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28th July 2005

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

Re: Inquiry into the Administration and Operation of the Migration Act 1958

As an individual I make this submission and would like my name withheld when published. I currently visit the Perth Detention Centre on a fortnightly basis to take a number of children to visit their refugee father. When I first met this refugee he was in a bad way. He has been in detention for over 3 years and emotionally and psychologically has been greatly affected. In my first few visits he told me that he almost attempted suicide on a number of occasions and there was evidence of self harm on his wrists. He eats very little and as a result looks very thin. He has told me many times that he has had difficulty sleeping. Out of concern for his wellbeing another refugee had contacted a volunteer organisation to ask for help. It was thought that by bringing his children to visit it would assist with his emotional state.

I have now been bringing his children to the detention centre for over 6 months. There are times when his emotional state deteriorates and I have brought this to the attention of the staff. I do not think any psychological counselling or assistance is given to him at the Detention Centre. Not only is this situation difficult for him but also for his children. They miss their father very much and wish to have him out of the detention centre so that they can have a normal relationship. The school has kindly offered to tape the children's school performances but this is little compensation for not having their father present. Often he has concerns about his children's welfare who are living with his estranged wife. He gives the children food to take home to ensure that they have enough to eat and has expressed to me that his wife is often not home taking care of them as she works and likes going to the casino.

I have a number of concerns regarding this particular situation:

- The effect of being locked up for many years which has impacted on him emotionally and psychologically.
- The effect that his detainment has had on his relationship and care of his children.
- The lack of emotional and psychological support and counselling in the detention centre
- The length of time it has taken in processing this refugees case.

As a volunteer I have also assisted a number of other refugees on temporary protection visas. Many of them told me of their experiences of being locked up in detention centres for indefinite periods. One refugee told me he still experiences nightmares of being locked up and the despair that he felt.

After being detained for indefinite periods they then faced the uncertainty of going through the temporary protection visa process and not knowing whether they will remain in Australia. I attend and scribe at the permanent protection visa application DIMIA interviews with many refugees. As DIMIA do not provide a copy of the interview (although they tape it for their own use) need to scribe (as we are not allowed to take in our own tape recorders) and record the interview. This process of having to retell their stories is often very upsetting for the refugees I have attended.

On one occasion I witnessed a DIMIA officer berate a refugee because the refugee had said that his family told him that his friend was missing and probably killed. The DIMIA officer said that in his first DIMIA interview three years ago that the refugee had said that his friend had been killed. The DIMIA officer asked him what the truth was had his friend been killed or probably killed. He told the refugee that this puts his whole case in doubt because he had lied at his first interview and said he had been killed. The refugee had tried to explain that the news he had from people in his country were that his friend had been killed but recently his family said that he had been missing and was probably killed. This refugee was quite distressed by the manner of the DIMIA officer who appeared to be trying to undermine the refugee. Considering this refugee had already been given a temporary protection visa and proven his refugee status I felt the manner and line of questioning of the DIMIA officer was unnecessary.

I still find it hard to believe that Australia is forcing people who are fleeing their country due to persecution to be indefinitely detained. Often these individuals already have health and psychological issues from their persecution which appear to be exacerbated by indefinitely detaining them. There appears to be little support or psychological counselling available to them in the detention centre. I would ask that the Senate seriously consider the policies for processing refugees, specifically mandatory detention and indefinite processing times.

Regards

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