

## **Human Rights denied in Australia**

I have become increasingly perturbed over the last year about the level of human rights afforded to Australian citizens, and the Australian government's approach to human rights. In the name of security, the government has passed controversial legislation pertaining to the possibility of terrorist attacks on Australian soil, which contravenes basic human rights such as the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Also, the federal government has not protested that one of its citizens, David Hicks, has been imprisoned for an indefinite period of time without the details of his charge being announced, clearly violating basic human rights. The Australian government's policy of mandatory detention is a startling example of a government clearly abrogating its responsibility to the international community, as it is again a policy which contravenes minimum standard of human rights. After examining the issues of human rights in Australia, I have concluded that the Australian government breaches international human rights during its everyday functioning. If the government will not abide by the most basic of laws, then it is clearly undermining the principles upon which the modern world has been founded. The federal government is hypocritical when it criticises the level of human rights afforded to people in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, therefore diminishing our standing in the world community.

The anti-terrorism laws that were passed in 2005 awakened me to the fact that the federal government valued vague national security issues ahead of the most inalienable human rights. In their pursuit of apparent terrorists, the government passed legislation that allows people to be held in indefinite detention and unable to communicate with their families, a practice that is already applied to asylum seekers. Furthermore, the rights of potential detainees, such as the presumption of innocence and their access to legal representation were limited in the legislation. I was further outraged when I learned that the media was restricted in its coverage of such unjust, debased detention and trials involving national security issues. As the media reported the extent of the laws, I wondered what would happen to me if I were imprisoned under such legislation. There would be nothing to stop the government from barging through the front door of my house, hauling me off to a prison and detaining me for as long as they liked. If the press tried to report this gross injustice perpetrated upon me, it would be on the wrong side of the law as well! I believe that the government erodes the pillars of liberty and freedom every time they use these atrocious anti-terrorism laws. The Australian government should realise its hypocrisy when complaining of the draconian terror laws of foreign countries, as its own terror laws are internationally regarded as authoritarian.

The federal government's unabashed support of the illegal detention of Guantanamo Bay detainee, David Hicks, reflects the government's support of policies that blatantly disregard the most sacrosanct of human rights. The U.S. government does not afford Mr Hicks full rights under the Geneva Conventions, such as living conditions comparable to those of American troops, repatriation following the cessation of military conflict, and a ban on interrogation. David Hicks has also alleged he was tortured by the American forces. The reason for his treatment is that he is an "unlawful combatant", a term that is

not recognised by international law. Before I researched the issue further, I thought that the foreign governments, such as Australia's, could do nothing about the detention of their nationals in Guantanamo Bay. However, I was alarmed to understand that the British government had secured the release of its citizens from Guantanamo Bay, as had the American government! Therefore, because our government has made no attempt to repatriate David Hicks, I have come to the conclusion that the Australian government supports the values which vandalise and corrupt the framework of society. The federal government indulges in unacceptable hypocrisy when it seeks to denigrate the image of human rights in other countries, further tarnishing Australia's international reputation.

I feel sympathetic towards the asylum seekers who are subject to the Australian government's mandatory detention laws, which flagrantly flout the international rights afforded to refugees. These refugees, from war-torn nations, are detained until their applications are processed, an indefinite, tedious process that can take years. Under the International Convention on Refugees (1951), the Australian government is obliged to offer asylum seekers access to the Australian legal system, employment and education. This government, however, has ignored its responsibility by indefinitely incarcerating hundreds of asylum seekers. I deplore the Australian government for making no attempt to ameliorate the strife ridden lives of asylum seekers. Australia has a moral and legal obligation to assist asylum seekers, and our government chooses not to do this. I believe the government knowingly violates the laws that are essential for a just society; therefore, it knowingly denigrates the basis of democracy in the modern world. My heart swelled with pride after the Socceroos performance in the World Cup, but my heart does not swell with pride when I view the Australian Government's policies on asylum seekers; as it is regarded as regressive and draconian around the world.

The general Australian public must realise that it is not "other" countries that violate a person's inalienable human rights, but the very one which they consider to be a haven for fairness and justice, the country that they believe would steadfastly preserve the sanctity of liberty and freedom. The Australian Government continues to operate under laws which, in other Western democracies, would be considered draconian. It is my view that the Australian government should abandon all of its policies and laws that betray the concepts of liberty, democracy and freedom. I believe the government should focus on the task of ensuring its laws uphold human rights, and do not erode them.