

# ASCI Update : April 2010

Hello friends,

Welcome to the latest update from Asylum Seekers Christmas Island (ASCI). As I am sure you are all aware, Christmas Island continues to be in the headlines. I am still visiting all three centres on the island regularly: North West Point (male camp), Phosphate Hill (male camp) and Construction Camp (families, women and unaccompanied minors).

Some of my recent concerns have been the obvious overcrowding, which is particularly bad at Phosphate Hill. In a recent visit, asylum seekers complained that there are half hour waits to use showers, in the last week at least two days, no hot water was available, the toilets do not always have toilet paper and there are not enough recreation facilities. When I spoke with a group of Afghan women, they explained that there are no headscarves available nor is there suitable clothing from Serco. One Afghan woman, who arrived on her own, under the suspension policies was given a short sleeve top much to her embarrassment but no other clothing was available. Finally, some children are not going to school, as there is simply no room available at the school.

ASCI still needs your help. We are under staffed and rely purely on donations that people send us. In this update you will see we urgently still need letter writers and donations of books, dvds, and dictionaries.

Professor Linda Briskman from Curtin's Centre for Human Rights Education and ASCI committee member has written a short article for this ASCI update.

Incase you did not see or listen in the last few weeks:

## ***Read:***

■ Savitri Taylor's "The asylum freeze and international law":

<http://inside.org.au/the-asylum-freeze-and-international-law/>

■ Linda Briskman and Lucy Fiske's commentary in The Drum:

<http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/stories/s2870551.htm>

## ***Listen:***

■ William Maley on Radio National speaking about Afghan Hazaras:

<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/breakfast/stories/2010/2871038.htm>

Thanks to everyone who has provided support to ASCI! Come visit us at

[www.asylumseekerschristmasisland.com](http://www.asylumseekerschristmasisland.com)

Warm wishes,

Michelle Dimasi

ASCI Director

[michelle@asylumseekerschristmasisland.com](mailto:michelle@asylumseekerschristmasisland.com)

## A place of shame: Asylum seeker detention on Christmas Island

Linda Briskman, Professor of Human Rights Education, Curtin University.

My third research visit to Christmas Island in April 2010 was the most confronting as it was a time of severe overcrowding and the announcement of harsh policy changes. As in past stays, I was enchanted by the stunning beauty of the island and shocked by asylum seeker detention. The announcements of the suspension of claims for newly arriving Sri Lankans and Afghans and the proposed relocation of men from these groups to the soon to be re-opened Curtin Detention Centre in remote Derby, has sent shockwaves through the refugee advocacy community.

Overcrowding in all the Christmas Island detention sites is clearly evident. To ease the overcrowding, in the last few days of my visit a large number of men were relocated to the Darwin detention facility and some unaccompanied minors (known as UAMs) were transferred to Port Augusta, a town that was once home to the Baxter detention facility. In the island's maximum security Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) the overflow has resulted in people living in demountables, tents and a commandeered education complex. The tents house forty men; the education complex rooms twenty-four.

The overcrowding extends to the two other sites of detention on the island – Phosphate Hill (housing almost 200 men) and Construction Camp (housing families, children and unaccompanied minors). Although numbers change almost daily, at one stage during my visit the Construction Camp housed 450 people including more than 100 children, including infants, a number that has increased with the boat arrivals of recent days. Bed space is not the only concern. Access to resources and activities is limited.

The detention of children is a national scandal. The Construction Camp was designed as temporary accommodation for the men who built the IDC. Now this ghetto-like, squalid collection of demountable buildings is perhaps akin to the conditions of a third world refugee camp. Calling this facility an alternative place of detention masks the fact that it is a detention environment where people do not have freedom of movement and where children are denied access to playthings and the taken-for-granted joys of childhood. Although most children and UAMs thankfully attend the local school, this cannot compensate for the loss of liberty and uncertain futures.

The Rudd government's increasingly tough policies represent political opportunism at its worst. The experiences of those detained rebound to their extended families and communities including family members who have already been granted visas, families in home countries and family members in Indonesia who have not made the journey. Although the government generally endeavours to ensure that processing is as fast as possible on this isolated island where the 'processors' are flown in and out, some people have been detained for periods nearing a year, which will increase with the suspension policies now in place.

Linda Briskman and colleague Lucy Fiske were on Christmas Island conducting research on how excision impacts on the human rights of asylum seekers and Christmas Islanders.

For more commentary, see: <http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/stories/s2870551.htm>

## Letter Writing Project

We have now extended the letter writing project to women asylum seekers on Christmas Island. These women have arrived with either their children, husbands or bravely, on their own. Women and children are being locked up behind fences at construction camp.

At the moment, the women involved are Kurdish, Sri Lankan and Afghan. There are also two Vietnamese women who have been in detention for over 6 months who cannot speak English and would really appreciate someone who can write in Vietnamese.

If you would like to be involved in the letter writing project- writing to men or women- or have questions or queries, please email Lisa Hartley on [letters@asylumseekerschristmasisland.com](mailto:letters@asylumseekerschristmasisland.com)

Please remember to send letters to the Immigration Detention Centre address (IDC) not to the ASCI mailing address, as follows:

Asylum seeker name (ID Number)  
C/- Christmas Island IDC  
PO Box 639  
Christmas Island WA 6798

## Visting People in Detention

Would you like to visit people who were detained on Christmas Island and now currently in mainland detention centres? Some asylum seekers in Darwin, Perth and Sydney detention centres have requested some mainland Australians come visit them. If you would like to visit someone, please contact ASCI on: [visits@asylumseekerschristmasisland.com](mailto:visits@asylumseekerschristmasisland.com)

For general info about visiting people in detention please see:  
<http://www.immi.gov.au/managing-australias-borders/detention/visiting/>

## ASCI is on Facebook

We're happy to announce that ASCI has its own Facebook Fan page. For those with a Facebook account, join the page by clicking on the link below and be kept up to date with ASCI news and other relevant information.

[http://www.facebook.com/pages/Asylum-Seekers-Christmas-Island-ASCI/114740741887041?v=app\\_2347471856#!/pages/Asylum-Seekers-Christmas-Island-ASCI/114740741887041](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Asylum-Seekers-Christmas-Island-ASCI/114740741887041?v=app_2347471856#!/pages/Asylum-Seekers-Christmas-Island-ASCI/114740741887041)

## ASCI's Library Project

A big thank you to all the generous people who have already made donations to help improve the library at the North West Point detention centre. It now has over 5000 books which is largely due to your overwhelming contributions, so thank you!

The library at North West Point, while slowly growing, still needs resources to cater to more than 1700 people. These materials, besides offering the obvious benefits of education and learning, provide welcome respite from the stress of detention and are an important part of sustaining mental and emotional wellbeing. Books and magazines are treasured commodities within the centres and any donations made will be very gratefully received. ASCI's next project is to build up the library at Phosphate Hill IDC where approximately 400 men, women and children are currently being detained. The growing population has meant that recreational spaces are becoming limited, and library resources will be in greater demand than ever. Phosphate Hill also requires materials suitable for children and teenagers. Cultural resources are very gratefully welcomed - in particular Hindi/Bollywood movies and music, as well as mainstream pop music such as Michael Jackson, Akon and various other hip hop artists (please be wary of sending CDs with excessive explicit lyrics!). Both libraries currently require:

### **English learning resources for all levels**

ESL resources catering to speakers of specific languages are particularly helpful (see below for a list of languages and dialects). This includes flashcards and audio tapes/cds, phrasebooks and exercises. Alphabet and Phonetic resources that cater to absolute beginners of specific languages would also be extremely helpful.

While English lessons are being taught at both centres, shortage of available qualified teachers mean that classes are limited and many people miss out, despite their eagerness to learn.

### ***Dictionaries***

Dictionaries are in very high demand, particularly at North West Point and there are simply not enough to go around. These include solely English dictionaries (student/learners dictionaries are particularly helpful) as well as phrasebooks and bilingual dictionaries that translate both from and into English.

### ***Cultural Resources & Current Media***

Reading, listening and visual materials in native languages are also very much sought after. Current magazines and newspapers are very well received though difficult to get on the island.

### ***Australian resources***

The asylum seekers are very keen to learn all about Australia - everything from native animals, to climate to landmarks to food and culture, so any books or resources about the country will be very popular. The more pictures the better!

We currently require resources catering to the following languages:

- Arabic
- Farsi
- Dari
- Hazaragi
- Tamil
- Kurdish
- Burmese
- Indonesian
- Tamil
- Urdu
- Sinhalese

### ***Ipod Shuffles and Prepaid Phone Credit***

Additionally, ASCI would be extremely grateful to people willing to donate Ipod shuffles. These have recently received DIAC approval to be brought into the centres as they don't have recording device on them. While it might seem like a costly gift, you'd be bringing an immeasurable amount of joy to more than one person, which in itself is priceless.

We'd also very much appreciate any donations of prepaid international phone credit/calling cards for making calls to families overseas.

### ***Making a donation to ASCI***

To send books and resources to ASCI, unless you are sending quite a few, we ask that parcels be sent via EXPRESS POST. Even if it is marked as air mail, it ends up going by sea, which takes between 2-3 months to arrive.

When sending express items to Christmas Island, please fill out a customs declaration form and hand the parcel over the counter rather than via the yellow express bins outside post offices.

Books can be sent to the following address:

Asylum Seekers Christmas Island  
c/- Michelle Dimasi  
PO Box 681  
Christmas Island WA 6798

If you have any questions at all regarding donations or contributions to ASCI, please contact Renee Chan at [donations@asylumseekerschristmasisland.com](mailto:donations@asylumseekerschristmasisland.com)