

BALANCE

LAW SOCIETY NORTHERN TERRITORY

Woomera - plea for help

The Territory legal community has been called on to provide expertise and support to the volunteers representing the 211 detainees at the Woomera Detention Centre.

On return from his Christmas break Darwin barrister John Lawrence called at the Woomera Legal Outpost – a rented house that serves as the nerve centre for volunteers.

“It is appalling. It’s madness what’s going on in that detention centre. As Australians we should be concerned,” Mr Lawrence said.

Uneasy about the plight of detainees at Woomera and even more concerned following news of hunger striking detainees

stitching their mouths together, Mr Lawrence spoke to the Adelaide practitioner who established the outpost.

“I have been requested to pass on the message that what is needed is practitioners willing and able to put their names on a list of people who could assist in any way with advice for detainees with reviews and appeals before the Refugee Review Tribunal, the Federal Court or the full Federal Court,” Mr Lawrence, who is also the President of the Criminal Lawyers Association of the Northern Territory, said.

“The list would provide the centre with a stock of names they are able to tap into for help on specific cases,” he said.

Mr Lawrence said the volunteers also need money to pay for administrative items such as transport, rent on the house, food and the cost of legal process.

“It is particularly galling that following the discovery of the lies about the asylum seekers on the Tampa throwing their children over board, we are again faced with a desperate situation where something shocking is happening and we have no reliable facts or information,” he said.

Since the hunger strike began at the centre on 18 January there have been 29 self-poisons and 22 self-mutilations. Forty-four people had their lips sewn together including a minor.

The hunger-strike of about 250 detainees follows concern among legal representatives, members of the medical profession and volunteers groups about the conditions detainees are forced to endure and the mental health of already traumatised people faced with a desperate future.

Legal practitioners wishing to put their names forward should contact the Law Society on 8981 5104.



Happy 2002!

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