

Brendan Lewis

12 October 2017

Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600
Email: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

RE: Submission regarding Migration Amendment (Prohibiting items in Immigration Detention Facilities) Bill 2017

Dear Committee Secretary,

My name is Brendan Lewis and I am an Australian citizen. My various forebears came to this land as poor convicts, refugees and as people fleeing oppression and famine in their native land. I am very concerned that Commonwealth's regime for asylum seekers is inhumane and contrary to the international agreements that Australia is party to, and which over the years our nation has championed. Australia was in fact a founding member of the UNHCR, Australia's vote actually enabled the creation of it. I encourage the senators to revisit the wording of the universal declaration of human rights and reflect deeply on Australia's current situation in that respect.

Once upon a time, we welcomed people fleeing war, tyranny and oppression. We recognised that people had an innate unalienable right to appeal to us for asylum; quite properly understanding that those we welcomed would contribute greatly to our country, and this has been the result time and again. With each influx of refugees, our nation has grown stronger and more diverse.

In the last decade the appeal for asylum has been politicised, and humanity has been gradually drained from our refugee intake system; with very little exaggeration it resembles nothing so much as a series of concentration camps where trauma, suicide and murder seem par for the course. To continue the allusion, the Australian population are in the same situation as those residents of small towns in Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Germany, whose inhabitants saw the smoke but preferred to speculate no further. The current amendments before our legislators support this allusion, and they might ask the question - were the inhabitants of those small towns well-served by the horrors beyond the barbed-wire. Our current practice isolates us from the enlightened nations of the world and leaves us with the nations where torture and death are acceptable remedy. We no longer criticise nationalised barbarism, we are practitioners of it now, and I find it disgusting.

In particular the proposed legislation amendments call for the unregulated use of dogs against asylum seekers and the granting to the Minister of discriminatory powers as to prohibited objects. The removal of connectivity to family and the wider public through the phone bans is already deeply felt by many in detention, and the intention is to remove all connection from everyone so incarcerated. The institutionalisation of instruments of oppression such as strip searches, random transportation, removal of rights and dehumanisation will only produce more suffering - to no effect whatsoever. The senators must ask themselves where this will end. What is the purpose; is it to place people into a silence so profound that no cry of pain can ever be heard? Remember that these

people have committed no crime. Is their appeal for asylum so gross an insult to Australia that we must abandon all humanity in this slippery race to the bottom.

The senators must also be aware that these arrangements erase lines of acceptability. The creation of Border Force and its deployment against asylum seekers was a signal moment. This is another. Do we grant Border Force extensive discretionary power to use against innocent people, simply to make a weak man appear strong. If in agreement, will we be happy when these forces are projected against Australian citizens? And when considering humanity, is it acceptable that Border Force officers themselves be required to participate in this dehumanisation. In 10 or 20 years with the unravelling of time, will these officers finally get to share in the torment that they delivered on our behalf. Will they recall with growing horror the 2am role calls, the stripped bodies in harsh fluorescent light, the snarling dogs and the endless minutiae of institutionalised cruelty. Do we allow this - or can we start the long trek back into the community of nations - under the beneficence of the international declaration.

So, I urge the senators considering this miserable proposal to condemn it without qualification; and to condemn the current detainment regime that serves this nation so badly, that degrades the Australian people and makes them complicit in atrocity for the sake of cynical political gain.

Yours sincerely

Brendan Lewis
by email