

Asylum Seekers to Australian PM and Minister for Immigration

2000.10. Asylum Seekers

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In our submission on the **Treatment of Asylum Seekers**, sent to Minister Philip Ruddock and the Prime Minister, we made the following points:

- Conditions in which the asylum seekers are detained breach the guidelines of the UN High Commission for Refugees
- The remoteness and the prison nature of the detention camps prevents contact with support groups and scrutiny of management procedures
- The private prison management is trained to deal with criminals only: most asylum seekers are genuine escapees from political and religious persecution.
- The length of detention under punishing conditions compares poorly with other countries with comparable number of asylum seekers, e.g. Sweden, where the maximum time is two months. Given good will and modern technology, health and security screening and status assessment should be a matter of a few weeks only.
- The extraordinary refusal to allow the UN, NGOs and church working groups to visit and observe our system of dealing with asylum seekers justifies suspicions of malpractice.
- We strongly urge the Government to heed the call by Amnesty International to release children and their mothers held in this type of detention.
- The current investigation into these matters should be an impartial, full and open inquiry and not a departmental one.
- We note that Australia was one of the original drafters and a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees.