

The Australian government is excising fathers as well as islands.

ChilOut welcomes the opening of a less hostile detention centre, the Port Augusta Residential Housing Project, to which some detainee women and children are currently being transferred.

ChilOut spokeswoman Dianne Hiles said today, 'The Port Augusta housing project has opened, but it is a year after the former Minister for Immigration announced that more women and children would be transferred to alternative facilities. The children have been in high-security detention – de facto mental hospitals - for two years or more. Two years is a very long time in the life of a child.'

ChilOut acknowledges that, for single mothers and their children, housing project detention facilities are an improvement on high-security detention centres. However, most detainee families consist of a father, as well as a mother and children, and there is no change in the policy of excluding fathers from the facilities. Therefore only a tiny minority chooses to split their families by transferring women and eligible children to housing projects.

'The Australian government is still excising islands and it is still excising fathers. The government is denying children the right to a family life. The splitting of families is imposed upon them by our government,' Ms Hiles said.

'Children are separated from their fathers at the most vulnerable time for a family which is awaiting the results of their application for refugee status, after having fled their homeland to save their lives,' Ms Hiles said.

'It has always been within the Immigration Minister's power to declare any place in Australia a "place of detention" – a flat, a motel, a hospital ward, a residential housing project detention centre or a high-security detention centre. The choice is the Minister's,' Ms Hiles said.

Yet, most children in immigration detention continue to live in high-security facilities run by Australasian Correctional Management (ACM). Like Woomera housing project, ACM runs the Port Augusta facility. Detainees are not free to come and go and must return to the high-security facility to receive visitors.

ChilOut calls on Minister Vanstone to show compassion and commonsense and allow children to live with both their parents in declared places of detention in the Australian community.

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Figures as at 20/11 **for detainee children in ACM-run housing projects:**
4 in Woomera; 2 in Port Hedland; 0 in Port Augusta. (source: Minister for Immigration web site)

Figures as at 20/11 **for detainee children in ACM-run high-security detention centres:**
31 in Villawood; 29 in Baxter; 15 in Port Hedland. (source: Minister for Immigration web site)