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I wish to make a submission to the Inquiry into Immigration Detention in Australia, having visited many detention centres in our country over several years.

RRT PROCESS

- Having supported detainees at the RRT I have comments on that process: The fact that ONE member only presides at the hearing not only places great responsibility on the member, but also places limits on the interpretation and understanding of the claimant's case.
- What qualifications is a member required to have?
- A detainee has no right of appeal to that hearing, I believe that should be offered as required.
- To presume that a person's evidence is false, and has to be proved true, is the opposite order to our way of justice in this country where a person is deemed innocent until proved guilty.
- It has been apparent to me that the member is endeavouring to trap the claimant into becoming confused about evidence. This could discredit the detainee's story.
- Some of the members are ill informed of the situation in the detainees' home country, from which the person has fled.

PLANNING OF DETENTION CENTRES:

- To have the visitors' centre at Villawood totally out-doors, and with visitors allowed to come until 7.00 pm has been appalling. For many months of the year the cold winds and low temperatures have worsened the conditions detainees who often have had to leave their friends quite early and return to their "prison" like situation.
- My detainee friends there have told me of their difficulty of queuing for their medication in Villawood IDC in winter and wet weather. They are often obliged to stand for long periods in the elements. This seems to be another form of punishment.

FOOD IN DETENTION CENTRES

- Because of the high percentage of Chinese detainees in Villawood IDC the food offered is primarily Chinese. Some of the African detainees encounter

great difficulty in eating this food given so frequently. I would think it possible to offer people of different cultures some food of their own country periodically.

- In Baxter, the men agreed that the ingredients provided for cooking were adequate, but the cooking methods employed made the meals quite unpalatable. Hence again and again, the inmates are able to eat less and less, compounding their ability to survive their situation.
- In visiting detainees at Villawood IDC we gained permission to offer a BBQ. We had been through all the preliminaries which were required, and reached the visitors' centre at 1.00 pm, requesting the BBQ. It took numerous prompting to get first, the BBQ, and after more time elapsed, the gas, and even later the appropriate tools. The detainees began to cook at 4.00 pm. The delay appeared unnecessary, and was another frustration for our friends who looked forward to a special meal.
- Purchasing healthy food for detainees has cost visitors thousands of dollars, a cost which should not be theirs.

CONDITIONS IN CENTRES

- At Maribyrnong IDC months of work has been completed recently on the driveway entrance to the centre. However from what I have heard about the sleeping quarters, the bathrooms lack shelving and bathroom cupboards for their toiletries.
- The rooms are shared, and it can happen that new arrivals are brought in during the early hours (3 or 4.00 am) , with much noise and disruption.
- For many reasons, the detainees encounter great difficulty in sleeping., possibly dropping off to sleep in the early morning. Then soon after 6.00 am and again at 7.00 am a head count takes place. Until recently a bright torch was shone in each face, and the person asked to repeat their name. This was seen as punishment by the men, for a person who escaped early this year. Others were paying for this event with much sleep deprivation , and a form of torture.
- One detainee in the same IDC saw a doctor on a Friday in July 08 and was prescribed anti-biotics. However he did not get them until the following Monday. He discovered that the nurse had given the medication to a GSL officer on the Friday but the tablets sat in the office for 3 days, despite the patient's requesting them many times over the weekend.

OVERALL

From my observations mandatory detention has severely affected many asylum seekers. It is the uncertainty of their stay and the lengthy delays in getting decisions which affects their whole person, especially their mental states. So many of my friends are mentally damaged by their incarceration, some of whom will never be able to work. Even from a financial point of view, this is a bad result for our country. The longer a person is in detention, the more difficult it is for that person to settle in the community.

I hope our country can move quickly to a more humane and compassionate treatment of those who seek asylum in Australia, that they can be processed quickly, and that on our shores where they can access legal and medical services, and be supported by those faithful people who will visit and give moral support to people already traumatised by their life experience.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to our government.

Yours sincerely,

Kath Morton.