

Dear Senators,

I would like to draw your attention to several concerns I have about the workings of the Immigration Department:

1. I am strongly opposed to the current detention process. It is:
 - a. inhumane
 - b. expensive - there is the cost of maintaining detention facilities, the fact that people cannot work or make other useful contribution to the community, the addition health costs involved in dealing with the psychological damage caused (or compounded) by people being imprisoned in this way for indeterminate lengths of time.
 - c. unjust - the processing of people's claims seems to be a ridiculously drawn-out affair and in some circumstances refugee status has been refused despite glaringly obvious evidence of political persecution. e.g. & I quote Arnold Zable's article of May 13, 2005: When Iranian asylum seeker Ardeshir Gholipour stepped out of Baxter detention centre last Friday week after five years of incarceration, his first thoughts were of how so many years of life could have been taken away from him and his fellow detainees.

Gholipour had not committed a crime. Indeed, he had fled in fear for his life after years as a pro-democracy activist in Iran. This included 27 months in a tiny cell in Tehran's Evin prison for distributing pamphlets on behalf of the Iranian Freedom movement.

2. I am deeply concerned about the behaviour of Federal Police in relation to at least two families here in Launceston.

The situation of the S█████ Family is by now well known, and was finally satisfactorily resolved, though not before the family had been severely traumatised. But an early morning raid on another Tasmanian family only received short-term publicity and to this day I don't know if the situation has either been clarified or resolved.

A friend of mine, met, fell in love with and married a man from Nigeria. I have only met this man once or twice and know very little about him, but I do know that he was a student at the Maritime college in Launceston at the time and after his marriage sought permanent residency. I think it was three years after their marriage that the raid occurred. By this time the husband had qualified with his next level of Ship's Engineer Certificate and was able to work Australian coastal routes with Immigration Department approval. Round seven am one morning while he was at sea, five Federal Police raided her two-bedroom cottage on the pretext that they believed the husband's divorce from his ex-wife in Nigeria was not legal. All the husband's letters and papers were taken (including correspondence from his lawyer) and her 16-year-old son's room was searched. My friend was not allowed to dress in private and was so distressed by the pressure of what had transpired that she had an grand mal fit. There has been constant pressure on this family with further interrogations by Federal Police officers. At one time I was telephoned and questioned about my friend and her relationships, and I am sorry now that I answered their questions, as when I tried to return the call to clarify information I had given, the number they called from registered as some kind of warehouse. I checked with my friend to make sure the man I spoke to was someone she knew of, and she confirmed this. So why couldn't I call them back?

My understanding is that there was a belief that this marriage was not a real marriage, that the intention was simply to keep the husband in the country. If this is the case the dramatic nature of the raid is beyond all belief. If, in fact, the husband is believed to be an unsuitable candidate for Australian residence, then the wife should not be subject to such treatment. I believe her health has suffered seriously from all of this.

3. I have had the privilege of being asked to act as sponsor for relatives of Sudanese friends of mine.

Again the process by which people are accepted or rejected appears to be very vague and the department does not give reasons for rejecting applicants. The paperwork involved in these applications is quite daunting for myself as an English-speaking person who is used to filling out forms. Someone who has English as a second language (and poor English at that) is really struggling.

I understand that only a certain number of people can be accepted, but I am not at all sure that the process is fair and at times I think people are rejected out of hand.

I hope you will consider the above comments seriously. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like more information.

Sincerely,

Joy Elizabeth
Newnham Tas