

**Motion to be put with the permission of ACFID COUNCIL
16 October 2015**

Regarding: End mandatory, indefinite detention of children and return children and their families from Nauru to Australia

In 2005, then Prime Minister John Howard released all children from immigration detention. Today, in blatant disregard of the evidence, around 200 children remain suffering in indefinite mandatory detention in Nauru and onshore in Australia. The average length of detention exceeds 12 months.

In the five years since the extended detention of children recommenced in Australia, psychiatrists, psychologists, health and medical professionals, child development experts, child protection workers and the Australian international development sector have repeatedly spoken out against the practice, highlighting the damaging impacts on children and raising concerns about the adequacy of health care, hygiene and education in detention centres.

Australia is alone among the 148 Refugee Convention signatory states in detaining children on a mandatory and indefinite basis without any form of independent review. Last year, the UK Parliament legislated to limit the detention of children to a maximum of seven days. Despite a commitment from both of Australia's major political parties to free children from immigration detention, this has not happened.

Various inquiries, including the Senate Select Committee report, the Australian Human Rights Commission's Forgotten Children report and the Government commissioned Moss Review, have all uncovered incidents of child abuse. 67 cases of child abuse have been recorded on Nauru alone.

There is a direct correlation between the time spent in detention and rates of mental illness, with prolonged detention causing acute distress and a rapid decline in mental health and well-being. From 2013-2014, 128 children engaged in self-harm and 105 children were assessed as being at serious risk of suicide or self-harm in Australian detention centres.

Regardless of the efforts made to mitigate harm in detention settings, all evidence suggests the only way to guarantee the rights and wellbeing of asylum seeker children is for the Australian Government to immediately end the practice of mandatory, indefinite detention.

The movement of children out of detention under the current Government is welcome. It is, in fact, an acknowledgement by the Government of the serious harm that the policy of mandatory, indefinite detention promotes. However, while the number of children detained has been reduced substantially, the average of length of detention has increased markedly.

ACFID:

- 1. Condemns the mandatory, indefinite detention of children and their families;**
- 2. Applauds the work of courageous advocates who continue to highlight the damaging impacts of children in detention and the efforts they have taken to bring this practice to an end;**
- 3. Calls for all cases of child sexual abuse onshore and on Nauru to be examined by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse; and**
- 4. Calls for the immediate release of all children and their families from immigration detention centres, and the return of children and their families from Nauru to Australia.**

**Moved by: Nigel Spence, CEO, ChildFund Australia
Seconded by: Ian Wishart, CEO, Plan Australia**