

**Parliamentary Joint Committee on the  
Australian Crime Commission**

**Inquiry into trafficking in women for  
sexual servitude**

**Submission No:31**

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## SUBMISSION TO JOINT PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

### TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN SEXUAL SERVITUDE

**This submission relates to the detaining of women in detention centres after having been placed there for return to their country of origin.**

For almost four years, I have been visiting the Maribyrnong Detention Centre once a week as one of the chaplains. During that time, I have met many women who have been at the Centre for a short period en route to Thailand, Indonesia, and other countries in South East Asia. Respecting their privacy, I never query them as to why they are in the Centre. None of the women have told me that they have been trafficked, nor that they have been sex workers. In informing myself about the issue as a whole, I am quite aware that women have been unwillingly involved. Others, while they may be willing, this is often caused by issues of disadvantage, poverty, and lack of opportunity for employment and supporting their families/children in their home countries.

The times when I have been more sure that the women have been involved in the sex industry, (whether willingly or not), has been when there is media publicity around raids on brothels one day and the women have actually arrived at the Centre. On a couple of occasions, another detainee has told me that the women are sex workers.

In one instance, a family with children who were detained in the Centre, spoke with me about their concerns that their children were sharing the confined living area with the large numbers of women (approximately fifteen women) who were going to be in the Centre for a week or more. In this case, it was fairly clear that the women had been trafficked as their detention time and numbers matched a report in the media. The parents did not fully appreciate this fact because of images around women who willingly or unwillingly find themselves working as sex workers. I tried to handle this situation in the most sensitive way possible.

It has concerned me that the women are very young. At times, some have looked quite distressed, sad and anxious, and are obviously resigned to the fact of going back to their own country to face uncertainty. They share dining facilities with all the men who are detained at Maribyrnong. Also, if they wanted to attend the English classes at the Centre, they have to go into the men's recreational area where the small education room is located. There is need to check whether the English teacher conducts any classes in the family/women's living area.

#### **Recommendation:**

That women who have unwillingly, or willingly been involved as sex workers, be housed in a separate facility, with the support of a social worker who may be able

to help them make some more dignified transition from Australia to their home country if this is the final resolution.

The experience of an organization such as the Asylum Seeker Project, Hotham Mission in Melbourne, has shown that it is possible to work in collaboration with the Immigration Department, professionals, and volunteers on community housing options, such as in the Alternative Place of Detention arrangement. It works within the constraints of the Migration Act 1958, and offers a solution which recognises the vulnerability of women who, for whatever reason, can be stereotyped in a way which belies their actual reality.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

*Stancea Vichie*

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