



Uniting Church. **Uniting People.**

unitingpeople.org.au

Uniting Church SA demands greater compassion at Inverbrackie

April 20 2011

The Uniting Church in South Australia is calling on the Immigration Department to take urgent steps to make it easier for detainees to connect with community supporters in the wake of alarming death- in- detention statistics.

The church believes an easing of visitation restrictions will reduce the stress and mental health issues affecting people in detention.

The call comes following the release of alarming national statistics showing that twenty nine asylum seekers have died in detention since 2000. The problem appears to be growing with five deaths in detention facilities in the past seven months.

“Australia desperately needs a more humane approach to asylum seekers and refugees,” says Rev Rob Williams, Moderator of the Uniting Church SA.

“That humane approach includes enabling people in the community to offer tangible support and compassion; and yet this month in SA, both of Inverbrackie Detention Centre’s community liaison officers have resigned in frustration. Surely, this is a clear sign that all is not well.”

Rev Williams went on: “Our detention centres are creating unnecessary trauma and distress; and while we know the suicide toll, it is obvious that many people are self-harming with no available statistics to explain the extent of the problem.

“There are community groups and local churches willing to offer practical support and friendship but bureaucracy and red tape are stifling those efforts.

“We just can’t sweep these problems under the proverbial carpet which is what is happening right now.”

Rev Williams said that when Inverbrackie was first being discussed the government assured the public that community relations and visitation would be encouraged with appropriate process.

“In contrast, the processes for gaining permission to visit detainees are so restrictive that those genuinely wanting to offer support and those genuinely needing it find connection extremely difficult.

There are mothers, fathers and children at the moment who would like to have visitors and connect with the local community but there is not a system in place.

“ There needs to be a system whereby asylum seekers can opt to receive visitors so that their names can be readily passed on to community groups. There are many asylum seekers in detention who have no access to visitors because nobody knows who they are”.

“Although no deaths have occurred at Inverbrackie, the deaths in other centres around Australia highlight

what can happen when not enough attention is paid to human rights and mental wellbeing. We’re calling for an urgent and compassionate response to our genuine concerns.”