

ARTISTS SPEAK OUT

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In the gradual crawl of humanity to permit people to be fairly treated even if they haven't got guns or disagree with the king of the moment, and are likely to be killed or jailed for their beliefs, the idea of agreeing to be a safe place to rest and maybe settle is a defining mark of a humane, fair and compassionate country. But we've blown away our conscience and our responsibilities in the wind of election campaigns driven by the bile of talkback geriatrics. It's time to reclaim the heart of the nation and give asylum to those who qualify now.

Peter Garrett – Midnight Oil

I'm no expert on politics or the law but our current immigration system obviously isn't working. It seems to assume that all refugees are guilty until they can somehow prove that they are innocent. There's got to be a fairer, more humane way to treat these people.

Daniel Johns – Silverchair.

As a nation we feel that the Taliban is such an abhorrent regime that we are prepared to send our young soldiers to dismantle their hold on power. Yet when Afghans flee that same regime and drag their families halfway around the world to a foreign culture, language and climate – risking their lives in the process – we accuse them of jumping the queue, infringing on our rights, of being illegal immigrants and stuff them in tin huts at Woomera in the desert. The double standard is glaring; Australians at their most pathetic. Our nation is of the heartless kind.

David Bridie

The three of us as human(e) beings are extremely disturbed by the Howard government's handling of the men, women and children who are seeking asylum in our country. Many of them have fled their home country to escape an oppressive regime and upon arrival in Australia they are being greeted by an oppressive regime. These people have rights to request asylum in Australia and the Howard Government has a responsibility to process those requests efficiently and quickly. Some of these people are attempting acts of self-mutilation and even suicide because they feel they have been left in limbo in a desert detention center and nothing is being done to acknowledge their requests. John Howard and Philip Ruddock don't seem to care. They refuse to be 'intimidated' into action. No-one can tell *them* what to do. Australia's elected representatives are not doing anyone any favours.

Paul Dempsey, Clint Hyndman, Stephanie Ashworth – Something for Kate.

On an intuitive level, which is the level of attention I've managed to pay to this issue I suspect that the amount of humane hospitality being offered by, aw wealthy, and as relatively empty a country as our own, is unacceptably low. I see no reason to subject any asylum seeker to anything worse than due process. They should at least be offered reasonable comfort in the interim considering the trauma invariably suffered during such fundamental life changes. On face value from the media portrayal that I have seen, the asylum seekers seem stigmatized through their incarceration as criminals by default. This in itself is surely a violation of human rights. If the UN is going to 'independently' assess the conditions of these so-called 'detention centres' and they are assessed to be unnecessarily harsh, I see no reason why these people should not be duly compensated for the inhumane treatment they have received through the policies of our government.

Quan Yeomans – Regurgitator

Although this issue is obviously a very thorny political football, given the typically divisive nature of the Australian Government's advice to its electorate, I believe the real dilemma here is one of conscience. Do we as a nation, the supposed 'lucky country' truly believe that it is just for us to detain, and in many cases reject people who have fled their homelands in fear for their lives? The fact that this situation has been allowed to fester to its current stage is an indictment on the compassionless soul of Australian culture.

Bernard Fanning – Powderfinger

Refugees risk their lives to come here to try to make a better life for themselves and their children. That's the point I keep coming back to in this whole debate. All these poor (people) want is a better life. So what do we do? We lock them up. We spend all our money and resources keeping them locked up. What are we afraid of? One more Iraqi restaurant? I'm disappointed, I always thought we were a nation of groovers, not losers.

I keep wondering what would've happened if Kim Beazley had been better advised. I wonder if he'd come out and taken a much more agro anti-Howard stance, and not listened to the likes of Laurie Ferguson. Maybe voters would have had a stronger, more definite alternative to Howard. And I wonder, too, about the people suckered in by Howard's racism. Do they regret it now? I wonder. I always thought we were a nation of the mellow, not the yellow.

Pinky Beecroft – Machine Gun
Fellatio

It's a terrible thing indeed to be ashamed of your country.

I've felt this way before: in the late '60s with 'all the way with LBJ' when a boot-licking toad of a PM dispatched more young Aussies to the 'bright shining lie' of Vietnam.

Recently as well, when the best chance in a generation for the advancement of the Original Australians via Mabo and Wik was systematically knackered by Canberra's cynical chiefs. The desert jails and island shitholes (literally) of the current debacle will surely be as damning a legacy for Howard and co as 'Nam was for Holt. Which wouldn't be so egregious except that Howard's sinking refugee boat is dragging us all down with him. For Australian overseas travelers who've at any time proudly trumpeted our country's legendary belief in the 'fair-go' – the internationally digested images of our government's inhumanity towards desperate, displaced people is more than a mere embarrassment. It's a betrayal.

Rob Hirst – Midnight Oil

I think that if a government is going to exploit an issue to win election points then surely that government has a big responsibility to follow up of the effects of its exploitation. It seems that the refugees are being treated in a less than humane way. The point is that they are human beings. Surely desperate ones, too. Would you put your entire family on a small, overcrowded boat and head off across the open ocean without any real certainty of salvation if you weren't totally desperate? I can't help believing that if the refugees were Christian Scandinavians for example, or cute-looking Americans perhaps, their processing would be much quicker and their confinement more comfortable.

The whole world situation is very, very frightening to me; I see human apathy and ignorance as the biggest problem. As long as we continue to accept what comes at us via the television as the God-given truth then we deserve all the horror that awaits us. You could do worse than to log onto a website like johpilger.com everyday for a dose of reality and truth. Don't be scared to have an opinion. The whole world has some serious thinking and learning to do. We can only do that by expressing ourselves. Art has always been a vehicle for growth and change. Be careful. Be active.

Shanley.

I'm concerned about why these people are coming and what's happening back in their countries to cause them to flee. People in Australia don't realize that no-one wants to leave their home like that; no one wants to leave home and come on a leaky boat to Australia. They'd rather be having a normal life back where they came from. It's absurd that we should have refugees who are willing to put their lives on the line in the first place, especially from rich countries in the Middle East like Iraq. I think those issues should be tackled.

(But) the reason these people are coming over is related to America's foreign policy, which Australia blindly backs. That's why you have refugees coming from the countries they are coming from. It's about American foreign policy and nothing else. So if we are going to help cause the problem, we have to help find a solution. It is the Australian Government's responsibility to at least take these people in.

Fetah Sabawi – Superheist