

Australian Tamil Congress

A Unified Voice for All Tamils



2nd August 2011

Committee Secretary
Joint Select Committee on Australia's Immigration Detention Network
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600.

Dear Secretary

_____ welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Joint Select Committee's inquiry into *Australia's Immigration Detention Network*.

First we wish to thank the current government's positive policy action in the relocation of families with children to 'community detention' (CD).

We have recently been to the _____ with some understanding of the pressing needs of those fleeing war and persecution and seeking Australia's protection. The _____ like many IDCs in remote and poorly serviced locations, is isolated from the community help and care and institutional services that it desperately needs. At _____ many are living in tents and without adequate bedding for the winter season. Many asylum seekers deeply depressed and in poor health due to prolonged delays in determinations of their claims for asylum. The inevitable outcome is more serious and permanent mental illness and self harm. In addition to our visits to IDCs we regularly visit and actively participate in helping the Tamil families and children in the Community Detentions in and around _____ and closely liaise with Red Cross and MDA on the wellbeing and case works.

As the priority in a long list of urgent and obvious changes needed, we humbly request you to take immediate action to protect the most vulnerable among this group of desperately deprived people. Please:

Broad policy changes:

- Provide access to adequate legal representation, including face to face discussions, so that lawyers and asylum seekers can make their cases (eg IMR) and take advice on the appropriate course of action;
- Even after getting refugee status in Australia there are around 36 Tamils are detained for more than a year by ASIO; the reason was that they lived in LTTE controlled areas gives the opportunity to ASIO to reject these refugees. Even at the height of the war in Sri Lanka LTTE was not a banned organization in Australia. According to Sri Lanka now there is no

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LTTE and here ex-LTTE giving interviews (eg recently in Channel 10), then why these Tamils are being detained by ASIO?

(<http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/joint/commttee/j126.pdf>)

We wish to know on what process/ground the ASIO determine the detention of these vulnerable traumatised people. At least consider the ASIO detained cases to relocate to 'community detention'.

- Relocate mentally and physically sick detainees and unaccompanied minors from IDCs to community centres or appropriate health care places;
- UN Card holders when they landed here are assessed from the beginning and are being rejected; and
- About the government's recent 'Malaysian solution', we wish to bring to your notice that Australia should look after asylum seekers detained and processed in Australia, since Malaysia already has 100,000 in its camps. These people are already pawns in Malaysia's tough politics.

IDC detainee's/community representatives' suggestions to the management to consider improve the Center :

- Providing blanket to those in marquee for the winter time;
 - Exploring appropriate arrangement for treatment or release to relevant center (or 'community detention') for treatment _
1. Address Tamil detainees did self- harm / suicidal attempt
 2. Address the needs of mentally sick detainees
 3. Address the needs of physically sick detainees;
- Detainees living in marquee couldn't get proper sleep particularly sleeping in the upper bunker bed guys due to light disturbance and Serco Officials for counting purpose;
 - The computer software currently there doesn't read Tamil fonts, hence can't read articles in Tamil; in the camps many feels they have too much time for thinking which leads to overwhelming depression and self-harm thinking about their separated loved ones for such long time, hence these type of reading may comfort them;
 - To explore providing a TV in each camp/marquee;

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- Currently there is a Mosque and a Church like set up to the detainees; most of the Tamil detainees (90%) are Hindus, hence to provide a room/marquee setup for prayer facility and bringing a Hindu priest on Fridays as like the Christian priest visit on Sundays.
- Phones to tune to higher pitch for better hearing and communication;
- For those rejected cases, provide them with more internet access so they can prepare better for appeal process;
- Some skill training to the detainees or even increase the half-an-hour English class to one hour or more, as they wish to spend the time not thinking the past multiple trauma rather in their education and training for future benefits; further this will equip them with skills needed to enter work force and productive citizens in the community; and
- Increase the site seeing days or external activities and allow some time to spend outside during the trip as part of mental wellbeing.

The remoteness of the IDC is a big issue for the community. For example Curtin and Scherger IDCs are too far to the Tamil community to access. This puts great pressure to bring community bridging with detainee and provide moral help to these traumatised detainees by community leaders.

Suggestions on settlement arrangements:

- Settlement agencies to give priority on assisting job placement to the refugees in addition to their excellent accommodation and TAFE English course arrangements;
- Settling more Tamil refugees in cities like Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide – creating internal mechanism to facilitate the new arrivals settling other than Sydney and Melbourne;
- ‘Community detention’ to be looked after by MDA (as they are specialised in this area) or they too to play a role rather currently vested with Red Cross; and
- Settlement agencies to have a closer link with the local community group during early stage of settlement.

Yours sincerely,