



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office



Australian Catholic
Migrant &
Refugee Office

SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO IMMIGRATION DETENTION IN AUSTRALIA.

The Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (ACMRO) is an agency of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC). In 2002 and 2004, the ACBC made major statements on Australia's policies for refugees and asylum seekers, with special reference to detention.

The Bishops addressed the Terms of Reference of the current Inquiry as follows;

- Detention, beyond the minimum time necessary for carrying out security and health checks, identity checks and the lodgement of applications for Protection Visas, is deeply destructive of human dignity. After a minimum time these people should be released into the community and be obliged to contact the immigration authorities on a regular basis. ACMRO also comments that mandatory immigration detention has been used as a deterrent to future irregular arrivals. This should never be a reason for such detention.
- The isolation of the new Christmas Island Detention Centre (if it is ever used), and the uncertainty and ignorance about the assessment process on the part of many people who are detained, cause widespread and significant psychological damage. Staff are similarly affected by the stressful environment of the centres.. The centres and their operation should be transparent and visible.
- In 2002, the Australian Catholic Bishops welcomed the introduction of the housing trial for women and children. This has now been expanded to Immigration Residential Housing, Immigration Transit Accommodation and community detention. ACMRO comments that, If people must be detained for immigration reasons, these forms of detention service are far preferable to the isolation of mandatory detention centres like Christmas Island and the former Port Hedland, Woomera and Baxter, From an economical point of view, they can probably be maintained at the same (or less) cost compared to the large detention centres.
- ACMRO also comments that it is important to provide for the pastoral care of detainees, especially when they are in detention centres. This means that Church and community groups should be given easy access to detainees. Yet this has not always been given in the past. It is also necessary for such groups to be consulted about future plans for centres so that they can plan the placement of personnel. A particular concern is the planning for reception of detainees on Christmas Island. It is very expensive for voluntary groups to travel there and they cannot do so without good notice.



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- The Bishops in 2002 said that it is vitally important that the international community – with Australia deeply involved – seek solutions to the root causes of population movements. Without this cooperation between countries, refugees and asylum seekers will inevitably become a permanent part of the global scene. Only through long-term efforts to share world resources more fairly and to uphold international human rights and humanitarian law standards will the world experience a significant reduction in the number of persons who flee persecution in their homelands.

Respectfully I make the above points to the Inquiry into immigration detention in Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Rev Monsignor John Murphy
Director.

13th July 2008