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As an Australian citizen, I am appalled at the new laws which will essentially mean that Australia is refusing to honour its international obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention. Article 31 of the Convention expressly prohibits penalising asylum seekers, yet by excising and detaining all unauthorised boat arrivals, that is exactly what Australia will be doing. Under international guidelines set by the UNHCR Executive Committee, detention "may be resorted to only on grounds prescribed by law to verify identity...to determine the elements on which the claim to refugee status or asylum is based...to deal with cases where refugees or asylum seekers have destroyed their travel and/or identity documents...to protect national security and public order..." (Excom Conclusion No. 44, 1988), but clearly the Australian government is operating from a reasoning that is totally separate to these very specific exceptions. How can we as Australians sit by and watch while children are put into detention centres again (breaking Australia's commitment to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child), and while men and women who are merely fleeing persecution are kept in shocking conditions and denied their rights under international law? Not only is detention financially detrimental (apparently more expensive than keeping refugees at the Hilton), but as a nation we will be taking one step further towards totally turning our backs on this sea of humanity, under guises that are ultimately strictly political. Border security and the prevention of terrorism is one thing, but the proposed changes smack of racism not unlike what was practiced by Australia as part of the White Australia policy. The irony of Australia boasting of its multi-culturalism while at the same time turning up its nose at humanitarianism is both hypocritical and ultimately, greatly disappointing. By these new laws, we are essentially saying that politics is our foremost concern, that international law means nothing, that the luck of being in a country that does not know war or bloodshed while others suffer is not our problem, that ultimately we can do whatever we like regardless of any other authority.