



Australian Federation of Graduate Women Inc.

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1 November 2010
The Hon Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600

Dear Mr Bowen,

On behalf of the Australian Federation of Graduate Women I welcome the announcement that the Australian Government will move some families and unaccompanied minors out of immigration detention facilities and into community based accommodation. It is however very disturbing to learn that there are again hundreds of children in detention and some of them have been there many months, but there is no immediate plan to act.

Reports suggest there are some two hundred children currently in detention at the various centres—and of course a number of children now in the Australian community who had to spend an unconscionable time in detention before their parents were accepted as meeting the very stringent criteria for being accepted as refugees. It is particularly the situation of women and children that calls for urgent remedial action. The Australian Federation of Graduate Women has as its core purpose the advancement of the welfare of women and girl children through education, but we have had, from our foundation, a commitment to working to ensure an environment for women and children that is free of both political oppression and domestic violence. Apart from the apparent denial of educational and health rights to children under the current conditions of detention, there is an abundance of material from the experience of refugee and detention (concentration?) camps around the world that demonstrates that women and children in such circumstances are highly vulnerable to emotional and sexual abuse.

It has been reported that you are considering taking steps to provide group homes where women and children could be housed. We urge you most strongly to proceed immediately with this proposal. It would be at least a temporary step on the way to a more just and humane system for all asylum seekers,

AFGW has an obligation, both through its own policies and through those of its international body, the International Federation of University Women, to endeavour to protect the welfare of all women and children, and in particular to strive for the fulfillment of the various United Nations Conventions on the treatment of women and children who are victims of war, civil unrest, oppressive regimes or domestic violence. As Australian citizens, we are saddened to have to conclude that Australia's treatment of unauthorised asylum seekers breaches such conventions, both in the very fact of automatic detention, as well as in its nature and its often lengthy duration. A year is a very long time in the life of a child. As of August 2010 **628** children are reported as being detained in inappropriate conditions on Christmas Island, at Leonora, a mining compound near Kalgoorlie, in Darwin and Port Augusta.

We are again holding hundreds of children in remote desert and island camps. We are again warehousing families indefinitely in remote camps for unedifying political purposes. We are again treating the continuing education of these children as an irrelevance

This is all the more alarming when you consider that that's come about since 2006 when the Howard government released all children from detention. While we accept that unauthorized entry of refugees presents problem to the government it does not justify the inhumane treatment of already traumatized people, above all women and children, nor the denial of access by these children to education and to a stable family life.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jane Baker
President