

MEDICAL and HEALTH PROFESSIONALS PROTEST AGAINST ASYLUM POLICY

We the undersigned doctors, nurses, scientists, health workers, psychologists, health academics, health managers and other concerned individuals call on the Howard Government to immediately release and process all people detained, who are seeking refuge under the United Nation's Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, on the following grounds:

- 1) it is inhumane to indefinitely imprison people, especially children, who are fleeing due to a well founded fear of persecution;
- 2) the mandatory detention policy is actively harming the health and well-being of those seeking protection from persecution;
- 3) psychological studies overwhelmingly demonstrate the serious harm and adverse long term health effects of imprisonment of adults and children;
- 4) the policy of detaining refugee families is contrary to the Health for All principles of the Ottawa Charter and other binding conventions;
- 5) although Australia is a signatory to the UN convention on the rights of the child, children in detention are denied these rights, because they are considered to be refugees not children;
- 6) the "Pacific solution" of setting up detention centres in Papua New Guinea and Nauru is the antithesis of good public health policy as refugees are being exposed to new tropical diseases; the health status in some of those communities is extremely poor and local health systems are unable to cope with local let alone these additional health problems; and it is hugely expensive for the Australian taxpayer;
- 7) refugees can be speedily processed for health and security reasons in Welcome Centres (as in New Zealand), not Detention Centres.

We, as health and other professionals, are obliged morally and ethically to speak out and oppose the policy of mandatory detention of refugees. We call on the Howard Government to act in a humane and responsible manner in the best interests of refugees and the Australian people. We also call on all other political parties and the independents in the Federal Parliament to support this action and to show the leadership that is necessary to contain the divisiveness that has occurred over this issue.