

Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes

Submission to the

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

National Inquiry into Children in Detention 2002

How can the baptized claim to welcome Christ if they close the door to the foreigner who comes knocking? “ If anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brothers or sisters in need, yet closes his heart against them, how does God’s love abide in him?” (1 Jn 3:17)

Pope John Paul II, Message for World Migration Day 2000, no. 5

The Exercise of the right to asylum proclaimed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art 14.1) should be recognized everywhere and not obstructed with deterrent and punitive measures. A person applying for asylum should not be interned unless it can be demonstrated that he or she represents a real danger, or there are compelling reasons to think that he or she will not report to the competent authorities for due examination of his or her case. More over, such people should be helped with access to work and to a just and rapid legal procedure.

“Refugees: A Challenge to Solidarity”, n 13, pontifical Council Cor Unum and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People.

“All people have the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution”
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 14(1)

“In every situation affecting the interests of a child or a family, the interests of the child must come before all others”
Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3

“The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society”
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 10(1)

“No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention”
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 9

“No one shall be subjected to torture, or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 7

“Contracting states shall not impose penalties, on account of their illegal entry or presence on refugees who, coming from a place where their life or freedom was threatened...are in their territory without authorisation...”
Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951, Article 31(1)

Recognising Australia’s commitment to these conventions and to the foundations of the Common Law, The Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes promotes the following principles as a necessary beginning to any debate on an Humanitarian and Refugee program in Australia:

- Australia is part of the international community and has undertaken its responsibilities towards refugees voluntarily and in the spirit of humanitarianism;
- As a wealthy and stable nation, we share a responsibility for the weakest in the world community;
- Australia is entitled to protect its territorial integrity in ways that are consistent with its international obligations and undertakings, and its domestic law and legal principles;
- No refugee or asylum seeker may be subject to punishment, mistreatment or other human rights violation to deter others from seeking asylum in Australia;
- Refugees and Asylum seekers who are intercepted on their way to Australia will be treated with respect for their dignity and not be subjected to physical violence or threats of physical violence;
- Under no circumstances will a refugee or asylum seeker be diverted to a country that is not party to the 1951 convention or major human rights treaties and which cannot support their presence with dignity;
- Aid funds will not be diverted from development projects to underpin the detention and processing of asylum seekers in other countries
- Non citizens in Australia will only be detained after an individual assessment of their public security or safety risk. All detention must be reviewable by a court and must be for the shortest time possible.
- Any asylum seeker in detention is entitled to be treated humanely with respect for his or her human dignity. The standards in detention will be no less than criminal prisoners are entitled to.
- Asylum seekers who are accepted as Convention refugees are entitled to family reunion.
- Asylum seekers accepted as refugees will be granted permanent visas.

Research Methods

The Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes NSW represents over 4000 religious in NSW. We also work closely with the more than 20,000 other religious working in many areas, including pastoral, educational and social work with detained asylum seekers and with refugees and asylum seekers in various Australian communities.

In preparation for a submission to HREOC's National Enquiry into Children in Detention, CLRI (NSW), in co-operation with the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, sent a questionnaire to religious all over Australia, asking for stories and experiences relating to the terms of reference of the enquiry. With the written responses to the questionnaire and several telephone interviews, CLRI's report has come from the combined experience of over 20 people who currently work with or who have in the recent past worked with asylum seekers in Australia. The input of several others, who have worked around the world in refugee camps and settlements, has also been sought by way of best practice contributions. Unless otherwise noted, all comments relate to experience in Australia's detention centres.

Included in this submission are the suggestions and experience of teachers, social workers and nurses, some with over 30 years experience in their fields, and many with experience working with refugees or displaced people both in Australia and in other parts of the world. This submission includes input from people who work in or have recently worked in Villawood, Maribyrnong, Woomera, Port Headland, and Curtin Detention Centres and in settlement programs for released refugees and community asylum seekers in Sydney and Melbourne. Several participants invited released refugees and their children into their homes to assist with the first months of settlement in Australia.

It is indicative of the climate surrounding Australian Immigration Detention Centres that almost none of the questionnaire respondents were willing to have their names or positions released or published with this submission. Most also requested that their stories be published without the addition of which centre the asylum seekers were detained in. It was explained to researchers that not only did asylum seekers justly fear the impact on their cases from publicity, but Centre workers, including religious volunteers, also risked losing their positions or access to the Centres should it become known that they had participated in this enquiry.

Experience of Religious in Work with Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Australia

General Effect of Detention on Children

One respondent, who worked with children in Hong Kong and Malaysia's refugee detention centres explained:

"Children's emotions were frozen at the ages they were when they arrived. I knew people who were 20 but who arrived at 14 – and the dream that they had at 19 was the same as the one they had when they arrived. They had no concept of living a life now, only of the future. Their emotions were more like 14 year old kids."

Several respondents pointed out that children in Australia's detention centres have experienced some level of trauma or upheaval even before arriving in Australia, which necessarily leaves them fewer resources for dealing with the Detention Centre environment they meet upon arrival. The experience of conflict, flight, separation from other family and friends, life in refugee camps and the final ocean crossing to Australia can only add to the stress of the Detention Centres themselves.

"From my previous experience, in Hong Kong and Malaysia: The children in Detention would not do well in school. I would talk to them and they would say 'I am sad'. I could not count the kids who said to me 'I will die – there is nothing for me'. Many of them would have nightmares, and they were afraid about going to sleep. They were preoccupied by the processing of their claims and many of them just couldn't function beyond that – they were emotionally blocked...totally pre-occupied by it, and influenced by the depression of the adults. Waves of depression would go through the camp. In preparation for return, the children would at first refuse to talk about their families and their homes, but they would not talk about home at first – they would say that they did not have families."

One teacher explained her experience of using videos to instruct new arrivals to an Australian Centre::

"Whenever a video showed heavy seas, the children lapsed into complete stillness because quite a few had been literally plucked from their sinking vessels"

Even the daily routine, without the drama of protests getting out of hand, causes difficulties for some children:

"Every Child is different – but in Detention they are all conforming to the same routine, through locked and un-locked gates, and surrounded by razor-wire 24 hours a day. A lot depends on the parent/child bond, and if the child has both parents with them, which is quite often not the case. The detainees are not allowed to lock their rooms, so one small boy (6 yrs) was frequently found in people's accommodation areas....The child was resented by some older detainees, and labeled a thief... He was an intelligent child, in unfortunate circumstances."

At another Centre:

"While it is difficult to say that behaviors such as refusing to eat, night terrors, regression to bed wetting, temper tantrums, and in the older children, insecurity, are due solely to detention, facets of detention cannot be helpful. Factors such as communal meal areas where meals are served at definite times; no regard for cultural dietary needs; no regard for children's likes and dislikes; no possibility for mothers to prepare food for their children are detrimental for children. Other factors such as nighttime security checks, crowded living arrangements and lack of trauma intervention do not help sleep problems"

At Villawood:

"Because of the turmoil within the centre, the children 'walk' sometimes all night (This is especially true for the children who are without families). They wander whenever there is no particular event or duty for them to perform. There is little privacy for them, even within their family group."

Entry into the Community and the resumption of “normal life”

The trauma of the Centre will not remain there once children and their families leave. Respondents who work with refugees once they have been released to the community explain:

“Their pattern of life is turned up side down. They try to sleep during the day time and stay awake at night. This seems to help them stay sane. Once they are out of the Centre it so hard to get back to a normal way of living”

“Young children who are detained seem quickly to settle into a normal childhood pattern when released, even as early as after a couple of weeks. I wonder about long term effects. Children from about 7 – 8 upwards can be very traumatized; to follow these children through would be a worthwhile study.”

One respondent shared her home with a family recently released:

“my little boy was shy, afraid and withdrawn when he came to live with us. He couldn’t speak English – all he wanted to do was watch TV – All night! I remember asking him to come for a walk around the block. The freedom frightened him. He didn’t want to move outside our house. He has buried his nightmares deep inside himself and I wonder when they will surface.”

The prejudices of the Australian community fanned by government and media also affect the ability of former detainees to feel at home in Australia:

“ I know 6 high school children who deny to their peers the knowledge that they have been through detention. They say they migrated to Australia. When the “Tampa” affair was on, one child told me they had a discussion at school about the incident, but she did not join in the discussion, saying she ‘would not want her friends to know she was a refugee’; she wanted to bury that experience and not have to discuss it with the others.”

Effect on Child Development and Education

One former Detention Centre teacher found that the management of the Centre and the experience of the children once they were there affected her students:

“Because the parents of many were also in the Centre, the authorities deemed it necessary for me to have a [Security] Officer accompanying me when crossing public areas. The [children’s] main feeling was FEAR, with frustration second. Hunger strikes and jumping off the second story were tried [in front of the children]. With a guard escorting us, I used to take the children beach strolling and to the local swimming pool, [yet] fear and frustration were very evident.”

Educating teenagers in Detention Centres has not been a priority – in Woomera in recent months, students have been receiving 4 sessions of education per week, each of one hour’s duration. A teacher in Port Headland in 1996 explained that her classes

“began with over 40, but many teenagers soon dropped out and spent the day idling. Those who stayed responded well to education...”

Even for those allowed out of the Centre to study at the local school, Detention followed them to this supposedly ‘normal’ environment. At Curtin:

“Three of them were allowed to attend high school outside detention [but they] still have a degree of anger to work through; at the time of life when they should have been seeking personal independence, they were being escorted to school by a security guard.”

In Victoria:

“When I was visiting Maribyrnong, the children I knew there were not allowed to go to school at that time. When they were allowed to go to school they were taken in a police vehicle, and collected again in the afternoon – so not in the normal way. They were thrilled to be going to school, but they couldn’t go on excursions, and they wanted their parents to see their teachers. They couldn’t enroll them in school...”

This pre-occupation with security and discipline apparently extended so far in one detention centre that a 13 year old girl who was top of her class at the local school was prevented from attending school after she participated in a hunger strike. She has been in detention for over two years and has been refused refugee status, but Australia has no forced return policy with her government, so she and her family are effectively in permanent detention. She is now refused education because she protested this situation with the only method she had at her disposal – her own body.

From a teacher of many years in the classroom in Australia, and with experience working with refugee children in several places in Asia, as well as in an Australian Immigration Detention Centre:

“I am at present working in a school where there are a number of children in attendance who have been in the detention centres in Australia... These children are very far behind their classmates in all areas of education. Of course, some of them had disrupted schooling in their own countries. That is the nature of what it is to be a refugee and have to escape to a safe country. However, keeping them locked up for several months without the benefit of normal schooling didn’t help them either. Children need continuity in their learning when they are young or they quickly forget what they have learned.

“It was my experience in detention centres overseas that schools were among the first services that UNHCR sought to provide for children in refugee camps. The reason for this was a well known fact that attending school each day was an important factor in establishing a regular, safe routine for children. Besides being very important for the education of the children, it served as a normalizing routine which the children could relate to their former lives – in cases where they had previously attended school, and for other children it helped to keep their minds off the sadness and difficulties that were affecting them in their other part of their lives in detention.”

Several respondents teach in areas with both “community asylum seekers”, those who lived outside the centres while seeking asylum, and with refugees newly released from detention. They compare the two groups of students:

“Children not detained learn easier; more contented, accept Australia’s rules and regulations”

From a teacher working to assist refugees in settling into Australian schools:

“It seems apparent that children from detention centres do have major problems...the children who are refugees are wild and aggressive kids. I am not certain about what their experiences are...because they have been displaced, their schooling has been interrupted or they have not had any schooling at all. UNHCR only worries about them up to Primary Level.”

Beyond the classroom, but from a trained teacher and pastoral worker:

“The environment of the detention centre is not conducive to normal development, either socially or educationally. The children see nothing of everyday life outside the centre. There is no celebration of the children’s culture; rather it is a source of humiliation. they see no evidence of tolerance or acceptance of multiculturalism.”

Teenagers

Detention appears to affect teenagers in a particular way. One respondent explained that “Older children are more aware of all the legal implications of trying to get a visa,” and they often have the added burden of acting as translator for their parents. A community worker explains an effect of one child’s experience:

“One story that always stays with me is about a girl of about 13. She and her family had escaped from a country where her father had been imprisoned and tortured. The mother and four children went into hiding. This girl was the oldest. They managed to escape the country. [After release from Detention], the girl was at a school where I taught and was put in a class which she was old for but this was because of her lack of English. The girl was quite tall and well developed. I guess it was expected that she would behave according to her age...This girl had been asked to take on great responsibility. She had been called to be an adult before her time. I used to take her to a group after school. As we were packing up one night, I went to look for her. She was in the doll’s corner playing with a doll like a 5 year old might play. The other children had gone home. She had the freedom to experience childhood which she had missed out on. I am sure that if the other girls her age had seen her they would have teased her. She needed the freedom to experience what it was like to be a child.”

These difficulties are compounded by the status of teens in Australian society. One respondent explained that she knew teenagers who complained because they could not earn a living as they would in their own countries. These young people found it hard that they should be locked away at a time when they could be so economically valuable to their families, and, indeed, starting their own families. In response to the question about teenagers, one respondent explained that one couple she worked with were classed by Detention Centre staff as teenagers, because of their age, although they were the parents of two small children.

Unaccompanied minors

One respondent worked with unaccompanied minors in camps in Asia, as well as in Australia’s Detention Centres. These experiences relate to her time in Australia:

“All children in detention are affected negatively and some of the issues are the same as for unaccompanied minors. However, the adverse affects on the latter are much worse in my own opinion from working with them over many years.

- Unaccompanied children become very depressed and anxious. They tell you every day that they are sad and this shows in a lack of energy, and disinterest in what is going on around them.
- They worry about their own safety and also about that of their parents back home
- They show psychosomatic symptoms of illnesses, are restless and have problems concentrating. Some refuse to participate in any activities around them.
- They feel they lack affection, sometimes becoming very attached to a kind worker at the centre, or others not relating to anyone at all.
- They feel they lack help and guidance and have no-one to stand up for them if they face problems with others
- They suffer from poor sleep and nightmares and often have intrusive memories during the day as well. The effect of their living conditions make it difficult for children to make decisions”

Boy and Girl Children

Without being conclusive, two responses to the question about boy and girl children point to a variety of experience, and to the possibility that this is an issue that needs the input of educational and development experts:

“Usually boys are more active and can use up energy chasing each other – which is some sort of outlet. Girls seem to cling to the parent”

“Boys often become very aggressive and sometimes join gangs to survive. They can bully other inmates. Girls seem to become more introverted and quiet.. They are often afraid, especially of anything new or different.”

Security practices in detention

At Port Headland:

“Security men usually went around in pairs, day and night. The children were afraid when they appeared. During hunger strikes, food was always made ready and parents made sure their children ate. Few, very few, children were seen on the 2nd story during those demonstrations.”

At Woomera:

“There does not appear to be any provision to protect children from harm during their times of unrest. To do so is a matter left to parents and guardians”

At Maribyrnong:

“There was a riot of sorts and several men damaged equipment such as computers, televisions and other furniture. This happened at night and was accompanied by a great deal of noise...The mothers [told] me later, how afraid the children and they had been, as they were locked up their own area just next to the area where it was all happening (in the same building). They were powerless to reassure the children that they were safe as they really were very afraid themselves, no knowing what was really happening, whether the place would be burned down, if the violence would escalate and overflow into their area. Although they tried to reassure the children, they couldn't hide their own fear.”

At Villawood:

“The presence of security personnel are akin to police or army in the children's minds. The constant roll calls and difficult interaction between the security officers and the detainees is a source of distress to the children. They have had a severe traumatic time in their country of origin, the transit countries or camps, and then to be held in detention centres causes untold harm to their well being – physically, mentally, emotionally.”

The Role of the Parent in Detention Centres

Detention Centres are set up like prisons, where ACM officials act as prison guards, maintaining not only security but also strict regimes for all parts of life. Regular “musters”, room searches, interrogations and even body searches, combined with lack of personal freedom, act to infantilise adult detainees. The long term effect of these practices on adults has been addressed by mental health professionals, but the effect on children detained with their parents and on the family structures of asylum seekers can be seen by many.

“Families (hence children) no longer live together under a family structure, but are housed and fed among other inmates en masse. The family has no privacy, or space for itself, is unable to make decisions about the time or eating, the type of food, when or where it will eat. There can be no secrets from others as there is nowhere for people to have a private discussion. The parents are no longer the decision makers and they cannot protect their children from what is happening around them...”

“In detention, there is obvious difference between detainees and “outsiders” – staff and visitors. While the staff have a difficult position to uphold, they, not the parent have the authority to speak, this must impact on the child”

When parents become depressed in detention, their children are quick to pick up the change and to respond themselves.

“Discipline is made very difficult for the parents as often in detention, the children “belong to everyone”. Perhaps the greatest problem for the children is not being able to understand the difference in their parents – parents before they are stressed; they become short with the children; weeping; depressed; worried; maybe guilty. Older children often have the burden of being the translator for the parents.”

“The one subject and aim is to get a visa, and leave detention. Quite often the parents are depressed – this impacts on the child. Depends on the length of stay – and the parents’ ability to assist the child.”

“Because parents are depressed by their situation, they often lose interest. As a consequence, children become out of control”

“Parents sometimes become so depressed that they are unable to care for their children either physically or emotionally. Spouses if they are together, begin to quarrel over even small things, because they feel so helpless. This situation is very unsettling for children. Children begin to defer to camp authorities for what they can and can’t do and their parent’s authority and confidence is even further eroded.”

The effect of this break down in the parent – child relationship can continue long after the family is released into the Australian community, even if the family is detained for a relatively short period.

“A was a 14 year old girl in Villawood with her mother and father for 8 months. In Villawood, she was well liked, did well in the school, spent a lot of time with her mother and often acted as translator for her parents, especially her mother who was often not well. Her mother reported that A lost weight and could not eat the food, and that she did not sleep well. She appeared very pale and anxious. On leaving Villawood, the three settled in a unit and A went to school. For the first year as the parents tried to “become parents” again and lay down some limits to A’s activities, A began to have temper tantrums; resented being offered traditional food; refused to eat; was ill often; was disciplined at school as she tried to “put down” her peers and began having nightmares. Both her parents were well during the first year and suffered from some marital disharmony. All three refused help from STARTTS. Initially they blamed all their woes on their war in their country from which they had been forced to escape. Later (about 2 years after detention), they began to speak about that experience as being “too shocking” on top of the war and as the cause of many problems.”

Alternatives and suggestions

Suggestions and Comments from Questionnaire Respondents

Respondents were asked to make suggestions as to how the Detention Centres could be made more appropriate for children and their families, and as to how the reception system itself could be changed. Their responses follow:

“I believe that the detention centres should be closed. I would agree that a period of six weeks may be necessary for documentation but after that time, the refugees should be permitted to live in the community while their cases are being processed. In the short time they are held in detention, families should have access to cooking facilities and the kinds of food the family normally requires so that they can prepare suitable food for their children at the times the children need to be fed. There is no need for razor wire and large fences. Children should have access to playing areas where there is shade, trees, grass and simple playing equipment. Families should be allowed more privacy.”

“Family supports are needed as undue pressures come with being detained. Family counselors are needed. Parents need to be told of Australia’s requirements in parenting, not just relying on customs and word of mouth”

“I believe that families should live as a unit, in SEPARATE homes rather than in large accommodation areas, and that they be given accompanied outings reasonably often – otherwise it is a tough strain on the nerves and sanity”

“I find it hard to suggest models for anything IN DETENTION. The bottom line is that no one who has not committed a crime should be in detention. If we lock up children, it will harm them.”

On Education and Training

“Education has to be fluid – depending on arrivals. Teachers across all IDCs should meet regularly with other teachers to work on a curriculum. Depending on numbers of children – they should attend local schools as has happened in Maribyrnong. Ed. committee across all IDCs”

“I believe that effective classes in manual arts, cooking, painting, etc, ought to be given to offset boredom and possibly to serve as a starting point for those given release. Of course, English classes should be mandatory”

“These children (especially in detention) could have story telling, music, and some theatre to distract them from the persistent dreary surroundings they are living in”

“Teachers should learn about the cultural background of their students – our assumptions are not always appropriate...the children need to learn basic things – such as learning at a desk, or what to do with pencil and paper.”

One respondent spoke about the need to assist children to break through the walls they built around their trauma. She explains some of their formal and informal needs:

“In Melbourne, they go to a language centre for 6 months. Many of these children have had no schooling, or interrupted schooling...after 6 months, they are put into a class of their age level. A 14 year old, without proper schooling, in a class with children of the same age. It isn’t going to work. It is a recipe for disaster.

“We need bilingual schooling in preparation for the general system. There are adult aids, who speak their languages, who could help the teachers...and if they had specialised schooling for two years, then they could catch up. They need to have guidance officers, welfare officers who are there to help with the difficulties. These kids will have to have emotional, traumatic problems, and yet we are not dealing with them. Yet we will wonder in 5 years why they are getting into gangs. Those problems are not being dealt with. We need to put into place proper educational systems. Our own kids find it hard enough to keep up with school.”

A respondent with experience in the East Timorese centres:

“the teacher should understand some of the possible [mental health] patterns, or the way that some people deal with trauma or stress...there needs to be someone committed to the program and hired for the children – some cultural background is necessary. There can be a sense of shame attached to mental health issues.”

On the trial at Woomera to take women and children out of the Centre

A respondent who lives near Woomera:

[The refugees are] “worried about parental relationships: mother/father; father/child. Most women in their own country do not have this liberty and find it difficult. Local people in Woomera are not friendly to the idea. It is a small country town with insufficient services.”

“They are almost “cemented” together. That is the whole family group as most others have been killed. The bond is so strong and they dread to be separated. Separation is not the answer”

“One Difficulty would be the mother’s lack of English – if the child becomes the interpreter it can put responsibility onto a young child.”

“In view of my experience I strongly recommend education OUTSIDE the centres. If in school with children from the Australian community, the attitudes of the latter need to be assessed. Children seeking asylum in Australia need to be protected from further rejection. The immediate, urgent, need is to learn English and understand Australian culture and practices. This is what will help immediately. Other aspect of education can be addressed in programs for the children after they have left the centre. [Also], school aged children need to be in school at least 4 hours per day.”

One community worker explained that for at least one family released on a similar scheme, the children “hated visiting [the father] in detention and had lots of behavioural reactions after each visit.”

The Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Proposes

CLRI is in the process of completing a full alternative humanitarian program policy, which will be launched in time for the 2002 DIMIA Review. The basic principles of the policy are now clear, however, and form a basis for the following suggestions.

Detention

- When detention is considered necessary for people who have not yet been immigration cleared, it must be limited to the shortest time necessary to determine applicants’ identities, basic claims, health needs, and prima facie security risk.
- CLRI believes that these initial screening and admission needs require no more than 30 days.
- All asylum seekers must be released from detention at the end of that 30 days, unless there are reasonable grounds for believing that they pose a risk to the security or safety of the Australian community.
- All asylum seekers must be presumed eligible for release
- Any asylum seeker detained beyond 30 days must have immediate access to review of their detention, in order for the detaining authority to establish the reasonableness of the belief in their risk to the community. The lack of identity documents does not constitute reasonable grounds.
- Any detention must be within easy access of a major Australian city.
- Any detention of Asylum seekers must be separate from “removal” and “deportation” detainees.

Families

- At all times, families must be kept together. When the detention of one family member is unavoidable, families must be given a choice as to how and where they will reside. The responsible authorities will ensure that the family is assisted in settling within easy distance of the detained family member. Should a separated family have relatives in an Australian city and wish to live with or near them, the detained family member shall be kept as close as possible to that city.
- Should families with children require detention, their cases must take priority over all others for speedy processing.
- Should any children remain with their families in detention, they must be released to the community for schooling as soon as possible. Whether or not the children are enrolled in school, families with children shall be allowed to leave the detention centre regularly for social and recreational visits.
- Should any families remain in detention, or in any government provided residential facility, the parents shall have complete control over their children, within the limits of Australian child protection standards. This includes the provision of facilities to allow family meals and children's occasional eating at the times and in the manner most appropriate to the family.
- Families in detention, or in any Government facilities, must be given separate living quarters, where they can find privacy and intimacy.
- The Woomera-style women and children release program must not be the model for future detention alternatives. After the trauma of flight and travel to get to Australia, asylum seekers must be allowed and supported in their need for a united family unit. Children, in particular, need as normal as possible an environment upon arrival in Australia, and to meet this, Australian Government practice must treat the retention of family bonds and supports as paramount.

Release

- Upon release, all asylum seekers must be given access to settlement and social services at least at the level of permanent residents. All social services must be provided through main-stream Government bodies such as Centrelink, Medicare, the Department of Housing. Settlement services and assistance shall still be provided through community programs, partly funded by Government.
- Centrelink offices in areas densely populated with refugees should have a designated person to help with refugee and asylum seeker clients, as is already being done in some parts of Sydney.
- All asylum seekers and refugees living in the community shall have full work and study rights immediately upon release.
- All refugees must be granted permanent protection visas, regardless of their mode or path of travel or entry to Australia.
- People found by Australia to be eligible for refugee status, or for an on-shore humanitarian grounds visa, must be immediately eligible to apply for family reunion with their immediate family members and dependents.

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The Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes

72 Rosebery Ave, (PO Box 259)
Rosebery, NSW 1445

Ph: (02) 9663 2199