



****MEDIA RELEASE****

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Unprecedented NGO coalition to get kids out of detention

Seven Australian NGOs have united to highlight the horrors facing children in Australia's detention centres, in response to the Human Rights Commission's Forgotten Children report.

A new video from the group, featuring doctors and mental health experts, paints a graphic portrait of life for children inside Australia's detention centres and the toll it takes on their wellbeing.

The video can be viewed here: <http://youtu.be/3BI2ayiufVY> (broadcast quality available).

Dr Sarah Mares, child and family psychiatrist who provided evidence during the inquiry, said: "Australians now know that children and families are being held for very long periods in places that are like prisons. The sadness I saw was overwhelming. Many children were too upset to play. They were clingy, crying, bed wetting and had delayed language. One child aged about 6 was self harming and had asked, 'Where do I cut?' holding a knife to their arm. Such despair in children so young is very uncommon. It's a consequence of detention."

"There is already plenty of evidence as well as common sense that imprisoning children does them harm. This has been done in our name despite the government knowing the human costs which are inexcusable and long lasting."

"There are still children suffering these conditions each and every day. Even if these children are released, the problems for them do not miraculously go away, and there is nothing to stop it happening over and over again. It is upon us to speak up. Australia is a better place than this."

The project unites an unprecedented coalition including GetUp!, Amnesty International, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, ChilOut, Save the Children, Children's Rights International, the Human Rights Law Centre and Welcome to Australia.

Produced by GetUp, the video encourages Australians to speak up in order to keep the pressure on the Australian Government to free all kids still suffering in our detention centres.

The seven organisations will distribute the video to a combined audience of over one million people and GetUp members will fundraise to get it on the air.

GetUp Campaigns Chief of Staff Erin McCallum said: “When reports emerge of children as young as 12 feeling so hopeless they’re resorting to self harm, it becomes the responsibility of all Australians to take a stand and make it stop. That’s what tens of thousands of GetUp members have pledged to do - whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to get these kids out and to keep them out.”

Amnesty International Australia Refugee Campaign Coordinator Graeme McGregor said: “The findings of this report cannot be ignored: children are continuing to suffer as a result of our government’s asylum seeker policies. The fact is, there are alternatives to the detention of asylum seeker children.”

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre Campaign Coordinator Pamela Curr shared her experiences meeting children on Nauru: “One 12-year-old girl I spoke to resorts to cutting herself and banging her head when in distress. She told me she saw many adults do this when she was held on Nauru, she also saw a girl try to hang herself. She learned how to cut herself whilst on Nauru, and now she does it whenever she is angry.”

ChilOut’s Campaign Coordinator Claire Hammerton said: “Australian Governments, both past and present, have systematically ignored the rights of children since the release of the AHRC’s first report 10 years ago. It’s a stain on our standing as a nation that the inhumane treatment of children continues. This must end now.”

Human Rights Law Centre Director of Legal Advocacy Daniel Webb said: “Australia’s mandatory and indefinite detention of children is one of the most punitive policy approaches in the world. It’s harmful. It’s a breach of international law. It must end.”

Welcome to Australia National Director Brad Chilcott said: "For more than a decade we have known that we are responsible for damaging children and adults in our detention centres. We have been falsely taught that cruelty is the only solution to a complex global reality and have learned to measure strong leadership in commitment to brutality."

Childrens Rights International Chair, the Hon Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC, said: “The successive amendments to the Migration Act and the policies behind them, which target the poorest refugees and their children, are amongst the most regressive and unfair pieces of legislation in Australian history. They are a serious attack upon human rights, the rights of children and the rule of law. These shameful policies dishonour Australia throughout the civilised world.”

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