

2018 01 16 Refugee Action Coalition Media Release

Hunger Strike Starts Over Immigration Detention Visits Restrictions

Over two hundred detainees at two detention centres, Villawood in Sydney and Maribynong in Melbourne, have declared a hunger strike in protest at visiting restrictions recently announced by Border Force. The detainees have been on hunger strike for more than 24 hours, since the morning of Monday 15 January.

Posters declaring the changes would apply after 22 January went up unannounced in the centres, last week. Detainees only found out about the policy when told by their visitors.

Under the restrictions, visitors will have to give five days' notice of any visit, fill in a five-page form, with actual visits will be restricted to one on one. Visitors will also be required to have 100 points of ID when they attend the detention centre to visit.

The restrictions will hit families especially hard. Visiting minors will also now need identification.

These restrictions come on top of recent moves by Border Force to restrict what food can be brought into the detention centre and the attempt to ban mobile phones.

The moves, dressed up as security measures have nothing to do with security and everything to do with moves to militarise the detention centres under the control of Border Force, and their black-shirted officers.. They go hand in hand with measures to routinely handcuff anyone taken to appointments outside the detention centres.

Under the announced changes, there will also be restrictions on the amount of property that is allowable for any detainee.

The changes are similar to changes that were announced in September last year but which were substantially withdrawn after protests at the time. Both the attempt to ban mobile phones and food are the subject of legal action taken on behalf of detainees against Border Force. Detainees are angry that the changes have been declared without any prior consultation with detainees or visitors.

A letter drafted by the detainees was delivered to Border Force officials yesterday. It is understood that Border Force officials will meet with detainees' representatives today (Tuesday) to formally announce the new policy.

"There is no justification for the visiting restrictions. They are unacceptable, and should be dropped," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "By imposing such draconian terms on visits, it looks like Border Force is trying to deter visiting to detention all together and make conditions in detention even more intolerable.

"There old visiting arrangements have been in place for many years. There is no new security issue that has emerged to justify these measures. The militarisation of the detention centres is the inevitable outcome of the government's scare-mongering over border security.

"The government should be ending mandatory detention to allow asylum seekers to live in the community while their claims are being processed. And the increased use of 501 visa cancellation is turning detention centres into extensions of the prison system."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

Posted by: Ian Rintoul <rintoul.ian10@gmail.com>