

Introduction

As noted in our work published below, children are exploited and too often forgotten in debates about immigration detention. They are subject to repeated “ritualised” abuse to serve political purposes. This abuse is “organised” in that many (including some NGO’s) act together in ways that they know to be harmful to children. In addition, Australia is involved in the “commercialised trafficking” of children and young people across borders.

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Australia trafficks and abuses asylum seeker children

Linda Briskman and Chris Goddard

The Age 2014 February 25

In transporting imprisoned children over national borders, Canberra is not only involved in trafficking but also exposing them to more abuse.

In the heated debates about asylum seekers, including the tragic death of ████████ on Manus Island, there is one group that is always forgotten: children. Ten years ago we lamented the fact that there were about 100 children held in Australia's immigration detention prisons, arguing that those children were subject to «organised» and «ritualised» abuse by the Australian government.

We used the term "ritualised abuse" to explain that the children were subject to formal and repeated acts of abuse, carried out under a belief system that the government adopted to justify such cruelty. We used the term "organised abuse" to illustrate that children were being abused by many perpetrators who acted together in ways they knew could be extremely harmful.

Ten years later, there are 10 times as many children subject to this organised, ritualised practice on the Australian mainland, Christmas Island and Nauru. Children without parents, dismissively referred to as "unaccompanied minors", are now joining transported families with children on Nauru.

As the abuse has markedly increased, we have further refined our definition to incorporate "commercialised trafficking" in children. Australia is now trafficking more children across national borders, defying UN protocols of trafficking in persons. As the tragic events on Manus Island unfolded, there was barely a murmur about what was occurring in the second offshore imprisonment site of Nauru, with 10 unaccompanied children forcibly sent there from Christmas Island; more have now followed. Through deliberately misleading and confusing terminology, these trafficked children are described in various ways; "transferees" and "illegals" are being sent to "secure" detention sites, rather than to imprisonment.

According to a definition found through the UNICEF website, based on engagements with international agencies, "A child has been trafficked if he or she has been moved within a country, or across borders, whether by force or not, with the purpose of exploiting the child". Among the factors that render a trafficked child vulnerable, according to this definition, are that they "cannot speak the language, are disadvantaged by their legal status, suffer a lack of access to basic services (such as education and healthcare), or do not know the environment". All these apply to children we have trafficked to Nauru.

There is more. All those who contribute to this movement of children, and know what they do is likely to lead to child exploitation, are themselves traffickers. They include “recruiters, intermediaries, document providers, transporters, corrupt officials, employers and exploiters”.

“Duty of care” and “risk management” are terms familiar to Australians. Sending children to Nauru is a serious abrogation of duty of care and poses untold risks to unaccompanied children. Riots and fires on Nauru last year, and recent events on Manus Island, starkly reveal the impact of locking up innocent people and taking away all hopes and rights. For children to witness such events, sometimes without the protection of a parent, increases the well-documented harm that results from being locked up for indeterminate periods.

Imprisoned children’s voices are haunting. In *Human Rights Overboard* we recounted narratives about so many childhoods lost. One boy who was 11 when detained on Nauru told us: “I felt my childhood was being washed away by detention. It’s like watching an R-rated movie you are not supposed to watch. It included sexual content, very coarse language, violence, suicide and every horrible experience that you can imagine. Children experienced the grown up world when they are not ready for it.”

Last December a well-known non-government organisation advertised for an “Unaccompanied Minor Manager” on Nauru, specifying that a key objective would be to “reduce the risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation or harm to unaccompanied minors”. A noble statement, but given the remote location, the tensions and children’s past experiences, such a goal is not achievable.

In 1992, in his renowned Redfern speech, Paul Keating referred to indigenous stolen children and spoke of our failure to imagine such things happening to us. Ironically, it was Keating’s government that introduced mandatory detention of asylum seekers. Our national cruelty continues as we fail to imagine what it would be like if our own children were harshly imprisoned without cause, without limit and without hope.

In effect, the government is moving children for profit, exactly what they accuse people smugglers of doing. The profit is not only financial for the range of stakeholders, but unashamedly political. Those colluding with exploitation of children for political and financial gain include government departments, ground and air transport personnel, private security companies and “humanitarian” organisations. In this tangled web, ritualised abuse of children is shrouded by the shrill, simplistic message of Stop the Boats, unconscionably punishing these children to deter others.

In 2004, the National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention found children held in these facilities “had suffered numerous and repeated breaches of their human rights”. The inquiry found that our detention policies “failed to protect the mental health of children, failed to provide adequate healthcare and education and failed to protect unaccompanied children and those with disabilities”.

Such are the continuing concerns that the president of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs, announced on February 3 that she is leading another inquiry, 10 years later.

During the past 10 years, there were occasions when we foolishly hoped that children would be freed. Not only were these hopes dashed, but imprisoning asylum seeker children increased in scale, intensity and cruelty. This cruel punishment has become less unusual.

We live in a vast and wealthy nation “with boundless plains to share”. We can afford to be fair. Unless we reverse this blight on our nation, children’s anguish will continue to shame us.

How many more childhoods will be washed away while children remain imprisoned?

Linda Briskman is professor of human rights at the Swinburne Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University of Technology.

Chris Goddard is adjunct professor, Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia, at Monash University. Their book, with Susie Latham, Human Rights Overboard: Seeking asylum in Australia, won the Australian Human Rights Commission award for non-fiction in 2008.

THE AGE TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2014

20 COMMENT

Australia trafficks the asylum seeker children

LINDA BRISKMAN
CHRIS GODDARD

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Fine words but no action on Christmas Island

Linda Briskman, Susie Latham, Chris Goddard

The Australian 2010 January 25

The Rudd government is perpetuating the despair of the past.

TWO years after the Rudd government's election, disturbing news about immigration detention rolls on. Some of Christmas Island's asylum-seeker population are now housed in tents.

Christmas Island's detention facilities are being expanded beyond capacity and are now "home" to more than 1300 people.

Too many are children, most of whom are held in the gated and guarded construction camp. Curtin University researcher Lucy Fiske, who met children aged from seven months through to 17 years on the island, says: "There is no natural shade, no grassed area, no open space where children can run or play, and no outdoor space for communal gatherings. There is very little to do."

Only weeks ago we saw other disturbing images of women and children who disembarked from the Oceanic Viking, pleading for help behind the barred windows of a locked room in Indonesia. They had been promised that they would not be held in the Australian-funded Indonesian detention centre.

The months after the election of the Labor government appeared to provide some sense of optimism for those in favour of a more humane approach to asylum-seekers. There were many positive changes. The camps at Nauru and Manus Island were closed, temporary protection visas were abolished as were the cruel detention debts, and asylum-seekers in the community were given the freedom to work and receive Medicare while their claims were processed.

As late as July 2008, Immigration Minister Chris Evans appeared to signal that the detention system would change significantly. In a major speech, he acknowledged that mandatory detention for "health, identity and security checks is a sound and responsible public policy". Once these checks are completed, he said, "continued detention . . . is unwarranted". He went on: "The detention of children behind razor wire and the obvious damage done to them caused outrage in the Australian community . . . Labor's detention values explicitly bar the detention of children in immigration detention centres."

After this announcement of more appropriate values, many expected that Christmas Island, with its \$400 million maximum security detention centre and its 24/7 cameras, would be used less. A year after that speech, refugee advocate Frank Brennan wrote that some had been held on the island for more than nine months.

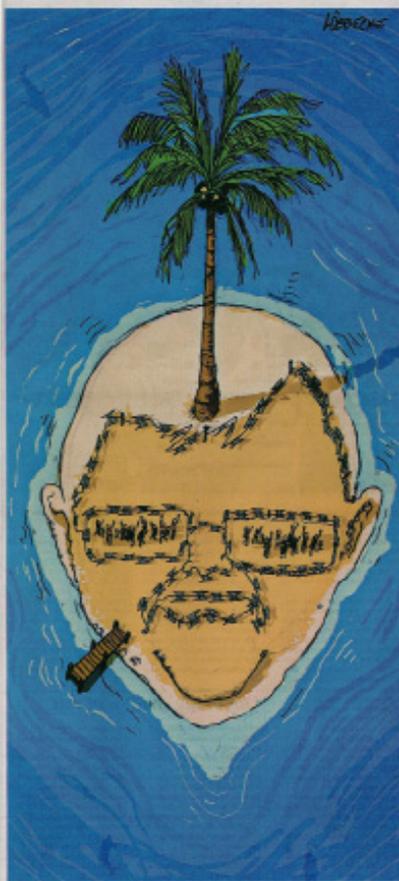
The fact that most asylum-seekers, including children, are still being detained inappropriately is the logistical consequence of a purely political decision. The government continues its farcical policy of processing all boat arrivals on the island in spite of criticisms from the UN High

Commissioner for Refugees, the Australian Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International.

There are other impacts. The island has a population of about 1200. They are outnumbered by the detainees and staff. Everything is flown in, at great cost to the environment. All goods are scarce and expensive, with a lettuce, for example, costing up to \$10. Services are stretched to the limit. Last year, the Human Rights Commission found a mental health team of only five people trying to provide services. Lawyers are reporting pressure to conduct interviews more quickly. All the services could be provided more quickly and cheaply on the mainland. Only last week the UN special rapporteur on health, Anand Grover, called for the closure of Christmas Island detention, stressing the impediments to health provision and legal advice resulting from the remoteness of the island. Yet the Immigration Minister's office rejected this expert opinion by stridently repeating the mantra of maintaining strong border security while treating people with human dignity.

The quest for humanity is increasingly diminished as numbers rise and tensions increase. Many people were shocked to hear of the recent use of the Guantanamo-like separation compound known as "red block", following a stand-off between detainees and officials. Refugee lawyer David Manne has described the use of red block as cruel, inhumane and degrading.

The economics make no sense. Labour costs are double those on the mainland. The asylum-seekers, most of whom are traumatised, could be more easily provided with appropriate accommodation and services.



FINE WORDS BUT NO ACTION ON CHRISTMAS ISLAND

The Rudd government is perpetuating the despair of the past

LINDA BRISKMAN
SUSIE LATHAM
CHRIS GODDARD

TWO years after the Rudd government's election, startling news about immigration detention riffs on Christmas Island's remote northern peninsula has once again landed in headlines.

Christmas Island's detention facilities are being expanded beyond capacity and are now "home" to more than 1200 people. To meet ever-increasing needs of detainees, more of whom are held in the gated and walled compounds called Xcel. Xcel University researcher Lucy Pille, who over child development centres provides the only TV service on the island, says: "There is no cultural divide, no planet area, no open space where children can run or play, and no outdoor space for communal activities. There is only the blocks."

Only weeks ago we saw other disturbing images of women and children who disembarked from the Christmas Island processing ship, held behind the barbed wire of a locked room in detention. They had been promised that they would not be held in the Australian-held Indonesian detention centre.

The months after the election of the Labor government appeared to promise a sense of optimism for the future in favor of a more humane approach to asylum seekers. There were many positive changes. The camps at Manus and Moresby Island were closed, temporary protection visas were abolished to meet the need of detention debts, and asylum seekers on the community were given the freedom to work and receive Medicare while their claims were processed.

As late as July 2008, Immigration Minister Chris Evans appeared to signal that the detention system would change significantly. In a major speech, he acknowledged that mandatory detention's health, identity and economic checks to a social and responsible public policy. "Clear these checks are completed, but still, 'continued detention' is a constraint," he went on. "The detention of children and their care and the obvious damage done to them cannot be done in the Australian community. Labor's intention is to explicitly say the detention of children in immigration detention centres."

After this announcement of more appropriate values, many expected that Christmas Island, with its 5400 offshore detention centre, and its 2200 offshore, would be closed by a year after that speech, refugee advocates have dreamed while thousands had been held in the island for more than nine months.

The fact that most arrivals, including children, are still being held in inappropriate facilities is a clear indication of a purely political decision. The government continues its fiscal policy of processing all boat arrivals on the island in spite of criticism from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Australian Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International.

There are other impacts. The island has a population of about 1200. They are outnumbered by the detainees and staff. Everything is flown in, at great cost to the environment. All goods are scarce and expensive, with a lettuce, for example, costing up to \$10. Services are stretched to the limit.

The quest for humanity is diminished as numbers rise

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The quest for humanity is increasingly diminished as numbers rise and tensions increase. Many people were shocked to hear of the recent use of the Guantanamo-like separation compound known as "red block", following a stand-off between detainees and officials. Refugee lawyer David Manne has described the use of red block as cruel, inhumane and degrading.

The economics make no sense. Labour costs are double those on the mainland. The asylum-seekers, most of whom are traumatised, could be more easily provided with appropriate accommodation and services.

Linda Briskman and Susie Latham are members of Crisis University. Chris Goddard is a member of the Human Rights Centre. Their book, *Human Rights Overboard: Seeking asylum in Australia*, won the 2008 Australian Human Rights Commission Human Rights Award.

After all, more than 90 per cent will be found to be refugees. Yet the plans to increase the capacity of Christmas Island continue apace.

The Rudd government, armed with extraordinary ratings in the opinion polls, was given an opportunity to redefine Australia's place in the world.

A year or so ago, we urged the government to offer a fresh response to asylum-seekers. Three fundamental changes, we said then, were needed to address the human rights issues: the removal of racism, the restoration of human rights, and the establishment of accountability. Instead, the government has decided to follow in the footsteps of earlier damaging policies. Sadly, it knows what it is doing.

Evans himself, in a speech championing the achievements of the Labor government, attacked the Howard government's Pacific Solution: "Neither humane nor fair, the Pacific Solution was also ineffective and wasteful. At massive cost to the Australian taxpayer, [it] was not about maintaining integrity or public confidence in Australia's arrangements. It was about the cynical politics of punishing refugees for domestic political purposes."

In 2008 we documented the irreversible harms arising from long-term detention. The government still has the opportunity to stop the games and demonstrate compassion and decency. It is not too late to stop the unwarranted cruelties to adults and children, and to embrace a compassionate Christmas spirit.

Linda Briskman and Susie Latham are researchers at Curtin University. Chris Goddard is a researcher at Monash University. Their book, Human Rights Overboard: Seeking asylum in Australia, won the 2008 Australian Human Rights Commission literature (nonfiction) award.

Unwarranted cruelty

Chris Goddard, Susie Latham, Linda Briskman

The Australian 2008 September 1

A royal commission into mandatory detention is needed to ensure the abuses of the past are prevented in the future, write Chris Goddard, Susie Latham and Linda Briskman

There have been highs and lows, heroes and villains, in Australia's treatment of refugees. In recent years, the heroes have been hard to find. This is why in *Human Rights Overboard*, published this week, we are calling for a royal commission into every aspect of immigration policy.

During the 1970's, thousands of Vietnamese arrived in Australia by boat. The country responded with humanity. In 1992, the Keating Labor government set in train a process that was to lead to Australia displaying a darker side. A system of mandatory detention was established, with asylum-seekers locked up without trial.

With the introduction by the Howard government of temporary protection visas, the Tampa incident and the excision of Australian territory from our migration zone, refugees were treated increasingly inhumanely. They were demonised by policies and practices that were largely – and shamefully – supported by both sides of parliament.

The publication of *Human Rights Overboard* draws together hundreds of oral testimonies and written submissions to the People's Inquiry into Detention. The inquiry, established in the wake of the Cornelia Rau scandal by the Australian Council of Heads of Schools of Social Work, exposes the secrecy and brutality of immigration processes and detention centres.

The inquiry heard harrowing stories from both sides of the razor wire, stories from detainees, immigration and detention staff, doctors, lawyers and advocates.

The stories reflect the experiences of the asylum-seekers: their journeys here and first contacts with Australian authorities; the processing of claims; their lives in detention; and their attempts to establish themselves after release.

For many on both sides of politics, it was the treatment of children that highlighted the cruelty to all. More than 2000 children were kept in Australian detention centres for an average period of 20 months. At least one child was locked up for more than five years. So many children, so terribly damaged, for so little reason.

According to a report in *The Australian* (August 13, 2008), Phillip Ruddock now regrets the treatment of those children.

But if you build a prison, you treat those inside, even children, as criminals. Especially if the prisons are out of sight. A former detention centre officer told the inquiry that many officers thought asylum-seekers were criminals: "I was once told..... you are the cat, they are the rat, and don't forget that."

The inquiry heard evidence of detainees being served inadequate, maggot-infested food and of assaults on adults and children. A migration agent who visited Woomera told the inquiry: "On one occasion I was stunned to see a tall young female guard kick a small boy aged about four because he was having fun near the compound gate."

Appalling conditions with ineffective avenues for remedy led many asylum-seekers to take drastic measures. Migration agent Marion Le told the inquiry: "There was a man who sewed his lips. If you met him you would be amazed that he would be driven to that because he worked with the UN and had all his documents with him, and they just totally ignored his documentation."

Living in detention profoundly affected children's development. A submission to the inquiry told how medical reports on a three-year-old boy blamed environment deprivation and the depression of family members for his sadness: "His mother reported that on one occasion he obtained a piece of string and executed his truck. He said to his mother, 'I have killed my truck because it is tired of being sad.'"

Very young children were not shielded from distressing events: a refugee advocate told the inquiry: "One of the most poignant moments I experienced was when a three-year-old curly-haired child, who could barely speak, interrupted my conversation with his father with the words, 'Guards take my mummy.'" A boy who spent three years in detention said: "The worst thing, I will never forget it, was people cutting themselves."

"It was horrible. I remember one time a person was harming himself up a tree and his children were crying under the tree. His wife was crying and yelling under the tree. His blood was dripping from the tree."

Children were imitating adults and harming themselves; a former detainee told the inquiry: "Children copy other people. Too (many) people go crazy inside. People standing on the fences, wanting to jump: the children look at these people."

This was organised and ritualised abuse of vulnerable people, including children, by the Australian government. Even when child abuse was reported to state child protection authorities, no action was taken.

This abuse of children was institutionalised, placed beyond the law.

After detention ended, for many the troubles continued: the six-year-old boy who refused to go to school in case his father was taken away again; the two-year-old girl who screamed if she could not see her father. A GP working in a refugee health service reported that two children took shampoo overdoses. "There is no reason why anybody would overdose on shampoo unless they had learned that behaviour in detention centres. It is isolated to the particular environment."

Then there were the deaths. The inquiry heard of mental and physical health care so substandard that it sometimes resulted in death. The inquiry has documented a total of 19 deaths in immigration detention, 12 of them between January 2001 and June 2003.

We must not forget those who died on their way to Australia. As Julian Burside has written in his foreword, the introduction of temporary protection visas in 1999 provided protection for three years only, and denied refugees the right to bring their families to Australia. This is one of the reasons so many women and children died in the SIEV X disaster. "On the night of 19 October 2001, 353 people drowned as they tried to get to Australia to be reunited with their immediate family members who had already been accepted in Australia as refugees."

Ruddock has apparently only one regret that he and others treated children so cruelly for so long. We have to ensure that no government is allowed to preside over such abuse of children - and adults - ever again.

A royal commission is needed to address the abuses described and set in place practices that will prevent them in the future.

The inquiry heard evidence that many elements of migration policy disproportionately penalised people who are not Australian citizens, and did so in a manner that is inconsistent with the way Australians would expect to be treated.

Removing such racism, restoring human rights, and reinstating accountability should be our immediate goals.

Human Rights Overboard is full of stories and quotes that bring tears to the eyes. As is so often the case, a young boy provided one of the most powerful quotes: "My mind is jumping around because the only way I could survive that place was (by) not caring, and not caring is not that easy."

Many Australians on both sides of politics also worked very hard at not caring. They apparently did not care about thousands of the most vulnerable refugees, including children. Now is the time to show that we are not villains, that once again we can respond with humanity.

Linda Briskman and Susie Latham are researchers at Curtin University. Chris Goddard is a researcher at Monash University. They are the authors of Human Rights Overboard: Seeking Asylum in Australia (Scribe, \$35).

Unwarranted cruelty

A royal commission into mandatory detention is needed to ensure the abuses of the past are prevented in the future, write **Chris Goddard, Susie Latham and Linda Briskman**

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Baby ██████'s got a new name: No. 390

Chris Goddard

The Age 2004 April 13

An eight-month-old girl is closely watched by guards. Her parents' crime is to have asked for freedom, writes Chris Goddard.

This journey, taking her first child home, was one that she had long imagined, but now dreaded. ██████ had been born two weeks early by caesarean, small but healthy.

██████'s mother remembers the journey home after five days in hospital. The nearby hills reminded her of the country she was raised in, although the soil around Shiraz was never as red.

Their home is air-conditioned, purpose-built, especially designed. Its features are proudly displayed on a website. There are "cameras, microwave movement detection systems and chain mesh fencing" behind their room. There is an "energised detection and deterrent system (EDDS)" and "smooth non-corrosive high tensile wires", designed so that "anybody touching the wires would receive a short, sharp, harmless shock," the website states.

The steel gates opened to admit ██████, her mother, the two guards and their driver to the Baxter Immigration Reception and Processing Centre. There had always been two guards outside the door during her hospital confinement, and now there would be more. She carried ██████, Baxter No. 390, into their room in Blue One compound. The gates and doors closed behind them.

The last part of my own journey to Baxter was along the Old Whyalla Road that ██████ and her mother took with their guards. Their home is best viewed, however, from the newer road to Whyalla, where miles of salt bush and mountains are clearly visible, and Baxter looks exactly as it is: a steel cage set against a mountain backdrop.

Beyond the small car park there is boundless open space, the red heart of Australia. Through the windscreen, however, all we can see is steel grey and straight, wires and poles. Today even the sky is unseasonally grey.

Near the huge steel gates that greeted ██████ there is a small door. Unfamiliar with the process, we press the intercom and the lock is released. We walk through a wire tunnel to the next door. We enter a small room, like a miniature departure gate at an airport, with metal detectors and X-ray machine. Here we are politely told that we have not followed the required procedures to enter. We are sent back. The irony is almost lost on us. Back through the steel door, which shuts behind us, into the wire tunnel, back to the other steel door that lets us back into the outside world.

We had missed any sign that asked us to report to the visitors' centre. We provide photo ID, they provide a locker for wallets and keys. We sign the forms that allow us to leave cigarettes and nuts as presents for those we are visiting. They give us receipts. The fresh fruit we keep with us in our

plastic bags. We are given wrist bands and stamps on the hand that are visible only under ultraviolet light.

A guard escorts us to the wire. Door. Intercom. Wire tunnel, the EDDS and pristine gravel. Door. Intercom. Metal detector. Our fruit is X-rayed. Door. Again we find ourselves locked in. The final door opens and we are in a large room.

There is a glass screen where another guard sits. Here we finally meet ██████ and her parents. They are health workers from Iran. ██████ is now eight months old, born in Australia, but not Australian. Her parents' journey here is no less symbolic. They arrived on Ashmore Reef on Christmas Day, 2000. Three years later, they have moved from one detention centre, Curtin, to another. And now they have a daughter.

Under scrutiny, we talk of Iran, Islam, their change of religion and their flight. We talk of how the children in detention centres, on mainland Australia at least, are slowly being released. They tell me that the guards are more friendly now the company running the centre has changed. I ask if they have changed the guards. No, they tell me, they have told the guards to change. Blue One compound has even had its name changed to Blue Gum compound.

As visiting time ends, they thank us profusely for coming. We thank them awkwardly for allowing us to visit. We apologise for the home we have built for them. We prepare our escape and collect the fruit that they have barely touched, and we cannot leave.

We are ushered out, into the area between locked doors, squashed together as all the visitors leave at once. Into the departure lounge, metal detectors, X-ray machine, UV stamp illuminated, wrist band cut off, through the door that leads to the wire tunnel.

Before collecting my keys and wallet from the locker, I stand and breathe deeply. The huge steel gates slide open to allow a car to enter the centre. This is how ██████ and her mother came home. Two parrots fly noisily over the centre towards the mountains. Perhaps ██████ will have seen them, as she returned to Blue Gum compound.

Baudelaire wrote of "forests of symbols". There are few trees here but the symbolism is deep-rooted, old-growth forest. As part of my work, I have seen prisons and secure units. I have seen children dying of child abuse, with fractures too many to count. I have seen children torn apart by sexual abuse. I have seen things I had to see, that I will never forget, that I found impossible to understand.

This time I have seen something that I should never have seen. I have been to see an eight-month-old girl, small for her age, smiling at her parents, soon to be walking, her every move watched by guards. I have seen an infant behind grey wires and electric fences, in a high-security prison on the edge of Australia's dead heart. I have seen her parents found guilty, without trial, of wanting freedom. I have seen parents so proud

of their first-born, but so close to despair. I have seen an infant given a number. I have seen a baby girl kept in a cage.

I drive hundreds of kilometres to my own home. I drive through towns and small settlements desperate for health workers, through places established by refugees, places where they want more families, more children. I drive for most of the night, eating the fruit that we could not leave for [redacted] and her parents, desperately wanting this journey to end.

Dr Chris Goddard is interim director of Monash University's national research centre for the prevention of child abuse.

Baby's got a new name: No. 390

An eight-month-old girl is closely watched by guards. Her parents' crime is to have asked for freedom, writes **Chris Goddard**.

This journey, taking her first child home, was one that she had long imagined, but now Ghazal had been born a two-month-old by caesarean, small but healthy. Ghazal's mother remembers the journey home after five days in hospital. The nearby hills surrounded her at the moment she was moved in, although the old ground Ghazal was born in had.

Their home is air-conditioned, purpose-built, especially designed. Its features are quickly displayed on a website. There are cameras, microwave movement detection systems and chain mesh fencing behind three acres. There is an "emergency detection and alarm system (HEDAS)" and "intrusion sensor receive high visible video" designed so that "anybody inserting the wires would receive a 400,000-volt, high-voltage shock," the website states.

The steel gates opened to admit Ghazal, her mother, the two guards and their driver to the familiar landscape of reception and processing centres. There had always been two guards outside the door during her hospital confinement and now there would be none, the warden Ghazal, No. 390, into their room in Blue One compound. The gates and doors closed behind them.

The last part of my own journey to Baxter was along the Old Murrumbidgee Road that Ghazal and her mother took with their guards. Their home is best viewed, however, from the nearest road to Murrumbidgee, whose scales of salt, mud and mountains are clearly visible, and Baxter looks exactly as it is in a road sign set against a mountain backdrop.

Beyond the road we park there is hundreds of open spaces, the red heart of Australia. Through the wilderness, however, all we can see is steel grey and straight wires and poles. Tying even the sky is unrecognizable grey.

Since the large steel gates that greeted Ghazal there is a small class. Below the wire the process, we pass the animals and the back is released. We walk through a wire tunnel to the next class. We enter a small room, like a miniature departure gate at an airport, with metal detection and X-ray

machine. Here we are probably told that we have not followed the required procedures in some way we see back. The way is almost lost on us, back through the steel door, which then is behind us, into the wire to metal, back to the where we see down that line to back into the outside world.

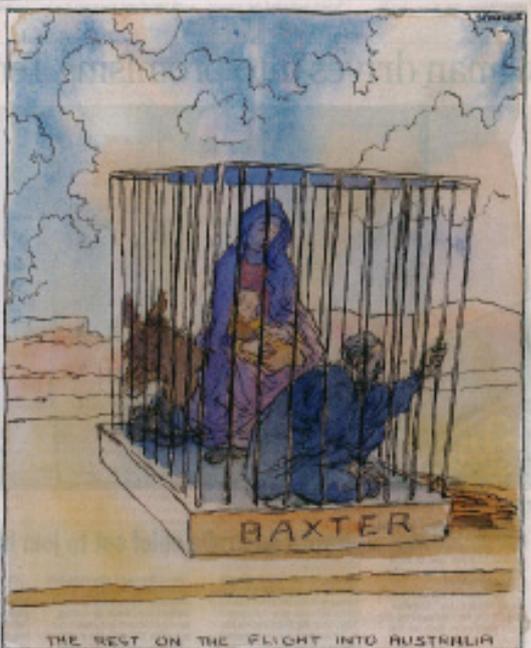
We had missed any sign that asked us to report to the visitors' centre. My phone glows red if my mobile is back for visitors and keys. We sign the forms that allow us to leave cigarettes and such as presents for those we are visiting. They give us receipts. The fresh fruit we keep with us in our plastic bags. We are given some bread and stamps on the hand that are visible only under ultraviolet light.

A guard escorts us to the wire. Door, bathroom. We stand, the HEDAS and camera guard. Door, bathroom, toilet, detector. Our final is X-rayed. Door. Again we find ourselves locked in. The final door opens and we are in a large room.

There is a giant screen where another guard sits. Here we finally meet Ghazal and her parents. They are both western from Italy. Ghazal is now eight months old. I am in Australia, but not Australian. Her parents' journey here is no less symbolic. They arrived in Adelaide first on Christmas Day, 2008. Three years later, they have no word from one detention centre, Curlew, to another. And now they have a daughter.

Under scrutiny, we sit of two, three, three coverage of religion and their flight, the talk of how the children in detention centres, on mainland Australia at least, are slowly being released. They tell me that the guards are now friendly now the company raising the centre has changed. I ask if they have changed the guards. No, they tell me, they have told the guards to change. Blue One compound has now had its name changed to Blue One compound.

As visiting time ends, they thank us profusely for coming. We thank them awkwardly for allowing us to visit. We apologise for the burden we have built for them. We prepare our receipt and collect the fruit that they have barely touched, and we cannot leave.



We are ushered out, into the taxi. Between locked doors, separated together as all the visitors have at once. Into the departure lounge, metal detectors, X-ray machines. UV stamp illuminated, wires bent out of. Through the door that leads to the wire fenced.

Before collecting my keys and wallet from the locker, I stand and breathe deeply. The large steel gates slide open to allow a car to enter the centre. This is how Ghazal and her mother came home. Two persons fly nearby over the centre towards the car entrance. Perhaps Ghazal will have seen them, as she returned to Blue One compound.

Remember some of "birds of verobirds". There are few trees here but the vegetation is deep-rooted, old-growth forest, as part of my work. I have seen patients and security units. I have seen children doing of child abuse, with doctors too close to court. I have seen children torn apart by social abuse. I have seen things I had to see, that I will never forget, that I found impossible to understand.

This time I have seen something that I

should never have seen. I have been to see an eight-month-old girl, small but her eyes, smiling at her parents, soon to be walking, her every move watched by guards. I have seen an infant behind grey wires and electric fences, in a high security prison on the edge of Australia's dead heart. I have seen her parents forced guilty, without trial, of wanting freedom. I have seen parents so proud of their first-born, but so close to despair. I have seen an infant given a number. I have seen a baby girl kept in a cage.

I drive hundreds of kilometres to my own home. I drive through towns and small settlements desperate for health workers, through places established by refugees, places where they want more families, more children. I drive for most of the night, eating the fruit that we could not leave for Ghazal and her parents, desperately wanting this journey to end.

Dr Chris Goddard is interim director of Monash University's national research centre for the prevention of child abuse.

By any measure, it's official child abuse

Chris Goddard and Linda Briskman

Herald Sun 2004 February 19

AS we write, there are about 100 children still held in Australia's detention centres.

These children are subject to organised and ritualised abuse by the Australian Government.

We use the term «organised abuse» to mean that those children are being abused by many perpetrators who are acting together in ways that they know can be extremely harmful.

And we use the term «ritualised abuse» to mean that the children are subject to formal and repeated acts of abuse carried out under a belief system that the government uses to justify such cruelty.

Such abuse, in Australia and Nauru, is virtually without precedent in Australian history. Perhaps the closest parallel is the time when policy and law were used to remove indigenous children from their families.

The similarities are telling on many grounds.

The 1997 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report, *Bringing Them Home*, examined the effects of the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from families, and the effects of institutionalisation.

The inquiry found that many children who had been forcibly removed had been denied the experience of being raised by adults to whom they were attached and that «this is the very experience people rely on to become successful parents themselves».

A significant proportion of the stolen generations were found to have children with major behavioural problems.

High rates of violence and suicide were also found.

Mental health problems, including depression, are still evident. The report also found significant levels of unresolved grief and loss, passed from one generation to another.

There are differences, of course, between what was done in the name of law and policy to indigenous children and what we are doing in the name of policy to children behind razor wire in detention centres.

Children, rather than being forcibly removed from their families, are compelled to watch their families divided and damaged, parental roles disintegrating.

Many have witnessed the devastating effects of depression. Some young people have themselves engaged in acts of self-harm.

Unquestionably, children in detention centres are entitled to the protection of all the international agreements that have established minimum standards of care.

Robyn Layton, QC, in her inquiry into South Australia's child protection system, supported this view.

She found that «children should only be detained as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time».

She also found that these children were denied the protection of the state's child welfare laws, in spite of «the serious systemic abuse of children in detention».

The stories that came out of Bringing Them Home make heart-breaking reading: «I feel I have been totally denied a childhood»; «Our life pattern was created by the government policies and are forever with me . . . The stolen years that are worth more than any treasure are irrecoverable.»

The stories from Baxter, Woomera, Port Hedland and Villawood are remarkably similar: tales of loss and grief, of scarring and trauma, of pain that will always be there.

Stories are emerging of childhoods denied, of irrecoverable innocence and joy, of pain that will pass to other generations. It is inevitable that there will again be calls for reparation and apology, rehabilitation and healing.

There is, however, a fundamental difference, one that must be giving every state and federal minister, every public servant responsible for child protection, serious pause for thought.

It took more than 100 years for an inquiry into the stolen generations.

We believe that public opinion will ensure that any inquiry into the stolen childhoods in detention centres will occur more rapidly.



Locked up asylum-seekers on Nauru

By any measure, it's official child abuse

Chris Goddard and Linda Briskman

As we write, there are about 100 children still held in Australia's detention centres. These children are subject to expanded and repeated abuse by the Australian Government. We use the term "organised abuse" to mean that those children are being abused by many organisations who are acting together in ways that they know can be extremely harmful. And we use the term "institutional abuse" to mean that the children are subjected to formal and repeated acts of abuse carried out under a belief system that the government uses to justify such cruelty. Such abuse, in Australia and Nauru, is virtually without precedent in Australian history. Perhaps the closest parallel is the time when policy and law were used to remove Indigenous children from their families. The similarities are telling on many grounds. The 1997 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report, *Bringing Them Home*, examined the effects of the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from families and the effects of institutionalisation. The inquiry found that many children who had been denied the experience of being raised by siblings in

whom they were attached and that "this is the very experience people rely on to become successful parents themselves". A significant proportion of the stolen generations were found to have children with major behavioural problems. High rates of violence and suicide were also found. Mental health problems, including depression, are still evident. The report also found significant levels of unresolved grief and loss, passed from one generation to another. There are differences, of course, between what was done in the name of law and policy to Indigenous children and what was done in the name of policy to children behind race. Children are now spending months and years in what is, in effect, a prison. Children, rather than being merely removed from their families, are compelled to watch their families divided and damaged, parental love disappearing. Many have witnessed the devastating effects of depression. Some young people have themselves engaged in sexual abuse. Unquestionably, children

in detention centres are entitled to the protection of all the international agreements that have established minimum standards of care. Robyn Layton, QC, in her inquiry into South Australia's child protection system, supported this view. She found that "children should only be detained as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time". She also found that these children were denied the protection of the state's child welfare laws, in spite of "the serious systemic abuse of children in detention". The stories that came out of *Bringing Them Home* make heart-breaking reading "I feel I have been totally denied a childhood"; "Our life pattern was created by the government policies and are forever with me . . . The stolen years that are worth more than any treasure are irrecoverable." The stories from Baxter, Woomera, Port Hedland and Villawood are remarkably similar: tales of loss and grief, of scarring and trauma, of pain that will always be there. Stories are emerging of childhoods denied, of irrecoverable innocence and joy, of pain that will pass to other generations. It is inevitable that there will again be calls for reparation and apology, rehabilitation and healing. There is, however, a fun-

damental difference, one that must be giving every state and federal minister, every public servant responsible for child protection, serious pause for thought. It took more than 100 years for an inquiry into the stolen generations. We believe that public opinion will ensure that any inquiry into the stolen childhoods in detention centres will occur more rapidly. We hope that it is soon enough for those complicit in this organised and repeated abuse of these most vulnerable children to be held personally accountable. One hundred years ago, politicians and public servants could perhaps claim that they were acting when they thought were the best interests of the children. Now, however, they know what they are doing. Our own history tells us they are doing a terrible wrong both to children in detention centres and to children in Australia and Nauru. ANTHONY PETERSON CHRIS GODDARD is a past editor of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. LINDA BRISKMAN was the Professor of Child Abuse, Child Development and Research, Monash University. CHRIS GODDARD is a research professor at Southern Cross University, and author of *Stolen Childhoods*. Linda.Briskman@scu.edu.au

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Now, however, they know what they are doing. Our own history tells us they are doing a terrible wrong both to children in detention centres and to childhood in Australia and Nauru.

Associate Professor CHRIS GODDARD is head of Social Work, Monash University, and interim director of the National Research Centre into the Prevention of Child Abuse. Chris.Goddard@med.monash.edu.au. LINDA BRISKMAN is associate professor of Social Work, RMIT University, and author of The Black Grapevine. linda.briskman@rmit.edu.au.

The nightmares of detention

Max Liddell and Chris Goddard

The Age 2003 December 8

As children suffer great psychological damage, ministers play mind games, write Max Liddell and Chris Goddard.

So the Prime Minister has rejected Labor's call to release children in detention by Christmas. Given his record on the matter we cannot be surprised, but his reason - that their parents were to blame for their detention - brings back childhood memories.

Many of us, as we grew up, read Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass. We probably regarded Alice's story as a «fairy story» and did not see any other implications. Alice's adventures were further sanitised and minimised by the Walt Disney film version of them. Yet Lewis Carroll's recorded treatment of Alice, viewed through a different lens, can be seen as a manual on the brainwashing and emotional abuse of children.

One wonders whether John Howard has instructed his ministers to read Alice's adventures. Federal ministers have subjected children and families in immigration detention, child protection workers, state governments and external critics to the same kind of paradoxical communication and entrapment that Lewis Carroll's characters practised on poor Alice. «

Double-bind theory» helps explain the impact of such communication. In brief, this theory suggests that, in a relationship that has survival value for the weak, the strong will issue orders or make statements that they require to be obeyed or agreed with. In practice it is impossible for the weaker party to do this. Children repeatedly subjected to such communication frequently develop schizophrenia.

A simple example of the double-bind is provided by an old story about a sign hanging from a bridge that spanned an American freeway. The sign said «Ignore This Sign». In order to obey, you must first notice the sign. But noticing the sign violates the instruction to ignore it. You are trapped; no matter what you do you will be wrong.

Lewis Carroll was the master of this kind of communication. Remember his dialogue between Alice and the Red and White Queens? Alice is asked how to make bread. She replies that you get some flour, and is asked where you pick the flour. When she replies that you don't pick it because it's ground, she is asked how many acres of ground she means, and told to stop leaving so many things out. On it goes; no matter what Alice says she is wrong. Humpty Dumpty in his famous «when I use a word it means what I say it means» speech spelled out the purpose. It was not about the meaning of words, but about who was in control.

The Howard Government's messages about children in detention mirrors such exercises in control and entrapment. Everyone else has been blamed. The child protection workers who investigated abuse of children at Woomera and seem to have substantiated the existence of abuse (admittedly such words were not used publicly) were wrong, as was the

South Australian Government. The trap is sprung tight by the existence of a Memorandum of Understanding that, in essence, retained the responsibility for protecting children in detention in Woomera (and subsequently in Baxter) in the hands of the Federal Government. Confidentiality provisions prevent the South Australian Government from commenting without federal permission.

So the Federal Government can criticise everyone, knowing that the evidence of what abuses have been officially substantiated can never see the light of day.

The Federal Government's paradoxical message has also been aimed at or had an impact on children and their parents.

Fifteen-year-old ██████████ was interviewed by Age reporter Russell Skelton earlier this year (28/7). Skelton described him as showing all the signs of institutionalisation, having been in detention for nearly three years, though he has since been released. ██████████ said he hated Australia, hated Baxter, but was afraid to leave; fearing the outside world more than his detention.

In a further twist, one of the factors holding up the ██████████ family's return to Pakistan (Mr ██████████'s claim he was Afghan had been rejected) was that it was too dangerous for officials to travel to Pakistan to get travel documents.

An Iraqi family who had been in detention for four years were deported. They were given a one-month tourist visa for Vietnam, and open tickets to fly from there to Syria and Iran, though they had no visas for those countries. They hoped to obtain these in Vietnam. However Australian authorities faxed authorities in Vietnam before the family arrived, warning that they were deportees and to use caution in dealing with them. Not surprisingly they were forced to return to Perth, and detention, after only two days. One of the children was said to have early psychosis.

A spokesman for the minister blamed the family for contacting the media, saying they had been repeatedly warned that a high profile would not help them. So we forced them to leave, made this impossible, then blamed them. The trap par excellence.

A link has been drawn between such communication patterns and schizophrenia. We would never suggest that Government ministers intend this with regard to children in detention, but it is reasonable to say that they have taken mind games far beyond what is moral or defensible. The distress and damage caused to children and families in detention show this clearly

In some respects Alice was lucky; she woke up, and her nightmares faded. For children in detention the nightmares continue, both in the abuses inherent in detention itself and in the double-bind in which the Federal Government has trapped them.

Max Liddell and Chris Goddard teach social work at Monash University.

The nightmares of detention

The Age 9/12/2003 11

As children suffer great psychological damage, ministers play mind games, write **Max Liddell** and **Chris Goddard**.

So the Prime Minister has rejected Labor's call to release children in detention by Christmas. Given his record on the matter we cannot be surprised, but his reason — that their parents were to blame for their detention — brings back childhood memories.

Many of us, as we grew up, read Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass. We probably regarded Alice's story as a "fairy story", and did not see any other implications. Alice's adventures were neither satirical and parodied by the Walt Disney film version of them. Yet Lewis Carroll's recorded treatment of Alice, viewed through a different lens, can be seen as a manual on the behavioural and emotional abuse of children.

One wonders whether John Howard has instructed his ministers to read Alice's adventures. Federal ministers have subjected children and families in immigration detention, child protection services, state governments and external critics to the same kind of psychological manipulation and deception that Lewis Carroll's character portrayed on poor Alice.

"Double-blind doors" helps explain the impact of such communication. In fact, this theory suggests that, in a relationship that has survived abuse for the world, the strong will have orders or make statements that they require to be obeyed or agreed with, in practice it is impossible for the weaker party to do this. Children repeatedly subjected to such communication frequently develop schizophrenia.

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Fifteen-year-old Alexander Rukhovich was interviewed by Age reporter Russell Shiner earlier this year. Shiner described him as showing all the signs of institutionalization, having been in detention for nearly three years, though he has since been released. Alexander said he hated Australia, hated Hunter, but was afraid to leave, fearing the outside world more than his detention.

In a further twist, one of the factors holding up the Rukhovich family's return to Pakistan (Mr Rukhovich's claim he was Afghan had been rejected) was that it was too dangerous for officials to travel to Pakistan to get travel documents.

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them. Not surprisingly they were forced to return to Iraq, and detention, after only two days. One of the children was said to have early psychosis.

A spokesman for the minister blamed the family for contacting the media, saying they had been repeatedly warned that a high profile would not help them. So we forced them to leave, made this impossible, then blamed them. The trap got even tighter.

A link has been drawn between such communication patterns and schizophrenia. We would even suggest that Government ministers intend this with regard to children in detention, but it is reasonable to say that they have never asked parents for beyond what is stated or defensible. The children and damage caused to children and families in detention show this clearly.

In some reports Alice was being the child who in detention the nightmare continues, both in the abuse children in detention itself and in the double-blind to which the Federal Government has trapped them.

Max Liddell and Chris Goddard work with South Islanders.

Look into the eyes of [REDACTED]: what do you see?

Chris Goddard

The Age 2003 April 30

We claim that children forget and recover so readily because we dare not contemplate the fact that, in reality, they will always remember. Chris Goddard

Why is the world obsessed with the image of one little boy maimed by the war in Iraq?

This is the story of [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is the 12 year old boy who had the misfortune to be at home in Iraq when the United States rocket arrived.

According to one newspaper report, the "hovel" he lived in was destroyed. So were his father and his five months pregnant mother. He lost his brother. Some of his sisters were injured. Cousins and other relatives were also killed. The number of relatives who died varies from report to report.

What happened to [REDACTED] himself is not in dispute. After the terrible explosion, [REDACTED] woke up, soaked in blood, his sheets on fire. *The Times of London* reported that Jon Lee Anderson, the New Yorker correspondent who saw him in hospital, was shown a photograph of [REDACTED] before his treatment, his body blackened, one of his hands "a twisted, melted claw. The other arm had apparently been burned off at the elbow two long bones were sticking out of it."

That is not the photograph of [REDACTED] that we see now, however. We see photographs of [REDACTED] after his arms were amputated, the stumps and his body swathed in bandages, his face somehow unscathed, his eyes..... What do we see in his eyes?

Almost all of us will retain images of this invasion of Iraq. There is the shot of a dead child, taken by Akram Saleh of Reuters, his or her face like porcelain, intact, appearing strangely at peace as only the dead can, but the rest of the head and body bound together as if to stop bits falling out. There is the symbolism of statues toppling, footage of crowds (with one person wearing a Beckham shirt), a mother sobbing next to her injured toddler, suspects stripped and kneeling in the dirt, a boy liberating a bag of sugar as big as he is. The blood on a BBC cameraman's lens. Those are my images. You will have yours.

The full cruelty and catastrophe of war has become something we cannot avoid. We assaulted by it even when we try to avoid it. Susan Moeller, an American journalism professor, describes us all as "passive receivers of images". That is akin to blaming the victim. The images home in on us, no matter how much we duck and weave. They are wrapped around our papers, they are inserted into television programs, even our children's programs are "updated".

Children have always suffered massive damage in war. Even when they are not themselves killed or maimed like [REDACTED]; they lose mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. As in my parents' families, in the London Blitz, they lose uncles and aunts and other relatives, both actual and potential.

The world has a long history of treating children cruelly. Children worked as chimney sweeps, encouraged to work faster by the fires lit under them. Children were used to dip pottery figures into poisonous lead glaze. Slain infants, it was believed, could benefit sterile women, cure disease. Buried in the foundations of buildings, dead children strengthened the structure. The unwanted child was abandoned. Children were mutilated to alter their appearance.

Perhaps our new technologies have provided new ways of using children.

Most of us will now have an image of ██████████, although it is hard to believe that the images we see are sanitized.

We do not see (but can read about) his arm that looked like, in Jon Lee Anderson's words, "something that might be found in a barbecue pit". Perhaps we are shown what it is believed we can tolerate, what is judged to be useful, what is required to show that he has been rescued.

As ABC TV's Media Watch observed. ██████'s future is brighter "with the help of *The Daily Telegraph*, "his rescue was organised by *The Courier-Mail* team", by the *Herald Sun* team", by *The Australian*". Many newspapers claim a part in his recovery.

Several charities and other papers have claimed his image. London's *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Mirror* are reported to be using his face and torso to raise money for good causes. What do we see when we look at the photographs of ██████?

What do we see and think when we look into his eyes? I see the confusion and random cruelty of war. I see a child who in the words of his uncle, "wants to be normal again: but can never be. I look for other children's eyes, other bodies, other children we should be caring for but are not.

I think such are our relations to children. that we need a particular child to "adopt". Just as we "adopted" the bruised and battered face of Daniel Valerio, dead and beyond repair, so we "adopt" ██████████ who can never be mended. Perhaps, at heart, we tend to be indifferent to the present suffering of children in general, of children who need our help every day, but we find it difficult to ignore a child, a clearly identified, named, photographed, damaged and distant or dead child.

I wonder what ██████████ is thinking, I think of the words he has said, his anger at being repeatedly exposed to the stares of strangers. I wonder if we do this to him because he is 12 years old and because he is an Iraqi. After all, that is how he came to lose his arms, skin, parents, family and home. I reflect upon our sensitivities to photographs of "our" soldiers as prisoners. I wonder if any of the newspapers and charities have thought to ask his permission to use his photograph around the world in this way. Perhaps we use his photograph rather than that of a wounded adult because we do not feel we have to ask a child. Perhaps some of us believe that, after all he has lost, he will not miss his dignity and privacy.

I wonder if ██████████ knows that, perhaps, we need him more than he needs us, that he is helping us more than we can ever help him, that

It is abuse, Mr Ruddock

Chris Goddard and Max Liddell

The Age 2002 March 21

In our hearts we know that keeping a child, anybody's child, in a desert camp behind razor wire cannot be justified, write Chris Goddard and Max Liddell

We are today reporting the children held in the Woomera Detention Centre to the South Australian Department of Human Services. We are taking this action because we have formed a suspicion, on reasonable grounds, that the children are being abused and/or neglected - and under the relevant South Australian legislation, reporting of suspected child abuse is mandatory for social workers.

As a result of our referral, we expect the department to expeditiously investigate the circumstances of the children and to act to secure their safety and best interests, as required under the legislation. In this investigation, the contribution of all parties contributing to the care of the children - including the Federal Government and the responsible Minister, Philip Ruddock - will have to be assessed.

There are many reasons to be concerned for the welfare of those children in Woomera. In February, after a five-day visit, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission confirmed that Australia's detention of the then 236 children in the camp was a breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It said the children were being inadequately educated, and that health services and general living standards were poor. In just two weeks, the organisation recorded 13 threats of self harm, five lip sewings, one attempted hanging and three self slashings. One 14-year-old was reported to have sewn his lips twice and slashed the word «freedom» into his arm.

The HREOC Commissioner, Dr Sev Ozdowski, said in February that there were nine children who had been in Woomera for longer than one year and 70 who had been there for more than six months.

Australia's Catholic bishops have called on the Federal Government to reassess the way asylum seekers are treated. Former staff doctors at Woomera have also spoken out. One described conditions as «inhumane» and «distressing».

The Australian Medical Association has asked to send a team of doctors to the camp, such are the concerns about the physical and mental health of the adults and children. The Australian Education Union has called on the government to release children into the community because they are not receiving adequate education. Dr Bernice Pfitzner, who spent nine months working in the camp, said a large proportion of detainees had mental health problems.

We are also concerned that the very fact that these are children appears to be challenged by the government. In a reply to the HREOC concerns about the children's psychological health, HREOC concerns about the

children's psychological health, Minister Ruddock was reported to have said that many detainees described as children were actually «14, 15, 16 or 17. In other words, you are dealing with minors who can be very close to adult» (The Advertiser, Adelaide, 21/12/01). In South Australia, the law clearly states that a child is a person under the age of 18.

Although we have never seen these children, we have formed the opinion that they are at least emotionally and psychologically abused. The relevant South Australian Government website (www.cyh.sa.gov.au) tells us that «Emotional abuse is behaviour towards a child which destroys self-esteem, confidence and a child's sense of worth».

It is our view that all the above form the «reasonable grounds» that the Department of Human Services in South Australia requires for a referral to be made.

The SA Government also informs us that we «do not have to know for sure whether abuse is happening». It also asserts that «People in the community have a moral obligation to report their suspicions», and that the Department of Human Services is «required by law to investigate reports of child abuse and to see that children are safe and protected».

In South Australia the relevant legislation is the Children's Protection Act, 1993. The object of the act is «to provide for the care and protection of children and to do so in a manner that maximises a child's opportunity to grow up in a safe and stable environment and to reach his or her full potential».

The legislation also states that administration of the act is founded «on the principles that the primary responsibility for a child's care and protection lies with the child's family and that a high priority should therefore be accorded to supporting and assisting the family to carry out that responsibility.»

It is our view that where children are in the Woomera Detention Centre with one or both parents, the department is thus under an obligation to assist those children and families by providing more appropriate accommodation. If unaccompanied children remain in Woomera - in what is after all an adult prison - it seems reasonable to expect the department to take immediate steps to place those children in alternative care, if their guardian, Minister Ruddock, will not do so.

It is surely impossible to imagine that any child-protection service anywhere in the world would regard keeping a child behind



razor wire in a desert as anything but emotionally abusive. It is not hard to imagine how history will judge the present circumstances of the children being held in the Woomera Detention Centre, for we are learning more about the effects of abuse and neglect on children.

It is becoming clear that abuse at an early age has many more long-lasting effects on brain development and functioning than hitherto realised.

Martin Teicher, writing in the current edition of the *Scientific American* («Scars that won't heal», March, 2002), argues that child abuse unleashes a veritable «cascade of molecular and neurobiological effects that irreversibly alter neural development».

Much of the early writing on child abuse was not only intended to draw attention to the severe injuries some children suffer, but was designed to draw attention to the fact that some adults prefer not to see abuse and some professionals prefer not to act. There is an awful symbolism at work here, where we permit vulnerable foreign children to be placed out of sight in the desert.

Abuse of a child is so damaging because it involves the abuse of trust. Failing to act when abuse is suspected is a further damaging abuse of trust. In our hearts we know that keeping a child, anybody's child, in a desert camp behind wire cannot be justified.

In our hearts we already knew what Martin Teicher tells us in the *Scientific American*: the physical wounds of abuse may heal but the damage done to a mind still developing may be beyond repair.

In our hearts we already know that it is through such abuse that so much violence and pain is passed down from one generation to the next. If our lives are shaped by our childhoods, what does our part in the detention of children in Woomera say about us? What will we become if we are prepared to lock children away? What will we become if we are prepared to find children guilty until they lose their innocence?

As our Governor-General has discovered, the child who has been abused and betrayed may grow into an adult who is not prepared to remain silent about the pain and betrayal. For all these reasons, we are referring all the children and young people in the Woomera Detention Centre to South Australia's child-protection services. Indeed, under the mandatory reporting legislation, it appears we are required to do so.

We await their response.

Dr Chris Goddard and Max Liddell teach social work at Monash University. Chris Goddard is also director of the Child Abuse and Family Violence Research Unit, a joint initiative of the university and Australians Against Child Abuse.

What will we be
to find children
their innocence?

It is abuse, Mr Ruddock

In our hearts we know that keeping a child, anybody's child, in a desert camp behind razor wire cannot be justified, write **Chris Goddard** and **Max Liddell**.

We are today reporting the children held in the Women's Detention Centre to the South Australian Department of Human Services. We are taking this action because we have formed a suspicion, on reasonable grounds, that the children are being abused and/or neglected — and under the relevant South Australian legislation, reporting of suspected child abuse is mandatory for social workers.

As a result of our interest, we expect the department to expeditiously investigate the circumstances of the children — to secure their safety and best interests, as required under the legislation. In this investigation, the contribution of all parties contributing to the care of the children — including the Federal Government and the responsible Minister, Philip Ruddock — will have to be assessed.

There are many reasons to be concerned for the welfare of these children in Woomera. In February, after a five-day visit, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission concluded that Australia's detention of the then 120 children in the camp was a breach of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It said the children were being inadequately educated, and that health services and general living standards were poor. In just two weeks, the commission needed 13 tonnes of aid items, five lip-swingers, one attempted hanging and three self-harmings. One 14-year-old was reported to have seen his lips index and checked the word "hooked" into his arm.

The HREOC Commissioner, Dr Jan Chakravali, said in February that there were nine children who had been in Woomera for longer than one year and 78 who had been there for more than six months.

Australia's Catholic bishops have called on the Federal Government to reassess the way asylum seekers are treated. Former staff doctors at Woomera have also spoken out. One described conditions as "inhuman" and "distressing".

The Australian Medical Association has asked to send a team of doctors to the camp, such as the overseas abuse and physical and mental health of the adults and children. The Australian Education Union has called on the government to release children into the community because they are not receiving adequate education. Dr Bernice Fitzner, who spent nine months working in the camp, and a large proportion of detainees had mental health problems.

We are also concerned that the very fact that these are children appears to be challenged by the government. In a reply to the HREOC concerns about the children's psychological health, Minister Ruddock was reported to have said that many detainees described as

children were actually "14, 15, 16 or 17. In other words, you are dealing with minors who can be very close to adult" (The Advertiser, Adelaide, 21/12/01). In South Australia, the law clearly states that a child is a person under the age of 18.

Although we have never seen these children, we have formed the opinion that they are at least emotionally and psychologically abused. The relevant South Australian Government website (www.dhs.sa.gov.au) tells us that "Institutional abuse is behaviour towards a child which damages self-esteem, confidence and a child's sense of worth".

It is our view that all the above facts the "reasonable grounds" that the Department of Human Services in South Australia requires for a referral to be made.

The SA Government also informs us that we "do not have to know for sure whether abuse is happening". It also asserts that "People in the community have a moral obligation to report their suspicions", and that the Department of Human Services is "required by law to investigate reports of child abuse and to see that children are safe and protected".

In South Australia the relevant legislation is the Children's Protection Act, 1995. The object of the act is "to provide for the care and protection of children and to do so in a manner that maximises a child's opportunity to grow up in a safe and stable environment and to reach his or her full potential".

The legislation also states that administration of the act is founded "on the principles that the primary responsibility for a child's care and protection lies with the child's family and that a high priority should therefore be accorded to supporting and enabling the family to carry out that responsibility".

It is our view that where children are in the Women's Detention Centre with one or both parents, the department is thus under an obligation to assist these children and families by providing more appropriate accommodation. If unaccompanied children remain in Woomera — in what is after all an adult prison — it seems reasonable to expect the department to take immediate steps to place those children in alternative care, if that guardian, Minister Ruddock, will not do so.

It is surely impossible to imagine that any child-protection service anywhere in the world would regard keeping a child behind razor wire in a desert as anything but emotionally abusive. It is our hope to imagine how history will judge the present circumstances of the children being held in the Women's Detention Centre, for we are learning more about the effects of abuse and neglect on children.

It is becoming clear that abuse at an early age has many more long-lasting effects on brain development and functioning than hitherto realised.



Martin Tishler, writing in the current edition of the *Scientific American* ("Stress that won't end", March, 2002), argues that child abuse inflicts a veritable "cascade of molecular and neurobiological effects that irreversibly alter neural development".

Much of the early writing on child abuse was not only intended to draw attention to the serious injuries some children suffer, but was designed to draw attention to the fact that some adults prefer not to see abuse and some professionals prefer not to act. There is an awful cynicism at work here, where we permit vulnerable foreign children to be placed out of sight in the desert.

Abuse of a child is so damaging because it involves the abuse of trust. Failing to act when abuse is suspected is a further damaging abuse of trust. In our hearts we know that keeping a child, anybody's child, in a desert camp behind razor wire cannot be justified.

In our hearts we already know what Maxine Tishler tells us in the *Scientific American*: the physical wounds of abuse may heal but the damage done to a child's still-developing may be beyond repair.

In our hearts we already know that it is through such abuse that so much violence and pain is passed down from one generation to the next. If our lives are shaped by our childhoods, what does our part in the detection of children in Woomera say about us? What will we become if we are prepared to lock children away? What will we become if we are prepared to find children guilty until they lose their innocence?

As our Governor-General has discovered, the child who has been abused and betrayed may grow into an adult who is not prepared to remain silent about the pain and betrayal. For all these reasons, we are referring all the children and young people in the Women's Detention Centre to South Australia's child-protection services. Indeed, under the mandatory reporting legislation, it appears we are required to do so.

We await their response.

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Can you imagine

Chris Goddard

The Age 2001 October 17

Parents throwing their children into the sea...is that an act of intimidation? Or is it desperation?

I MEDIATE if you can ... just imagine ... War has ravaged Australia for many years. Sydney and Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane, are little more than rubble. Millions have fled, who knows where. Thousands upon thousands have died.

Royal Park is a military encampment, the Opera House a ruin. The MCG is an execution ground. Mass graves fill the Botanic Gardens. Teenagers run riot with Kalashnikovs. Ethnically motivated murder is rife. Food is scarce and ever more expensive. The water is undrinkable. Everything is broken, nothing works. Children everywhere are dying. In the night, terrorists take men and boys to fight. Women are raped.

Just imagine ... Your oldest child has disappeared. Your younger children know nothing but war and fear. Crippled with hunger, they cry themselves to sleep.

No one knows what will happen next. There is talk of food being dropped from planes but, if that were to happen, the murderers and rapists would be the beneficiaries, Soldiers are always the last to go hungry. There is talk of safety in other countries. You and your family decide to flee.

Just imagine ... You have sold everything to pay every thief and gangster to help you and your children escape from the squalid camp you seem doomed to die in. As you cross the last stretch of water, in a crowded boat, guns are fired and your boat is turned back.

Imagine, if you can, returning to the hunger and disease ... Imagine what you might do to prevent your children being sent back to that brutality ...

Last week, a group of asylum seekers was reported to have "thrown their children overboard" in similar circumstances. According to Defence Minister Peter Reith, as the boat approached Christmas Island written warnings were thrown to them. Warning shots, using live ammunition, were fired. "Standard operational procedure", according to Mr Reith.

Photographs have been released showing women and children in the water. The story was reported in newspapers around the world: "Refugees rejected: kids tossed off ship"; "Refugees throw kids off boat"; and, "Children hurled into the sea". The most dramatic opening sentence came from Britain's Daily Mail: "Screaming children were thrown overboard into shark infested waters yesterday in a challenge to Australia's illegal immigrant laws."

The world's media clearly took the tone of their articles from statements by the government. Immigration Minister Philip Ruddock was reported as saying that "I regard these as some of the most disturbing practices that I have come across ... clearly planned and premeditated". He claimed:

"People wouldn't come wearing lifejackets unless they intended some action of this sort."

Prime Minister John Howard said that "we are a humane nation" but would not be "intimidated" by such behavior. "Suggestions of children thrown overboard, that is a sorry reflection on their attitude and mind." He described this as an attempt "to morally blackmail Australia". He could not "comprehend that genuine refugees would throw their children overboard".

"Quite frankly," he said, "I don't want in this country, people who are prepared ... to throw their children overboard."

Let us assume, for the sake of the argument, that some of these asylum seekers did precisely what our government claims. They threw their children into the sea. John Howard and his ministers have ascribed a very particular meaning to those actions. They have asked us to believe that this was an 'attempt to "morally blackmail" and "intimidate" Australia.

Yet, it is equally possible that those children were thrown into the sea in the forlorn hope that they would be granted a new life. Half a million children in Iraq have died in recent years. If you and I can imagine that, then perhaps we can imagine this: "Look after these children, even if you won't look after me." Imagine the desperation of a parent at such a moment.

It is extremely difficult to imagine, but it is important to try. In order to empathise, we need to put ourselves in the place of others. Attempting to understand the feelings and experiences of another requires openness and maturity. As technology grows ever more complex, our imagination becomes more important. After all, we have bombs that can enter a building through a door or a window. Most of us, however, can only struggle to imagine what it would be like to vainly attempt to protect our children as those bombs arrive.

Arundhati Roy wrote in *The Guardian* (September 29) that we have a problem because anger does not show up at an airport security check. How then can we be certain that what we see in the ocean off Christmas Island is "an attempt to blackmail"?



John Spooner

Throwing a child in a lifejacket into the sea is as nothing compared to watching him or her die, slowly, painfully, hungrily limbs twisting, belly distending, eyes misting, face shrinking. As bombs fall on Afghanistan, as buildings still smoulder in New York, throwing a child in a lifejacket into the sea is almost as nothing, even if it is an attempt to manipulate Australia's soft heart.

Now let us assume, for the sake of argument, that some of those asylum seekers not only did what the

Prime Minister claims - threw their children overboard - but did so to "intimidate" us. For now we came to the final irony in John Howard's position. If those callous and manipulative people threw those children into the sea to blackmail us, they were psychologically and physically abusing those children.

John Howard is claiming, in fact, that those children were abused. He has said he does not want people who abuse their children to live in this country. Yet he has returned those children to the "care" of those same "abusive" adults. This in itself can be regarded as abuse.

The world has a long history of using and abusing children for political ends. It is "standard operational procedure", with a longer history than using live ammunition to scare off unarmed refugees.

Imagine, if you can, this failure to empathise as a metaphor for all the horror in the world today. Imagine how it all might be different.

Dr Chris Goddard is head of social work and director of the Child Abuse and Family Violence Unit at Monash University. E-mail: chris.goddard@arts.monash.edu.au

The Age 17-10-01 p17

Can you imagine...?

Parents throwing their children into the sea ... is that an act of intimidation? Or is it desperation?

By CHRIS GODDARD

IMAGINE if you can ... Just imagine ... We have stranded Australia for many years. Sydney and Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane, are little more than rubble. Millions have died, who know where. Thousands upon thousands have died.

Royal Dick is a military encampment, the Opera House a ruin. The MCC is an execution ground. Mass graves fill the Botanic Gardens. Terrorists run riot with Kalashnikovs. Horrifically mutilated murder is rife. Food is scarce and very noisy expensive. The water is undrinkable. Everything is looting, carling, mauling. Children everywhere are dying. In the night, screams take men and boys to fight. Women are raped.

Just imagine ... Your eldest child has disappeared. Your youngest children know nothing but war and fear. Criminally with hunger, they cry themselves to sleep.

The war knows what will happen next. There is talk of food being dropped from planes but, if that were to happen, the academics and rights would be the beneficiaries. Soldiers are always the last to go hungry. There is talk of safety in other countries. You and your family decide to flee.

Just imagine ... You have sold everything to pay every fuel and gasoline to help you and your children escape from the squalid camp you were stranded in. As you cross the last stretch of water, in a crowded boat, guns are fired and your boat is toward back.

Imagine, if you can, reaching to the longer and distance ... imagine what you might do to protect your children being sent back to that hostility ...

Last week, a group of asylum seekers was reported to have thrown their children overboard in similar circumstances. According to Defence Minister Peter BART, on the boat approached Christmas Island, military warnings were shown to them. Warning shots, using live ammunition, were fired. "Standard operational procedure", according to Mr Bart.

Photographs have been released showing women and children in

How A REFUGEE SHOULD BEHAVE

of a parent at work a moment. It is extremely difficult to imagine, but it is important to try. In order to empathise, we need to put ourselves in the place of others. Struggling to understand the feelings and experiences of another requires openness and empathy. As technology grows ever more complex, our imagination becomes more important. After all, we have bombs that can enter a building through a door or a window. Most of us, however, can only struggle to imagine what it would be like to vainly attempt to protect our children on those bombs active.

Anarchist Roy wrote in The Guardian (September 27) that we have a problem because airport does not show up at an airport security check. How then can we be certain that what we see in the news of Christmas Island is "an attempt to blackmail"?

Throwing a child in a lifejacket into the sea is no nothing compared to watching him or her die, slowly, painfully, frantically, limbs twisting, belly churning, eyes rolling, face stretching, in twisted pain on Christmas Island, in buildings still smoldering in New York, throwing a child in a lifejacket into the sea is almost as nothing, even if it is an attempt to manipulate Australia's soft heart.

Now let us assume, for the sake of argument, that some of those asylum seekers are only children and the Prime Minister claims — three their children overboard — but did so to "intimidate" us. For now we come to the final irony in John Howard's position. If those callous and manipulative people threw those children into the sea to blackmail us, they were psychologically and physically abusing those children.

John Howard is claiming, in fact, that those children were abused. He has said he does not want people who abuse their children to live in this country. Yet he has returned those children to the "care" of those same "abusive" adults. This in itself can be regarded as abuse.

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Yes, it is equally possible that those children were thrown into the sea in the broken hope that they would be granted a new life. Half-a-million children in Iraq have died in recent years. If you and I can imagine that, then perhaps we can imagine this. "Look after those children, even if you won't look after us." Imagine the desperation

Let us assume, for the sake of the

HUMAN RIGHTS OVER BOARD



SEEKING ASYLUM IN AUSTRALIA

Linda Briskman Susie Latham Chris Goddard

With a foreword by Julian Burnside

Awarded the 2008 Australian Human Rights Commission's Annual Literature Non Fiction Award.

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