

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee  
Department of the Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra

Dear Secretary,

I wish to submit my comments for consideration by the Senate Committee's Inquiry into Detention as the Executive Director of the Elm Grove Sanctuary Trust, a charitable foundation founded in 1983 working for human rights, social justice, the environment, and the care of all people. On behalf of the Trust, I wish state our deep concern at the Howard government's policies regarding the inhumane and long-term detention of innocent people.

Over the past three and a half years the Trust has endeavoured to offer support for refugees and asylum seekers having founded the Bega Valley Rural Australians for Refugees and the Bermagui-Narooma Environs Rural Australians for Refugees. Our proposal to the Bega Valley Shire Council to become the first 'Welcome Shire for Refugees' in Australia was adopted unanimously and the Shire expressed their written objections to the federal government over the inhumane treatment of refugees . There are now over 65 other towns and shires nationally who have adopted this policy. These action groups have attracted considerable support from average Australians because of the distress felt by what was happening to these traumatised people who arrived on our shores fleeing terror in their homelands.

Given that our government chose to enter into a questionable invasion beside the US to rid these countries of oppressive leadership, it beggars belief that they could then choose to further punish these people, and their young children, who had fled such leadership by punitively locking them behind razor wire and inflicting further trauma on their lives. Despite many medical reports and UN concerns about what long-term physical and emotional affects this was causing, and the fact that over 90% of all asylum seekers have been found to be genuine, the Howard government has steadfastly refused to forgo this inhumane policy.

It is an abhorrence that this has been the practice of this government and despite ongoing lobbying by refugee action groups etc. it continues despite backbench members of the government expressing their concerns. While in recent days children and their mothers have been released into the community due to the action of these backbenchers, there are still many people who have been held over several years who are still languishing in our detention prisons without any hope of justice.

The affect has been considerable for those who have worked diligently to support these asylum seekers. It has resulted in many suffering deep depression after hearing the stories which lead to these asylum seekers fleeing their countries only to find themselves victims in this land. It has shattered their hope of ever obtaining justice for these people. If this has had such a profound affect for those who are supportive, how much greater must be the suffering of those incarcerated.

I would call upon your Committee to consider the affect that this government has had:

- \* on the lives of so many innocent and suffering people
- \* our destroyed reputation internationally
- \* and the spirit of the Australian community which I believe will eventually rise up against this evil in our midst to restore our national soul.

Yours sincerely,

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