

Abbott's anti-refugee agenda

Abbott has vowed to turn the boats back. He has appointed a 'three-star' general, former SAS commander Angus Campbell to stop those seeking asylum by boat with military force and to refuse to allow them to arrive in Australian waters. Campbell will report directly to the new Immigration Minister. For all the government's pretence it wants to stop people drowning at sea, this dangerous approach is almost certain to lead to more deaths, injuries, panic and fear for desperate refugees, and to escalating, unstable and confrontational situations. At least 5 asylum seekers died under Howards attempts to turn back boats.

Greeting some of the world's most vulnerable people, who are simply seeking safety, with military personnel intent on refusing them entry, is a horrific approach. It is an abandonment of Australia's commitments under the Refugee Convention. For all Abbott's rhetoric, Australia receives far fewer refugees than many other countries in the world and travelling by boat is not "illegal". Scott Morrison has said the "ideal" number of boats coming to Australia would be "none". At the same time, the Abbott government has declared it wants a "blackout" on reporting the numbers of refugees arriving by boat. Together, these policies are a secretive, fear-mongering and absurdly aggressive, unaccountable system.

Abbott wants to stop refugees who arrive by boat ever permanently re-settling in Australia

He has promised to strip funding for legal assistance for pursuing refugee claims (and appeals) from the almost 32000 asylum seekers who have already arrived by boat. If found to be refugees and entitled to protection, they will have to reapply for Temporary Protection visas every three years, and live in the uncertainty and fear that they may not be renewed and they may be deported. They will never be allowed permanent resettlement. Abbott will also force them to 'work for the dole' indefinitely. Scott Morrison has said he will eliminate rights of appeal on refugee status findings in the courts and instead pursue a limited 'non-statutory' process for determinations of refugee status, despite over ninety per cent of those who arrive by boat being ultimately found to be refugees.

Abbott has promised to 'buy back' Indonesian fishing vessels and spy on 'people smugglers'

Abbott's emphasis on people smugglers serves to distract from the reason people flee in rickety boats - because they are desperate and escaping war, persecution and

oppression. While his policies of purchasing Indonesian fishing vessels and setting up intelligence to catch people smugglers are unworkable and absurd, Abbott uses the demonisation of people smugglers as a way to both shift responsibility away from Australia's obligations and to attack refugees by proxy. It is not criminal or illegal to seek asylum and nor should it be a crime to bring the boats. We should be welcoming refugees regardless of their means of arrival.

Abbott has promised to remove any right of review for those facing indefinite detention

47 refugees have received adverse ASIO assessments on the supposed grounds of being "likely to engage in acts prejudicial to Australia's security". They are detained indefinitely, but ASIO is under no obligation to provide any reasons, in any case, how can likelihood of future acts be proved?

A United Nations Human Rights Committee concluded in August that this detention "amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, inflicting serious psychological harm on them" and that Australia had breached close to 150 international human rights obligations.

While Australian citizens can appeal an ASIO finding in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, these refugees have no right of appeal and no right to know why an adverse finding was made against them. Many refugees face severe mental health problems as a result of arbitrary and indefinite detention. Three small children are living in detention in order to be with their mother, Ranjini.

Abbott will abolish the limited Stone review process

The Labour government begrudgingly introduced a limited non-binding review process led by Margaret Stone after a critical High Court decision. The process has led to two findings being reversed, bringing into question the reliability of ASIO processes. But Stone herself has described her own process as "not guesswork in the terms of tossing a coin, but it is prediction". Now the Abbott government has vowed to eliminate even this process, with the Coalition stating they will abolish the Stone review process with 40 cases still awaiting a decision. In effect, refugees will get one assessment for life, with no way to challenge it.