

Melbourne Protest Calls for End to Mandatory Detention



Five hundred people joined a protest to end mandatory detention in Melbourne on Sunday 7th November and marched through the city streets demanding justice for refugees. The event was organised by the Refugee Advocacy Network, a coalition of groups formed earlier this year. Over 35 community organisations backed the rally.

Protesters heard from a range of speakers, including parliamentarians, acclaimed Afghan women's rights activist and opponent of the US/NATO occupation Malalai Joya; Gilios, a West Papuan refugee, representatives from the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union and Sister Brigid Arthur from the Brigidine Asylum Seekers' Project.

Sister Brigid Arthur (right) described her visits to young Hazaras in the little-known Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation centre and families in the Maribyrnong Detention Centre.

The demand of the rally was "End mandatory detention". It is this policy that is at the heart of the problem with Australia's asylum seeker system. Half measures and tinkering with the regime simply will not do. There are currently almost 5,000 people in detention centres, places that 2010 Australian of the Year, mental health advocate Pat McGorry, describes as "factories for producing mental illness". They are locked up for nothing other than seeking a better life.



Catherine Kelly with a placard of stark figures

Right: March through city streets - Jude Caldwell and Brigid Arthur

'What would you do in their shoes?'

This was the question put by students from Kilbreda College, Mentone. They mimed the arrival of a boatload of asylum seekers, followed by their reception, processing and eventual fate. The action attracted a good deal of attention from the midday crowds, not to mention at least three TV crews ...



'Enlarge the site of your tent...' in the shelter of the oak