

Submission No. 37
Date Received.....

RECEIVED
18 JUL 2008

BY: MIG

I wish to make a submission to the Committee based on my personal knowledge of, and experience with, many Hazaran Afghani refugees who underwent mandatory detention for three years on Nauru as a consequence of attempting to seek asylum in Australia.

During 2003 I wrote, and sent parcels, to a young Afghani family on Nauru. The parcels contained things to alleviate everyday living on a hot and humid island - many especially for their baby and small daughter. All were received with heartfelt thanks and expressions of gratitude that some people in Australia knew and cared about them.

The following is a literal transcription from a letter I received, written 22/09/03:

" You might obviously know that our life in the camp is very boring. You can imagine some one who is far away from his/her country, relatives and friends, being detained with no sin and know guilt. All we did was escaping from persecution and saving our lives. If this is a crime, we are criminals and should be detained, but if it's not a crime, why are we in detention? Why are we isolated? Do they think we are not human beings? These are some questions that I ask myself, but I do not find the answer for them."

One family with whom I am acquainted spent three years on Nauru, yet lived with dreadful uncertainty hanging over them until only this year receiving permanent residency.

A young woman, who calls me Mother, went into labour with her first child as the RAN ship docked at Nauru. Officials refused to transfer her to hospital. She was assisted at the birth by other refugee women.

This young woman's husband suffers Type 2 diabetes, but was given no treatment during their three-year detention. He spent a lot of time in gaol for behaviour that was beyond his control because it was the direct result of his ailment. Now living in Australia and receiving appropriate treatment, he is a healthy man.

All the ex-Nauru Afghanis with whom I am acquainted have spoken of the terrible mental and physical toll taken by the daily hopelessness and uncertainty that filled their lives during their time in detention. All were eventually found to be genuine refugees and all, in my experience, have proved to be warm, good and loveable people anxious to be productive and good citizens of Australia.

I find it tragic and shameful that so many good people have had to suffer needlessly at the hands of the Australian Government after enduring the horrors of persecution in their country of origin.

I remain, Yours sincerely,

Bette Devine.