

Dear Secretary,

I would like to submit to the Inquiry into immigration detention reform that the laudable principles included in the Migration Amendment (Immigration Detention Reform) Bill 2009, and in its regulations, be extended to Christmas Island.

Because Australia is a signatory to interational treaties which recognise the rights of those fleeing persecution, we are obliged by our laws as well as international law, to ascertain whether people seeking protection as refugees actually are refugees, and to treat them humanely while their status is being determined.

It is a relief that this government has already done a lot to restore justice and dignity to refugees who have come to Australia. Abolishing "The Pacific Solution" was a significant and welcome part of the new policies. It is unfortunate that the policies did not extend to restoring Christmas Island, an Australian Territory in every other respect, to Australia's immigration zone.

At the least, the admirable principles which now apply on the Australian mainland - that detention should be used as a last resort, for a limited period, with the right of review, and should not include children in detention centres - should apply in Australian territories, including Christmas Island.

It is inconsistent to have one set of rules on the Australian mainland and another in one - and only one - of Australia's territories. It looks as if we don't mean what we say, in Australia, that we adhere to. At worst it looks as if we still have lingering fears that people claiming to be refugees are actually terrorists, queue-jumpers or opportunists of one sort or another.

It is our obligation to treat those suffering a justifiable fear of persecution with respect, concern, and dignity. That applies whether they have actually arrived on the Australian mainland or on Christmas Island.

Yours sincerely,
Jill Greenwell