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Human Rights Overboard: Seeking Asylum in Australia

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Abstract

In 2005, in the wake of the Cornelia Rau scandal, a citizen's inquiry was established to bear witness to events in Australia's immigration-detention facilities. Until then, the federal government had refused to conduct a broad-ranging investigation into immigration detention, and the operations within detention centres had been largely shrouded in official secrecy. The People's Inquiry into Detention (as it came to be called) heard heartbreaking evidence about asylum-seekers' journeys to Australia, their refugee determination process, and their life in and after detention. In total, around 200 people testified to the inquiry, and a similar number of written submissions were received. Human Rights Overboard draws together, for the first time, the oral testimony and written submissions from the inquiry in a powerful and vital book that stands as an indictment of Australia's refugee policy. Clearly and comprehensively presented, the book is a haunting journey guided by voices from every side of the fence: former and current immigration detainees, refugee advocates, lawyers, doctors, psychiatrists, and former detention and immigration staff. Taken together, their stories record a humanitarian disaster that sounds a warning to current and future policy makers, both here and overseas. With a foreword by prominent humanitarian lawyer Julian Burnside, Human Rights Overboard is an essential book that will resonate for years to come.

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Offshore detention: Australia's recent immigration history a 'human rights catastrophe'. With a deal on the table that could mean the closure of detention centres on Nauru and Manus, Helen Davidson reviews the saga of offshore processing. Helen Davidson. Following the "children overboard" incident in October 2001 – and the deaths of 353 men, women and children in the Siev X disaster – asylum seekers were a major political issue and Howard went to a federal election with his infamous declaration that "we will decide who comes to this country and the manner in which they come". Howard won the election and offshore processing continued. From this date forth no one who sought asylum in Australia by boat would ever settle in Australia, he said.