable people very nervous, uncomfortable and treating them less than human.

It's generally accepted in our society that one is innocent until proven guilty but no doubt with the treatment of asylum seekers they are guilty until proven innocent! How to prove your innocence when these people who flee war-torn countries and corrupt governments have to flee with no papers, or false papers? How tragic when people who've fled torture and imprisonment from their corrupt governments arrive in Australia seeking asylum end up being locked up for years in detention for no reason but seeking a safe haven and freedom!

The events that have occurred over the last few years have created a black mark in Australia's history and I like many others have been ashamed of being Australian. It is time for a change to our law and attitude towards these people.

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