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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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