



MEDIA RELEASE

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ChilOut Condemns New Asylum Seeker Laws and the Use of Children as Political Pawns

ChilOut welcomes the Minister's promised release of some children from detention but is extremely disappointed by the passage of the Asylum Legacy Caseload Bill through the Senate early this morning.

ChilOut Campaign Coordinator, Claire Hammerton, says "This bill represents a fundamental abrogation of Australia's responsibilities to all asylum seekers and refugees, but especially to children and families."

"We find the use of children as political pawns deplorable. The Minister for Immigration has used the children's release as an excuse to slam this disastrous legislation through the Senate and support his own agenda."

ChilOut is particularly concerned for the fate of children detained on Nauru. "Twenty-eight unaccompanied children are living in a precarious state in the community on Nauru. They have been assaulted on several occasions (most recently on Wednesday) and hospitalised, and are living in constant fear. These new laws have abandoned them and the 167 children to their fate in locked detention on Nauru. The continued warehousing of children in offshore facilities is unconscionable."

Ms Hammerton states, "We praise the efforts of Senators Hanson Young, Madigan and Lambie who vocally denounced the legislation, but are disappointed that others have fallen prey to the manipulation of Minister Morrison."

"Let me be very clear – it has always been possible for children to be released from immigration detention. The Minister could have granted them freedom at any stage since the Coalition first came to power. Instead, he has led many to believe that releasing children was dependent on passing legislation that would usurp the rule of law and make him the most powerful person in the country."

Furthermore, Ms Hammerton said that under the Bill "Children and their families will no longer be able to apply for permanent protection visas. Subject to very narrow exceptions, those found to be genuine refugees will now be placed on three-year temporary protection visas with no family reunion. The detrimental impact of this regime has been well documented – children and their families will be condemned to a life of uncertainty, living with the fear that they could be removed from Australia at any time."

"It is a devastating day for human rights in Australia," said Ms Hammerton. "However, ChilOut will continue to fight until all children are released from detention and child protections are enshrined in law and in practice, and children are never detained again."

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