

TO THE SECRETARY
By WA WOMEN in BLACK
SENATE LEGAL & CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE
c/o 12 Tamar St Palmyra 6157
PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA A.C.T.
27th July 2005

Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee Enquiry into the Administration and Operation of the Migration Act 1958

We stand as a group asking for JUSTICE and have become interested (and appalled) at the way we, in Australia, are treating asylum seekers and refugees. We have come to believe that the present system facilitates great injustice to very vulnerable people and we make the following observations for the Committee's consideration:

THE LACK OF TRANSPARENT PROCESS allows all sorts of nastiness to flourish behind prison walls: especially when those walls are constructed far away in the desert and offshore.

THE POWER WIELDED BY LOW LEVEL BUREAUCRATS results in arbitrary decision making and a lack of accountability. The buck stops nowhere and often there is no obvious evidence for the way conclusions, affecting asylum seeker's application's, have been reached.

THE APPARENT IMPLACABLE GOVERNMENT HOSTILITY to people arriving by boat is painfully bewildering. It begs the question, are all these people guilty until proved innocent? It is known that nearly 100% ARE eventually proved innocent.

OUR DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM has diminished as the rights of innocent and vulnerable people are denied. This is dramatically evidenced by the cases of MS RAU and MS ALVARAZ. But how many other AUSTRALIANS have been disappeared by a secretive bureaucracy?

THE FINANCIAL COST of all this is huge and has benefited the private gaoling companies enormously. We wonder how much money has been diverted from our hos[itals] as a result.

THE HUMAN COST cannot be estimated. Mandatory detention has caused untold psychological and physical damage. We haven't mentioned sitting beside people being interviewed and feeling the fear and desperation issuing from them as they fight for their safety and especially the safety of their children.

We haven't mentioned the travesty that is the BRIDGING VISA E: a system that creates beggars: a system of demoralising detention: no work rights, no medical rights, no Centrelink rights!!

We haven't mentioned the effect on their health as the news of their case outcome fails to arrive: their lives lived suspended and in suspense.

We haven't mentioned seeing bruises inflicted by cattle prods still visible months after the event.

We haven't mentioned listening to the hoarse voice of a teenager affected by tear gas: a teenager who wouldn't speak of what had happened although we outside had the information over the air.

In this age of satellite communication, it is stupid to believe that secret events can remain secret. Today THOUSANDS of Australians are aware of the inhumanity that has occurred within our detention system. The shame is ours. WE ASK YOU, WHO HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE THE SYSTEM, TO DO SO AND TO DO IT SOON PLEASE. Our Australian honour and our freedom is in your hands.

Composed on behalf of the WA Women in Black by Pamela Morris & Jane Paterson