

Uncovering Australia's Detention Centres

On Monday 25th January a member of Communications team attended a thought-provoking discussion at Bristol University's School for Policy Studies: "State Crime: Australia's Abuse of Asylum Seekers". The talk was led by Australian academic Professor Linda Briskman (Swinburne Institute) who spoke passionately about her experience of visiting asylum seeker detention centres in Australia.

Detention centres are often the final step for many refugees before they either gain their refugee status, allowing them entry into a country, or are deported back to their home country. In the UK the number of asylum seekers entering detention centres has seen considerable growth in the past few years, yet very little is publicised about these detention centres and how they are managed.

Professor Briskman described the reality of Australia's detention centres which she felt had left many of those seeking asylum with "uncertain futures" and "a lot of mental health issues". She went on to discuss the difficulty of regularly checking these detention centres and the stories of their detainees which are frequently "hard to get out".

As an academic focused on the study of asylum seekers, Professor Briskman is one of the few outside figures who has been allowed into the Australia detention centres as what she calls a "human rights monitor". Further discussion of the Australian detention centres unfortunately showed that there is a strong emphasis on border security rather than human security, meaning a large number of detainees are being mistreated on a daily basis.

The talk was concluded with an open debate in which many members of the audience agreed that this issue can only be solved once asylum seekers and refugees are regarded as humans, not numbers; a conclusion which links very closely to our own 'rethinking refugee' campaign. We would like to thank Bristol University's School for Policy Studies for having us.