



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **ChilOut Deeply Troubled by Findings of the Australian Human Rights Commission**

The release of the report today, *The Forgotten Children*, by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is a disturbing reminder to all Australians of the stark reality for children in immigration detention both onshore and offshore.

The report highlights the multitude of fundamental human rights denied to children who arrive in Australia seeking asylum.

“Our moral and legal obligations are clear,” said ChilOut Campaign Coordinator, Ms Claire Hammerton. “Children must only be detained as a measure of last resort, and only for the shortest appropriate period of time. This report highlights our dramatic failure to uphold our obligations, by detaining children arbitrarily as punishment for seeking asylum.”

“The Australian Government must acknowledge that seeking asylum is not a crime, and that children are often the innocent victims caught up in global conflicts and ethnic persecution. For us to detain them indefinitely as a deterrent to others, particularly in isolated and harsh locations like Nauru, is reprehensible.”

Ms Hammerton noted that the AHRC report was the largest global survey of children in detention to date, and congratulated AHRC President Gillian Triggs and her team for their commitment to rigorously investigating and illuminating the plight of child asylum seekers.

“The Commission conducted over 1100 interviews with children and their families and consulted with a range of medical and developmental experts – the overwhelming conclusion reached is that we are damaging vulnerable young people, often for life, under Australia’s current detention regime. With disproportionately high rates of mental ill-health, self-harm, and developmental delays, the evidence against successive Australian Governments is damning,” said Ms Hammerton.

Some of the key findings of the report reveal:

- nearly one third of children in detention are diagnosed with serious mental illness, compared with 2% in the Australian community;
- young children denied medical aids such as glasses and hearing aids for prolonged periods, resulting in long-term damage to the health of children;
- the unacceptable risk of harm to babies born in detention, and an inability of mothers to bond with their children due to high rates of postnatal depression;
- the lifelong negative impacts on the learning, emotional development and socialisation of preschool aged children;
- a disproportionately high number of children (compared with those in the Australian community) have been the victims of physical and sexual assaults; and
- high levels of self-harm and suicide attempts by parents and particularly children.

“While we have seen many children released from mainland detention centres over the last few months, the report highlights that some children in detention have been subjected to this



punishment for longer than 19 months. For the more than 100 children detained on Nauru, their detention is indefinite and they are losing hope. It is little wonder that the report found that children living in this protracted situation are frequently put on suicide watch.”

ChilOut calls on the Australian Government to end the destructive practice of detaining children, and to bring all those children on Nauru to the Australian mainland.

“Australian Governments, both past and present, have systematically ignored the rights of children since the release of the AHRC’s first report 10 years ago. It is a stain on our standing as a nation that the inhumane treatment of children continues. This must end now.”

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