



Australian Government

Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

Ms Julie Morgan
CLRI (NSW) Social Justice Committee
POS Box 259
ROSEBERY NSW 1445

Dear Ms Morgan

Thank you for your letter of 24 May 2004 to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone, concerning media access to onshore and offshore detention centres. The Minister has asked me to reply on her behalf.

The Department arranges media visits to detention centres from time to time as part of the Government's aim of ensuring informed debate on issues surrounding unlawful non-citizens, asylum seekers and immigration detention. Media representatives taking part in such visits, however, must agree to abide by the Department's obligation to protect the identity and privacy of detainees.

I note, too, that, subject to the good order and security of the immigration detention facilities (IDFs), there is no restriction on detainees communicating with external persons, including media representatives.

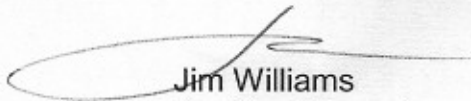
Immigration detention is one of the most highly scrutinised of Government programs. Federal Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Committees regularly visit IDFs and report on conditions. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) and the Commonwealth Ombudsman have statutory rights to enter IDFs to investigate complaints and to undertake their own inquiries into aspects of immigration detention. Members of the Immigration Detention Advisory Group (IDAG) are selected for their expertise and commitment to immigration and humanitarian issues. Through their unfettered access to IDFs, they advise on the appropriateness and adequacy of immigration detention services and conditions. International agencies such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees have also visited IDFs on request.

The Department maintains an official presence at each IDF, inter alia, to monitor the performance of its detention services provider against the Detention Services Contract and the Immigration Detention Standards (IDS). The IDS were developed by the Department in consultation with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's office and HREOC and relate to the quality of care and quality of life expected in IDFs.

The Government also makes every effort to get the facts of immigration detention and associated issues across to the Australian community in a variety of ways such as media releases, "live" interviews, publications and the Department's website which is regularly updated (www.immi.gov.au).

Thank you for drawing this matter to the Minister's attention.

Yours sincerely



Jim Williams
Assistant Secretary
Unauthorised Arrivals and Detention Operations

13 July 2004