

**To:**

**Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia**

[legcon.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:legcon.sen@aph.gov.au)

28 July 2005

Please find in the following pages our Submission to the Senate Enquiry on the administration and operation of the Migration Act 1958.

Submission for the Pilgrim Circle of Friends 27

Contact details:

Mrs Raelene Telfer

Marion

South Aust

**Submission to Senate Legal and Constitutional  
Committee**

## **by Pilgrim Circle of Friends Circle 27**

### **Inquiry into the administration and operation of the Migration Act 1958**

#### **Background**

Pilgrim Circle of Friends 27 is one of approximately 70 Circle of Friends groups operating under the auspices of ARA (the Australian Refugee Association). We are a group of about 50 people who provide ongoing practical help and support to asylum seekers, some of whom remain in Baxter Detention Centre.

Of our original 12 friends, mainly Christians from Iran, eight are now in the community in Adelaide or interstate. At present we are particularly concerned for the physical and mental health of those remaining in Baxter Detention Centre and the need for ongoing medical treatment of those who have been released.

Our Circle of Friends strongly supported the Private Members Bills for Decent Treatment of those in Detention and we have thanked Petro Georgiou, Judi Moylan and Bruce Baird for their ongoing commitment to changing what is an inhumane and unjust policy.

We also agree with the Private Members Bills in proposing a fairer and more accountable system, providing checks and balances such as judicial and independent review and seeking an end to the indiscriminate and indefinite detention of asylum seekers.

Through our friendships with group of asylum seekers we have come to understand why some of them, or their fellow detainees, could resort to desperate means such as hunger striking and other extreme measures. They have become so desperate and in despair because their stories have not been believed.

#### **Terms of Reference**

Our Circle wishes to address several aspects of the following four Committee Terms of Reference, namely:

1. The processing and assessment of visa applications and migration detention;

2. The adequacy of healthcare, including mental healthcare, and other services and assistance provided to people in immigration detention;
3. The outsourcing of management and service provision at immigration detention centres; and
4. General Government policy on asylum seekers.

## **Issues and discussion**

1. Re Terms of Reference One. Members of our Circle have visited many of those in Baxter Detention Centre for the past eighteen months. From this they know of the personal trauma and sickness being caused by prolonged detention. There is still much anguish and misery being caused by the type of visas being offered. A number of our friends have been released from Baxter on a range of Bridging Visas. Some are not entitled to receive any income support, receive no concessions for transport or housing and no access to medicine. They are forced to rely on charity. Circles of Friends are providing much of this support. The consequences of ongoing TPVs are increased psychiatric problems caused by the uncertainty about the future as well as fear of an end to protection and forced return to danger in their original country.
2. Re Terms of Reference Two. We see at first hand the physical and psychological problems of our friends who remain in Baxter and of those who have been released. There are cases of undiagnosed injuries, untreated injuries, discontinuous medical treatment, and severe psychiatric illness. This is very disturbing to members of our Circle who voluntarily visit Baxter and work with those who have been released. From our perspective, it appears that harm is being willfully inflicted on mostly young men who have sought sanctuary from danger and oppression. The psychological scars of detention are likely to be long term or permanent (Dr Jon Jureidini, Independent Weekly July 24 -30, 2005, p.3). From visits to Baxter we observe problems in the management and delivery of health for asylum seekers and inadequate funding.
3. Re Terms of Reference Three. We believe much of the damage to friends in Baxter is due to the outsourcing of the management of detention centres. The Palmer enquiry identifies the problem with present contract arrangements, in particular DIMIA's contract-management arrangements with Global Solutions Limited. This high level policy matter concerns our Circle because it has severe

consequences for our friends in Baxter. We believe contract arrangements must be reformed or scrapped with management reverting to direct Commonwealth control.

4. Re Terms of Reference Four Apart from the particular matters referred to above, members of our Circle believe overall Commonwealth policy toward asylum seekers and their treatment is one of indifference and antagonism. To end the harm and suffering already created we urge a change of heart so that asylum seekers are treated with priority, dignity and compassion, and are welcomed to Australia.

## **Recommendations**

The Circle of Friends 27 recommends that the Senate Committee, the Senate itself and individual members of the Senate:

- Press for increasing speed in the processing of asylum seekers in Baxter Detention Centre;
- Recognise and address the physical and mental damage being caused to asylum seekers;
- Insist that the Government end its attitude of indifference and antagonism toward asylum seekers;
- Press for provision of more resources for the rehabilitation of detainees damaged by their time in Baxter;
- Seek change to the visas offered to those asylum seekers remaining in Baxter, and to those already in the community such that there is immediate provision of Centrelink and Medicare benefits to those under Bridging Visas.

Signed:

**Raelene Telfer – Convenor Circle of Friends 27**

**Venton Cook – Chairperson Circle of Friends 27**

[telfer@senet.com.au](mailto:telfer@senet.com.au)

[venton.cook@bigpond.com](mailto:venton.cook@bigpond.com)