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Refugee Advocates Reject Detention Mobile Phone Ban

Refugee advocates have rejected the Australian Border Force announcement that mobile phones will be banned from detention centre.

Asylum seekers who have arrived by boat are already banned from having a mobile phone.

“The ban on asylum seekers having mobile phones in detention will be vigorously fought. The ban is punitive and unnecessary,” said Ian Rintoul, from the Refugee Action Coalition.

Any attempt to remove phones from the detention centres will likely be resisted by the detainees. The right to have phones is something that has been fought for since the first days of detention when places like Port Hedland and Woomera had one phone, and sometimes none, for hundreds of detainees.

Under the guise of 'stamping out illegal activity', the government is trampling on the human rights of people who have committed no crime.

It is yet another example of the way that creeping control by the ABF is resulting in increased militarisation of the detention centres and increasingly punitive measures taken against asylum seekers, their families and supporters.

The government implies the phone ban is directed at 501s - so-called criminal deportees - but the people who will suffer most are the asylum seekers who have committed no crime.

There are very good reasons why 501s should not be in immigration detention but successive government have ignored the problems this has caused and it is routine that 501s are housed with asylum seekers. There are good reasons that neither of these groups should be in detention at all.

For asylum seekers, mobile phones are a lifeline for them to remain in contact with the outside world, their families, their legal support and the community.

The ABF is more interested in getting phones out of detention centre to ensure vulnerable people remain more vulnerable and that Serco and Border Force operate inside the detention centres with impunity.

Rather than removing the phones, mobile phones should be available for all asylum seekers in detention. Banning the phones will just ensure there is an underground trade in mobile phones.

“The ban is futile. And contrary to the Border Force press release, there is no sign that detainees have any increased access to landlines inside the detention centres,” said Ian Rintoul.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

Posted by: Ian Rintoul <rintoul.ian10@gmail.com>