

May 17, 2006

To the committee secretary,
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee

RE: Inquiry into the provisions of the Migration Amendment (Designated Unauthorised Arrivals) Bill 2006.

My local member Michel Johnson's maiden speech says that "unlike the laws and cultures of many other countries which prevent foreigners from taking out their citizenship, our laws say that anyone can become an Australian." Yet, could he or any of you seriously suggest that the proposed changes are in keeping with our laws? Could you seriously, in your heart of hearts say that these new changes allow for ANYONE to become an Australian?

The member goes on to say that there is scope for the queue to be lengthened, "and processed more efficiently and more speedily, but never to compromise the broad domestic security of the Australian nation." Processing asylum seekers off shore is not a way of lengthening the queue. With the cost of transporting these people, and the money Australian taxpayers will be paying to those places that will take them, it is simply inaccurate to suggest that off shore processing is more efficient. Nobody has yet presented any evidence that these people are a threat to the domestic security of the Australian nation, and one might suggest that there are plenty of people born here who present a greater threat.

Michael Johnson also said that "there can be no place for policies tending towards national isolation or insularity." Off shore processing cannot be viewed as anything but a tendency towards national isolation and insularity.

We have an international, legal obligation to provide protection for refugees who land in Australia. In our enormous, resource-filled, spacious, and--as the budget forecasts suggests--an economically booming country, what possible justification can there be for processing asylum seekers off shore? The very nature of your position implies the duty you have to make sure Australia upholds international laws.

A key issue is the question: how will these asylum seekers have access to the Refugee Review Tribunal and to the Federal Ombudsman--an access they have a right to--when they are off shore?

What is proposed is in breach of our international obligations under the Refugee Convention, but should that even have to be said? This is about people's lives not getting re-elected or holding/maintaining power.

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