23 May 2014

Dear Member of Parliament

We write to urge you to vote in favour of Melissa Parke and Anna Burke’s motion to the Labor caucus to oppose offshore detention.

There are so many reports that now document the abuses that asylum seekers are enduring in the offshore detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island.\(^1\) Asylum seekers are living in terrible fear on Manus Island in the wake of Reza Berati’s violent death and the serious injuries perpetrated against other asylum seekers detained there. This is in addition to the alarming levels of despair evident on both Manus Island and Nauru as asylum seekers continue to wait for many months to find out their fate.

It is clear that Australia cannot ensure the physical safety of the asylum seekers it has sent offshore and it is causing immense psychological harm. Research over the last decade shows the negative psychological impact of mandatory detention, including in offshore locations. Mandatory detention leads to an increased risk of depression, suicidal thoughts and self-harm for asylum seekers. Such is the level of despair, some asylum seekers have taken their own lives in immigration detention centres. Detention is a dehumanising experience that leads to mounting hopelessness and demoralisation.\(^2\)

Offshore detention centres are also extremely expensive. According to the Report of the National Commission of Audit, it costs more than $400,000 per asylum seeker per year to detain an asylum seeker in offshore detention. In contrast, it costs less than $100,000 a year to hold an asylum seeker in community detention and less than $50,000 to hold them on a bridging visa.\(^3\)

Sending asylum seekers who come to Australia by boat to offshore detention centres can no longer be supported. This policy punishes an already vulnerable population and does nothing to address the reasons why people flee persecution in their own countries. Neither does it address the needs of asylum seekers to find a durable solution elsewhere. More humane and effective measures are available, including increasing Australia’s Humanitarian intake and resettling more refugees from Indonesia and Malaysia, and processing the claims of asylum seekers in Australia, by prioritising community-based alternatives to detention.

We urge the Australian Labor Party to show leadership on this issue and focus on protection policies to provide durable solutions for asylum seekers and refugees in the region.

Yours sincerely,

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