



FOUR DEMANDS OF THE 46th PARLIAMENT

End all forms of immigration detention for refugee children.

End refugee family separation.

Bring all refugees from Papua New Guinea and Nauru to safe settlement.

Ensure refugee children and their families seeking asylum are held no longer than 72 hours to enable basic identity and health checks.

NEWSLETTER February 2020

Dear Grandmothers and Friends

It has been an extraordinary Summer with bushfires ravaging land and displacing communities. The evacuation by sea of people fleeing from fire and smoke at Mallacoota caused many of us to see those images bearing resemblance to the flight of refugees from imminent danger to a safe haven...any safe haven.

Recovery from the bushfires will be a challenge for individuals and communities for a long time to come. We know of Grandmothers who are very actively involved in those recovery processes. It's a time when we are required to, as the saying goes, 'walk and chew gum at the same time'.

The unresolved human rights challenges in our nation's treatment of refugees came with us into the new year and, indeed, into a new decade. In this first newsletter of 2020, we update you on recent activities, give you access to stories of refugee experiences, inform you of upcoming events, and help you to stay in touch and (we hope) be even more effective.

'Twas the season of goodwill

Too many refugees in Australia have spent too many Christmases in isolation and sadness, if not outright despair. On the eve of Christmas 2019, Grandmothers discovered that 43 men evacuated from PNG for medical care were in fact under locked detention on the third floor of a motel in suburban Melbourne. Within 72 hours, we had organised a vigil of carol singing outside the Mantra motel on Bell St, Preston, to let the men inside know they were not alone and not forgotten.

We managed to get messages to the men who welcomed our offer to sing for them, to stand with them, to bring genuine wishes of goodwill and togetherness. On the Sunday before Christmas, our numbers swelled to around 150 grandmothers and others who heard of our plans for the vigil and jumped at the chance to join in.



Men in Mantra acknowledge the Grandmothers singing carols in the carpark below. Christmas 2019.

Several other groups have followed the Grandmothers' lead and staged their own events at the Mantra on Bell St. Many of the men have been there for 7 months. A Motel in Brisbane is also being used by Government as an APOD (alternative place of detention). These places are not counted in the official list of detention centres, deepening the secrecy veil the Morrison government uses to hide the truth of mandatory and indefinite detention.

Post-script: Grandmothers for Refugees decided against promoting or joining a 29/2 protest rally outside Mantra due to the risk of reprisals against the men. In Brisbane, ill refugees had their access to the gym denied in retaliation for a protest outside the Kangaroo Point hotel where 80 refugee men have been held for up to one year.

Grandmothers make an early start in Casey electorate



With the start of the 2020 Parliamentary year, Grandmothers in Casey electorate were quick off the mark to remind Speaker of the House and their local MP, Tony Smith, that they had not retired during the summer!

Biloela Family matter back in Court

The Biloela family remains on Christmas Island in difficult living conditions, according to their lawyer. The claim into the right of two-year-old Tharunicaa to lodge an application for asylum was heard in Melbourne last week and was adjourned pending decision.

Grandmothers for Refugees were a welcome sight with others in the forecourt on days of the hearing. The ruling by Justice Mark Moshinsky may take one to three months.

See the report in The Guardian [here](#).

Government number crunching

The Federal Government posts online a monthly version of refugee numbers, categories and places of detention. Below is the latest summary position and a link to the full report ending 31 December 2019. Please note that the government does not count children as being in detention as they are 'guests' of their parents! Those locked in hotels and motels may not be included as these places are not officially categorised as detention centres like Villawood in Sydney or MITA in Melbourne.

“At 31 December 2019, there were 1450 people in immigration detention facilities, including 1446 in immigration detention on the mainland and less than 5 in immigration detention on Christmas Island.

“A further 851 people were living in the community after being approved for a residence determination and 13,144 IMAs were living in the community after grant of a Bridging Visa E.”

Follow [this link](#) to the full report.

Australia’s detention conditions under global spotlight

In March, two international groups will be in Australia to examine aspects the conditions under which refugees are held in locked and community detention. A key element under scrutiny is the extent to which the Australian Government has progressed its processes to protect detainees from torture and other degrading treatment.

The investigative scope of the group referred to as OPCAT (**Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**) will likely be contentious during the visit.

The Australian Government ratified OPCAT on 15 December 2017. In February of that year, the Commonwealth Attorney-General (George Brandis) asked the **Human Rights Commission** to conduct consultations with civil society in order to advise the Federal Government on views about how OPCAT should be implemented in Australia. **Commissioner Ed Santow** is responsible for this consultation and advice to the group. Watch out for media coverage of the OPCAT visit in early March. Find [More...](#)



HR Commissioner Ed Santow (second from L) joined a panel of legal and health experts at the Behind Closed Doors Symposium organised by Refugee Advocacy Network(RAN) on 21 Feb in preparation for the OPCAT visit.

The **Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office** (which includes an Immigration Ombudsman) has been inspecting places of immigration detention since 2011 and has decided to publish more information on this issue since Australia ratified the OPCAT. The Ombudsman's Report is the first of what is intended to be a regular series on Commonwealth operated places of detention and covers investigations held in the first six months of 2019 in centres including MITA in Melbourne and BITA in Brisbane, with concerns raised about facilities in non-medical APODs (Alternative Places of Detention). Further information about the Ombudsman's role can be found in the link to the 18/19 Annual Report on page 1/33 of this report. Click the link https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0017/109700/Immigration-Detention-Oversight-Report_January-to-June-2019.pdf

CALL OUT: Palm Sunday Rallies – 5th April

Please mark your calendar now with this reminder for Sunday 5 April:

JOIN THE **PALM SUNDAY Walk for Justice for Refugees on Sunday 5 April 2020** at the State Library Melbourne (Corner Swanston & La Trobe Streets) at 2.00pm. Stand up for a fair and welcoming society by joining the **Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees**.

#palmsundaywalk #justice4refugees #justiceforrefugees .

New banners, placards and fliers will be ready in time for this annual event when it is important to remind Government that we have not given up on our demands.

EARLY WARNING: Mid-year General Meeting – Friday 19 June 2020

While you have your diary handy, please note this important date. We are planning to meet in Melbourne on Friday 19 June 10am – 3pm. This is in Refugee Week and on the eve of World Refugee Day 2020.

The day's agenda will enable us to hear from a guest speaker on the trauma impacts of detention on refugees and people seeking asylum. We will get updates on campaigns and plans for future actions. Among items of business will be the future scope and make-up of the Planning Committee. It is timely as the current members and executive will conclude their terms at this meeting.

Seeking Home campaign

Grandmothers for Refugees is joining with ASRC and others on a campaign to step up community awareness of refugees and their 10+ years of cruel treatment. Enough is enough! It is being designed as a two-year campaign with stages of activities using community information resources. Other organisations approached to participate include Justice for Refugees, RAR, Amnesty, and ACOSS.

Strategies and ideas are under development and will be highlighted in future newsletters.

New website under construction



We are indebted to Julie Cattlin for the work she has been doing on our new website. The Planning Committee has approved the preliminary work and we are moving to finalise all the elements by mid-March.

In the future, we hope the website will become your single door entry point to all things Grandmothers for Refugees. It will be the place to read the latest about refugee issues, stay in touch with breaking news, order T-shirts, find the latest resources for your group, check the dates for upcoming events, keep up to date with the latest newsletters, submit your photos and news and the place for new members to join.

We will guide you to bookmark or make the website a favourite so it is easy to connect from your laptop, iPad or computer.

Order your new t-shirt

Orders for the new Grandmothers for Refugee T-shirt can be made by clicking on this link <https://parkwaydesigns.com.au/products/grandmothers-for-refugees-t-shirt?variant=31396915970111> You pay the supplier direct and they will post to you.

Advice!! Some of us have found the sizing less than generous. Large, for instance, in the old style is not the case with the new. So please check your measurements against those offered by Parkway. There are plenty of options. And it's true... they don't shrink in the wash.

Badges

New badges for Grandmothers and Friends of Grandmothers are available from electorate co-ordinators who, in turn, can get supplies from the executive member closest to them. The cost is a gold coin. Any problems? Contact us at info@grandmothersforrefugees.org .

Happy anniversary, Bendigo Grandmothers

We finish this edition with warm congratulations to the Bendigo Grandmothers for Refugees who celebrated their fifth anniversary in January. The day began well with Co-ordinator Di O'Neil interviewed on local radio. Click on the icon below to listen to the interview.



CLIP Di O'Neil.MP3

Di O'Neil (R) makes a presentation to Jan Govett, a founding member of Grandmothers for Refugees, Bendigo.

With best wishes,

Jean, Jane, Margaret and Mary