

Mercy Advocacy

*“Cry out with a hundred thousand tongues.
I see the world is rotten because of silence.”*

- Catherine of Siena



Seeding the Future with Others
September 2014

Last month we spoke of listening to the voices of those whose dignity as persons are being trampled on, of ‘embracing the mysterious wisdom God wishes to share with us through them.’ Now, we know it is also time to add our voices to the increasing number who are speaking with and for those suffering exclusion.

In the current climate of secrecy and sloganeering, a first task is to scrutinize the statements of our political leaders, to weigh up the justifications given for our asylum seeker policies.



“I don’t think it’s a very Christian thing to come in by the back door rather than the front door.....”

Prime Minister TONY ABBOTT

“The only door open to us was the sea..”

***Somali woman
now detained, who journeyed through many countries seeking safety,
eventually coming by boat to Darwin.***

Would the paralytic man, unable to enter the house in the orthodox way, have reached Jesus without his ‘lifters’ lowering him through the roof?



Government and Opposition leaders, ministers/shadow ministers who are responsible, all stress that the boats must be stopped to prevent ‘drownings at sea’.

While we’re supposedly rescuing asylum seekers and deterring them from making the hazardous ocean journey;

- We are capturing asylum seekers at sea and either towing/ putting them in enclosed lifeboats and sending them back towards Indonesia.
- We are returning others to conditions of persecution they have fled;
- We are placing those who reach our shores in indefinite detention where their mental and physical health is compromised.

“Asylum seekers may not be drowning at sea, but they are drowning in a sea of hopelessness”

Letter writer to the SYDNEY MORNING HERALD



19 August 2014 - Immigration Minister **MORRISON** announces the release into the community of 150 children held in onshore detention centres.

***“It’s a good thing children in detention are being released.
At least it’s a start.”***

A view from the community

However, the release is:

- Only for children under ten years
- Only for 16% of those in locked detention
- Only for 6% of all detained children
- 148 children offshore on Christmas Island and 193 in Nauru will not be released.

Drawing by an 11 year old on Christmas Island



Read from right to left shows:

- 1 - War at home
- 2 - The boat journey
- 3 - The sadness in detention of the family, including a pregnant mother.



Refugees on Nauru will be resettled in Cambodia

Minister **SCOTT MORRISON** states that refugee resettlement is a safe haven package not an economic upgrade, when questioned about refugees being sent to Cambodia

He has also said that asylum seekers could set up their own businesses in Cambodia

“There is massive unemployment, especially among the young people. I would say more than 50 per cent of the young people, say people under 35 years old, cannot find any job. Thank you, Australia, for creating such a problem in Cambodia.”

SAM RAINSY, Cambodian Opposition Leader



Meanwhile on Nauru

More than 50 refugees, who are categorised as ‘single’ men even though they are married but separated from their families, have been resettled by Australia on Nauru and say they have been

“...abandoned to live like animals in the jungle”

In an interview from the tiny Pacific island, the refugees told **FAIRFAX MEDIA**:

- They don't have enough clean water, food, clothes, soap/toothpaste to meet basic needs.
- Unable to work to sustain themselves - only a few are employed (as labourers); most exist on \$12 a day.
- They can't afford phone calls to their families back home.

“In our country, the Taliban will come and they will slash our throats and finish our lives. It will take 10 minutes to die. But here, they are killing us by pain, taking our soul and our life slowly. In our countries there is physical torture, but here we are being tortured mentally,”

One refugee told FAIRFAX MEDIA



Involvement

We do not know if the *'hundred thousand tongues'* urged by *CATHERINE OF SIENA* are *'crying out'* against the *'rotteness'* of the treatment of those who seek our protection, but we are sure the momentum for change is growing and certain that more participation is needed if the situation is to improve.

So let us continue with our prayer, our learning about the issues, conversation, petition-signing, letter-writing, forum attending.....

Mercifully, the **'silence'** is being broken by many organisations, groups and individuals working on many fronts:

- The Human Rights Commission inquiry into *Children in Immigration Detention* continues
- Position paper on resettlement proposal by Jesuit Refugee Service, Cambodia
- The Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce Report *'Protecting the Lonely Children'* has been launched

www.acrt.com.au

- Open letters – eg. *J'Accuse* instigated by Prof *LOUISE NEWMAN*, psychiatrist and member of the now disbanded Immigration Health Advisory Group. This is available for signing on GetUp:

<https://www.getup.org.au/campaigns/refugees/jaccuse-open-letter-to-the-government/sign-the-open-letter>

- A stand being taken by prominent Australians

"[there] was bound to be a royal commission and compensation claims both for those mistreated and the military personnel..made to carry out the policy."

JANET HOLMES Á COURT



- A not too usual editorial '*Give the Children Freedom*', 20 August 2014, in our local *COURIER MAIL* urging release of all detained children.
- **Student involvement –**



50 schoolgirls in Ashfield, Sydney, sat for a week at lunch break in a square in the school yard staring at nothing much:

“It’s really symbolic of what’s happening to refugees because they sit in the detention centres, everyone know(s) they are there, but no one really does anything about it.”

YEAR 11 STUDENT

“Refugees have no voice in what happens to them and we wanted to stand in solidarity with them.”

YEAR 10 STUDENT

- ***Love Makes a Way*** – a movement of church leaders and members using non-violent actions to call attention to the injustices in our asylum seeker system, particularly with regard to children in detention by holding peaceful sit-ins or pray-ins in MP’s offices.



- Ever new community groups such as



- <http://workersbushtelegraph.com.au> to be launched on 6 September on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral Melbourne. One of the instigators of this group is Denise's sister, **CLARE FORBES** continuing media coverage particularly in The Age, Sydney Morning Herald and The Guardian
- And always Letters to the Editor

And so many more initiatives....



Suggested ACTION

At a recent forum a federal MP stated that none of his electors had raised any concerns with him regarding current asylum seeker policy.

Let's make our members aware of where we stand, particularly on the question of children in immigration detention.

Phone, email, write to your federal representative/Queensland senators urging the release of all detained children.





**Compiled by Genevieve Caffery and Dolores Creevey
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