

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull
Prime Minister of Australia
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Friday, 12 February 2016

Dear Mr Turnbull

Re: Offshore Detention

The Pacific Solution is working. The number of unscheduled boat arrivals has slowed. This has come about by a policy which incarcerates refugees who arrive by boat, including children, in harsh conditions on Manus Island or Nauru.

The basis of the Pacific Solution seems to be that future asylum seekers will be deterred from coming by boat because they know that harsh mistreatment awaits them.

If Manus Island and Nauru were pleasant places where families thrive in good health in an untroubled and nurturing environment the deterrent effect would of course not exist.

We understand that, despite vociferous denials, Manus and Nauru have repeatedly been shown to be unsafe places and this is in fact part of the strategy.

Effectively then one group of people is being mistreated for the benefit of another group which might otherwise undertake a perilous journey by boat from an Asian port.

The problem with this strategy is that it is unethical to subject people who have not provided consent to harsh treatment for the benefit of others. The extent of the benefit to the other group is irrelevant. The people being sent to these islands have not consented to be used for the government's deterrent purpose.

In medical research these principles are laid down in the Declaration of Helsinki. An example of such ethical principles operating in healthcare is in organ

donation. A person with two good kidneys cannot be conscripted without consent to donate one kidney for transplantation even when that transplant would likely be lifesaving. The principle is the same. In the current government offshore detention strategy people, particularly children, are placed at serious risk of mental and physical health problems to protect others.

We are confident that our government would not condone participation in research or treatment without the consent of persons who themselves can derive no benefit, even if those persons were unlikely to be harmed in the process. When innocent people are clearly being harmed without consent for the benefit of others the ethical implications are clear.

Ethical principles are not established by legislation but are identified as self-evident truths. We fail to understand how government decisions can bypass or negate well established and universally recognised ethical principles.

The argument that refugee security assessment procedures keep people on these islands is spurious. These processes can readily be undertaken in Australia.

For our government to be seen to follow well established ethical principles, the forced detention of asylum seekers in environments with a risk of harm must cease.

Signed by:

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