

Australian Education Union

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UNANIMOUS VOTE TO EDUCATE DETAINEE CHILDREN

A national conference of the union representing Australia's 155,000 teachers has voted unanimously for the federal government to comply with international covenants on the rights of the child and ensure children in detention have access to normal education.

The motion on the education of children in detention was debated for almost 2 hours at a national conference attended by more than 150 delegates from around Australia.

The Australian Education Union's National Conference further moved that education facilities should not be located within the confines of detention centres, but that children should be able to learn in regular schools.

AEU Federal President Denis Fitzgerald described the conditions inside detention centres such as Baxter and Woomera as traumatic and an inappropriate environment for children's learning.

"Today is an historic day – the teaching profession of the nation has offered the federal government an opportunity to remove a fundamental cruelty to those children in detention centres."

"Public schools teachers will offer quality public education to every child in detention centres – there is no longer any excuse for the federal government to say it cannot be done. Even if the federal government won't act with compassion, they at least are urged to remove a fundamental cruelty" Mr Fitzgerald says.

"We are ready to begin immediate negotiations to make access to regular schools a reality for detainee children. We'll work with local schools near detention centres to get them the tools they need to help these children" he says.

"We've seen children in detention centres in metropolitan areas given access to schools – the same right is even more important for children in the far bleaker and oppressive environs of remote detention facilities in places such as Baxter and Woomera."

"We are particularly concerned to ensure the federal government doesn't reject this opportunity out of hand as a result of the recent fires at Baxter and Woomera."

"It would be perverse, with all of the trauma and violence that's visited upon these kids, to connect them with anything to do with the fires. I couldn't imagine a government being so cruel as to further punish these children for fires that have been caused by clearly desperate people."

AEU (SA) State President John Gregory echoed comments from the floor of the meeting that it's time for the union to begin a mass national movement to achieve justice for these children.

"As a union, we will strive to defeat these injustices. We will stand up to inhumane and unfair policies and demand better" he says.

The final motion passed by the National AEU Conference in Adelaide follows.

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RESOLUTION

REFUGEE CHILDREN IN DETENTION

Federal Conference salutes the work done by many members who are activists and AEU and Associated Bodies to achieve the release of children from refugee detention centres. The Union condemns the Federal Government for its continued detention of asylum seekers, in particular children, and calls for the end of the policy which is causing desperation, severe trauma and possibly permanent damage to those incarcerated.

The campaign to end this policy has brought credit to the union and is in the highest tradition of those working for human rights. Conference particularly recognizes the principles shown by members in putting the needs of children before the xenophobia generated by the Federal Government and media.

Conference supports continued work with refugee organizations to achieve the goal of a humanitarian process to deal with refugee claims which involves asylum seekers living peacefully in the community with children attending schools as exists in New Zealand and the closure of detention centres as instruments of deterrence and punishment. While the ALP is to be congratulated for supporting the call for children to be released, we urge the ALP to make a clear stand against the detention centre program as an instrument of deterrence and punishment.

In particular, Conference calls for children detained in Baxter, Woomera and other centres to be allowed to attend public schools from the beginning of term in 2003 and to have a properly developed program of transition and support to enable them to do so. To that end, Conference calls on the Federal and State Ministers concerned to urgently meet with the AEU to develop such a program.

Conference condemns and opposes the two class refugee policy of the Federal Government and calls for the removal of the Temporary Protection Visa system.

ALL refugees, regardless of where they come from or how they arrive, must have equal access to all services available to other community members.

Conference expresses concern that refugees released from detention centres on Temporary Protection Visas continue to be punished by the Federal Government by being denied access to basic services, such as initial accommodation, bond assistance, employment assistance and free English language tuition.

Denying Temporary Protection Visa holders access to the family reunion program is a continuation of this government's willful breaching of international treaties and United Nations conventions. Forcing Temporary Protection Visa holders to live with the spectre of forced removal after three years contributes further to the psychological trauma experienced by people already deemed refugees and further illustrates the inhumanity and indecency of this government's policies.

Conference condemns and opposes the Federal Government's policy of forced repatriation of Temporary Protection Visa holders.

Conference urges all Branches and Associated Bodies to continue to organise and actively support activities aimed at achieving a decent, humane refugee policy.

Conference notes that the payment of fees by Temporary Protection Visa holders to access TAFE and AMEP courses, as is required by the Federal Government's policy, has been waived by the NSW, Victorian and Queensland governments, and calls on all other state governments to do the same.

The AEU calls on the Federal Government to comply with relevant articles and relevant conventions on “The Rights of the Child”.

That this compliance be reflected in the actions of the Federal Government that ensures the provision of normal education infrastructure on Christmas Island for the children of people who are classed as “Illegal Immigrants”.

That all education/schools facilities, including buildings, not be within the confines of any detention centres.

That existing education/schools should be upgraded to facilitate the needs of children of people in detention centres or under the constraints of Temporary Protection Visas.