



Senator Chris Evans

Leader of the Government in the Senate
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship

Sister Libby Rogerson IBVM
Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes
in New South Wales
PO Box 259
ROSEBERY NSW 1445

Dear Sister Rogerson

Thank you for your letter of 4 August 2008 concerning the Government's immigration detention reforms.

The treatment of asylum seekers has been controversial in Australian political debate for many years. The length and conditions of their detention has been a particular focus of criticism.

The Rudd Labor Government was elected on a platform that included a commitment to reform – not only in resolving outstanding issues but also a more humane treatment of those seeking our protection.

In just a short time, we have taken a number of major steps to restore public confidence in the integrity of our immigration system.

The immigration detention reforms I announced recently are based on a new set of values – values that take a risk-based approach to detention and seek a prompt resolution of cases, rather than focussing on punishment.

My Department has already commenced work on an implementation plan to give effect to these values. The implementation plan will be developed in consultation with community interest groups and agencies such as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

The Department will seek to progressively implement the reforms over coming months, initially through changed policies and guidance, then through regulation amendment and eventually through legislative change.

The detention reforms follow on from a number of significant changes in immigration policy made by the Rudd Government. Earlier this year, we ended the discredited Pacific Solution by closing the offshore processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island. The temporary protection visa regime - the symbol of the former Howard government's continued punishment of those found to be owed our protection – has been abolished.

In addition to the new detention principles, the reforms I recently announced included a new processing regime for those who arrive at an excised place and claim protection, including publicly funded advice and assistance, access to independent review of unfavorable decisions, and external scrutiny by the Immigration Ombudsman.

Labor believes that the new framework for immigration detention will meet our border security needs and deliver more humane treatment for people who seek protection in Australia.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Evans', written in a cursive style.

CHRIS EVANS