

**Subject: Taxpayer funded time spent on other people's lives**

**Date:** 15 February 2018 1:12:23 pm AEST

**To:** ALL FEDERAL MPs

Dear Australian Members of Parliament,

As we enter another day during which much of your time is spent discussing Barnaby's Joyce's living arrangements, I – as one of the many Australian citizens you represent in the paid role that gives you a forum to discuss such things – would ask that you take a few minutes of your time to consider the living arrangements of someone else ...

“Marie”\* and her family have been held on Nauru for more than four years having escaped a country where their only future was torture and execution. To save her children and provide them with not just a better life but simply a life, they found themselves with one option to reach genuine safety – a boat to Christmas Island. As [Sarah Smith describes in her personal portrait of the current existence of a woman in detention on Nauru with whom she has many things in common](#) (*both are mothers who have fought their government to provide their children with a better future, both love music, craft and reading - especially biographies and autobiographies, etc.*) ...

*Marie has been systematically victimised. Her children have been beaten by Australian security guards. I can't give the details of this because it would risk identifying her and put them in danger of reprisals. But I can assure you that, had this happened in Australia, the guards would have faced serious criminal charges. Marie's daughter has attempted suicide twice; she and her younger brother are severely depressed. They cannot attend school, there are no work prospects for them — now, or in the future. They are facing living – and dying – on an island made from bird excrement, in a society where the rule of law is not upheld. They live in a camp of mouldy tents where the guards govern in a terrifying manner reminiscent of Lord of the Flies — free from repercussions and drunk on their own power.*

At the time of Sarah Smith writing her article, Marie's daughter was again close to suicide ...

*This beautiful girl can't take any more. The reality is we should not expect her to. I wouldn't ask my own daughter to endure a life of indefinite beatings, appalling living conditions and the sexual assaults which are common on Nauru to the point of inevitability.*

*Nauru is not saving lives. Nauru isn't keeping our borders safe. Nauru is causing deaths on land and, as one of my friends there pointed out to me, there are worse things than death.*

So, although I acknowledge that there are issues of Barnaby Joyce's domestic situation that could be in direct conflict with his professional role and may warrant some investigation, please think about the domestic situations of others. People who chose a path away from injustice and danger. A path to a place where their children would be safe. Human beings who simply want to live somewhere that they can work and learn and read and not be beaten and abused in a place where there have no freedom and no future.

Barnaby Joyce may/may not have misused tax-funded expenses to travel or live in circumstances that were not work-related. But the bipartisan endorsement of offshore processing for innocent people who simply want to live without fear for their or their family members' lives in a society to which they can contribute is costing Australian taxpayers around \$570,000 per person per year.

I am not suggesting that we find Marie and her family a rich benefactor with a house in Armidale.

I AM saying that Australian politicians must end mandatory detention and offshore processing immediately.

If you care to such a great extent about where people live, in what conditions and how much it's costing the Australian taxpayer, spend a couple of days in parliament talking about Marie. And all the others just like her on Nauru or Manus Island.

AND THEN CHANGE THAT.

The more time that is spent debating whether Mr Joyce's private life should be private and whether his children should be protected, the more time people who were born in the wrong place with the right values have lives with NO privacy and instead, the constant and criminal invasion of abuse which is leading their children towards suicide.

Because of YOUR policies.

If you feel the moral high ground rising in you today as you rise to speak about Mr Joyce's choices, you should check yourself. And recognise that the choices that you have made in regard to the world's most vulnerable people deny you any kind of ground on which to stand. The UNHCR had indicated that numerous times. Experts in Human Rights and Immigration Law have indicated that numerous times.

Are you talking about that on the floor of parliament? Or behind closed doors?

I am an Australian citizen. I am informing you of what I – and many others – strongly believe should be your priorities. I am not denying that Barnaby Joyce's circumstances may encompass areas within the public interest. But what is clearly lacking in political life is proportion and perspective. And the essential valuing of basic human rights. Please stop spending taxpayer funded time on scoring political points to sustain your own careers and start using our funding of your role to sustain the lives of people who have and are enduring horrendous persecution. At the hands of their own governments ... and not at the hands of mine.

Your hands.

Think about those people. And their lives IN YOUR HANDS.

And having spent so much time talking about what's right and wrong about Barnaby Joyce's life, finally do what is right for those whose suffering has lasted years and has been life-threatening. And remains that way because of your choices.

*(\* not her real name)*

Regards, etc.

PS Please find attached a reply I have recently supplied to my MP, Trevor Evans (Brisbane), in relation to a response to my concerns raised with Minister Peter Dutton. I urge you all to go beyond the information being conveyed to you directly from the Dept of Home Affairs in reference to the results of mandatory detention and offshore processing should that information be in line with the Minister's response to me. I don't expect any/all of you to read all the references contained within the attached document as it's clear your time is being spent on other things that you have chosen to prioritise. However, you will know better than I that the Australian Parliamentary Library has valuable documentation (links to specific info on the issue of asylum seekers and refugees are included in the attachment) and there are a number of authoritative agencies and expert firsthand reports that are illuminating. [One such important review not included in the attached is the most recent report from the UNHCR on the conditions on Manus Island, released two days ago. If you read nothing else, please read this](#) and [the Briefing Remarks by the UNCHR Regional Protection Officer who presented the findings](#).

However, your time or that of your staff will not be wasted on [Professor David Isaacs' report in the British Medical Journal](#) that gives some indication of the damage that Australia's detention centre can inflict and [Dr Peter Young's submission to the Parliamentary Select Committee looking into conditions and circumstances on Nauru](#) which is a concise summary of the Dept of Home Affairs' responses when such issues are raised. Where the effectiveness and implications of the deterrent policies that are the basis of Operation Sovereign Borders are concerned, [Professor Sarah Joseph's article](#) gives an excellent balanced assessment of the reality of the punitive policies that you all insist are essential. Please avail yourself of this valuable information. And from it, base your decisions on how to proceed on a issue of genuine national importance.



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Thank you for your correspondence of 15 February 2018 to the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Alan Tudge MP, concerning regional processing. The Minister appreciates the time you have taken to bring this matter to his attention and has asked that I reply on his behalf. I note your correspondence was also sent to other parliamentarians.

As a party to the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and its *1967 Protocol* (the Refugee Convention), Australia takes its international obligations seriously. Australia is committed to providing protection to refugees consistent with the obligations set out in the Refugee Convention and other relevant international treaties to which Australia is a party.

The Governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea (PNG) are responsible for assessment of protection claims for people transferred to those countries under the regional processing arrangements.

Persons determined by Nauru to be refugees may remain in Nauru for up to 20 years, settle in Cambodia, express an interest in United States (US) resettlement, or move to a country they have the right to reside in.

Persons determined by PNG to be refugees may settle in PNG, express an interest in resettlement, volunteer to move to Nauru to await third country resettlement, or move to a country they have the right to reside in.

Resettlement of refugees from Nauru and PNG in the US commenced in September 2017 and continues in 2018. This arrangement demonstrates the strength of Australia's relationship with the US, and our shared commitment to working together on a range of global refugee and humanitarian issues.

US authorities continue to apply their own rigorous assessment and vetting processes to decide which refugees are eligible for resettlement in the US, and where and when this will take place.

Non-refugees should return home and can access assistance to do so.

Australia assists PNG, Nauru and Cambodia to provide refugees with settlement support to assist with integration into the local community. Services are delivered through a needs-based case management model and may include cultural and language orientation, employment, education and health linking, income support and accommodation assistance. Settlement services focus on building independence and self-sufficiency.

The Government of PNG closed the Manus Regional Processing Centre (RPC) on 31 October 2017.

The Nauru RPC operates as an open centre. RPC residents can move freely into and out of the centre through approved means. Transport services are provided to assist with access to community facilities.

People transferred and accommodated at the Nauru RPC are treated with respect and dignity and in accord with human rights standards. The Australian Government has contracted appropriately trained and experienced service providers to ensure that residents' needs are adequately met, including the provision of health and welfare services.

The Department of Home Affairs takes the issue of illegal or inappropriate behaviour in RPCs very seriously. Victims of any alleged assault, including sexual assault, are provided with appropriate medical treatment and mental health support, and are placed in an appropriate setting within the facility, pending further investigation.

The Government of Nauru encourages the reporting of all crimes, including sexual assault, to the appropriate authorities for investigation. The Government of Nauru has established a Gender Violence and Child Protection Unit. This service is accessible to all residents of Nauru. Where the Nauru Police Force (NPF) believes an allegation is substantiated, charges may be laid and the offenders prosecuted in accordance with the Nauru Crimes Act.

The Government of Nauru operates a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) programme which provides a point of contact in the community for residents of Nauru, particularly transferees and refugees. The CLO provides community policing support to the NPF and can report crimes or raise issues of concern with the NPF.

The Australian Federal Police (AFP) has deployed officers to work closely with the NPF to mentor and train officers to develop their investigative capacity further. Among deployed AFP members is an officer specialising in sexual assault investigations.

The Australian Parliament has scrutinised Nauru regional processing operations on a number of occasions and continues to do so. A number of independent scrutiny organisations, including the Commonwealth Ombudsman and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), conduct regular monitoring visits of the Nauru RPC with the permission of the Government of Nauru. Independent scrutiny organisations may visit PNG with the permission of the Government of PNG. Transferees are able to communicate with scrutiny bodies, such as the Ombudsman, the ICRC and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to raise any concerns they may have.

The UNHCR undertakes visits to regional processing countries as part of its monitoring of the application of the provisions of the Refugee Convention. The Australian Government supports the monitoring role of non-government organisations in respect of persons transferred to Nauru and PNG for processing and settlement. Decisions about monitoring visits, and responses to issues raised following such visits, are matters for the Governments of Nauru and PNG.

Where reports on such visits make practical observations which can be implemented and which would improve operational efficiencies, the Australian Government will support the Governments of Nauru and PNG to address any deficiencies.

The Australian Government's Operation Sovereign Borders policies are designed to safeguard vulnerable people from exploitation by people smugglers, prevent the loss of life at sea and restore the integrity of Australia's borders. Restoration of Australia's border integrity has enabled the Government to increase the annual refugee intake. As a result, the Humanitarian Programme has increased from 13,750 in 2016-17 to 16,250 in 2017-18 and will reach 18,750 in 2018-19. The 2018-19 Programme will represent Australia's largest offshore humanitarian intake in more than 30 years. Focusing on persecuted minorities, Australia has also welcomed 12,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict zone on top of this. The ongoing success of these strong border control policies has enabled the closure of 17 domestic immigration detention facilities.

The Australian Government's border protection policies are here to stay. No-one subject to regional processing arrangements will be resettled in Australia.

Thank you for raising this matter with the Minister.

Yours sincerely



A/g Director ABF Ministerial Correspondence Section  
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22 February 2018