



13 January, 2022.

SUBMISSION to Inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration

Re Ending Indefinite and Arbitrary Immigration Detention Bill 2021

To whom it may concern

We are grateful that the Hon. Andrew Wilkie and Hon. Zali Steggall has commended this Bill to the House. Likewise, we call on the government to implement this legislation and end the torturous program of detention of asylum seekers, a practice which is incompatible with accepted humanitarian values and, indeed, any standards of decency.

The publicity surrounding Novak Djokovic has brought to mind again the plight of human beings held in dehumanizing detention by our government for years on end. His stay in the Park Hotel was a few days. The stay of around 30 other people, and many more in other parts of Australia, has been more than a year, and this is after years of offshore detention.

Our understanding of what these people are going through comes from some very limited personal experience of writing to people in detention and visiting them in Villawood Detention Centre.

We know there are compassionate people considering these submissions. Because of the pandemic, we've all now had a taste of what it is to be in lockdown, or isolating. Think of it.

These are young, energetic men, usually having feared for their life, seen their loved ones killed, courageously fled everything that was familiar, and we – a 'civilised, peaceful' country – torture them more. They cannot work, or date, or go to a gym, or go to Uni, or a café, or even go out for walks. The men can't plan because their future is indeterminate. Not knowing how long the detention will go for is an added torment. As is the profound sense of injustice, that they have done nothing illegal in terms of international law. They have not stolen money or hurt anyone. They have *sought asylum*. They want to contribute to our country. The frustration is unbearable - but it must be borne – hour by hour.

Every day is the same as the one before, and the one before that. Every week blends into every other and becomes a month, which looks like the month before, trying not to slide into too deep a depression. Suicide and self-harm are constant temptations. All energy available is needed to fend off suicidal thoughts. The small flame of hope is barely flickering. Friends in detention are also suffering. The suffering is constant and maddening.

We are two Christians, haunted by the image of traumatized young men beings holed up without being allowed out at all. It's upsetting, and infuriating. We personally know hundreds of everyday Australians who are similarly distressed, haunted, profoundly exasperated that this is how Australia acts towards the desperate.

The stated intention of preventing deaths at sea seems to us a convoluted rationalization. Deaths at sea have been prevented because Border Control have turned boats back – an immoral practice in its own right.

Furthermore, it is morally wrong to use human beings as a means to achieve an end, rather than as having intrinsic dignity as persons who are, in our view, made in the image of God.

As Christians, we cannot reconcile ourselves to the fact that our taxes are being used to conduct this torture, and that we have a government acting in our name, ordering that this torture continue. We are deeply disappointed that the policies for what is euphemistically referred to as 'protecting our borders' has bipartisan support. How can we extract ourselves from complicity when we cannot vote for a major political party which will act according to our values? We feel profound shame.

Australia's lack of respect for these human beings is rightly the subject of international criticism. This country no longer has moral standing on human rights internationally, and has therefore forfeited the right to be critical of human rights violations elsewhere.

Just in the last day, Human Rights Watch has criticized our policies on asylum seekers and global heating. Australia is described as a 'global embarrassment': <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7579417/australia-slammed-as-global-human-rights-embarrassment-over-climate-covid-and-asylum-seekers/>

For those who are more pragmatic, on the topic of taxpayer money, we reiterate the words of Andrew Wilkie in his second reading of the Bill:

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/90baf2c3-8e0f-4a7a-b199-2f7d126f9de3/&sid=0066

“It costs approximately \$346,000 to hold someone in immigration detention in Australia for one year. I will say that again: it costs approximately \$346,000 per year to hold someone in immigration detention in Australia. But I will also tell the House that it costs only about \$10,221 for a refugee or an asylum seeker to live in the community. In fact, the budget for our offshore detention is still running at about \$1 billion per year. I'll say that again: the bill for offshore detention is still running in the order of \$1,000 million per year. These figures are breathtaking and almost unbelievable.”

It is immoral that money that could be used to fund any number of community needs is instead being used to torture people. It could be used to fund better care for people living with disabilities, or more social housing to mitigate our worsening affordable housing crisis, or to help close the yawning gap between the health of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the broader population or, currently, to make Rapid Antigen Tests more widely available.

We urge the Joint Standing Committee to recommend the passing of the 'Ending Indefinite and Arbitrary Immigration Detention Bill 2021' into law at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely



Ms Theresa and



Dr Neil Ormerod