Department of Immigration and Border Protection

The Manager

Global Feedback Unit

GPO Box 241

Melbourne, Victoria

Australia 3001

24 April 2016

**RE: CONCERNS REGARDING “NEW OPERATING MODEL” IN MITA**

Dear ….

We write to you in response to the new operating model which has been implemented in the Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation (MITA) and is looking at being implemented, if not already done so, nation-wide. We are composed of both people who regularly visit MITA and those who have grave concerns for the men and women currently residing in MITA.

It has been brought to our attention that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, together with the Australian Border Force and SERCO began implementing a 'new operating model' at MITA on Wednesday 20 April 2016. It is our understanding that under this model, the single adult men (SAMS) have been moved to a new compound (Bass) within MITA and have had a number of restrictions placed on them. Namely:

1. Compound gates remained locked, containing the SAMS in Bass
2. Shared rooms
3. Separation and restricted contact from men, women and families who are not in Bass
4. Written requests to SERCO if wanting to visit a friend in another compound
5. No communal eating space
6. No communal gathering space
7. Lack of activities
8. An inadequate gym and small number of computers
9. Officer supervision when leaving Bass to walk in MITA

These new measures that have been implemented are punitive and extreme. The detainees at MITA are peaceful and non-violent and such harsh measures are uncalled for.

Furthermore, we are deeply troubled about the effects this new model will have on our friends’ mental and physical health. Social, psychological and medical research has time and time again shown that there is a direct correlation between social isolation and decline in mental and physical health. A systematic review investigating the mental health of asylum seekers found that a specific set of stressors including loss of liberty and social isolation adversely affect the mental health status of men, women and children. As many of the detainees in MITA already suffer for mental and physical health conditions due to previous trauma, further isolating them in a locked compound with no communal space or activities will exacerbate their conditions.

In addition, due to the health conditions discussed above, many find it difficult and stressful to share a room with another person, especially given the small size of that room. This has resulted in some people sleeping outside. Furthermore, having locked gates between compounds and leading to the outdoors restricts the ability of the detainees to exercise properly and access fresh air. It also prevents the detainees from taking part in activities such as gardening or coffee, activities that are important to their mental wellbeing and social health and activities that we understand earn them points to use within MITA. This new operations model is unrealistic, impractical and unduly callous. The changes are likely to result in worsening mental and physical health and behaviour, the effects of which will likely be seen soon. Our friends are human and they deserve to be treated the way we would request we are to: with respect, dignity, and fairness.

At this time we would like to make a number of requests on behalf of our friends:

1. Increased access to open areas of MITA for exercise, fresh air, activities and contact with friends.
2. No restrictions on spending time with others inside MITA
3. Detainees be fairly and transparently re-assessed for access to single rooms based on their mental and physical conditions.
4. Communal eating with the rest of the population in MITA be reinstated.
5. Activities such as music class to be held together- not separated by compound or demographic.
6. An increased number of computers in Bass.

We implore you to take these considerations under advisement, weighing in the serious impact of the new model that has been implemented.

Regards,

Jenell Quinsee, Maaike Wallace and Carina Field

*on behalf of:*

Our friends in MITA, and

Janet Galbraith, Triane Vik, [add names here]