



International Detention Coalition

Human rights for detained refugees,
asylum seekers and migrants

Call for support:

Global campaign to end the immigration detention of children

Refugee, asylum seeker and migrant children simply do not belong in detention. However research shows that child detention is a growing problem and a major protection gap worldwide. The International Detention Coalition (IDC) will launch a global campaign to end the immigration detention of children at the UN Human Rights Council in March this year as well as in a number of countries. We need your support to build and put pressure on governments to start using child friendly procedures, or for those that already do, we need to ask them to share good practices with others.

The campaign to end child detention will be open to anyone supporting our position, as laid out in a policy document on child detention based on research in five continents wherein almost 80 formerly detained children were interviewed. The central argument not to detain children, their families and unaccompanied or separated minors is based on three principles:

1. Undocumented child migrants are, first and foremost, children.
2. The best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in any action taken in relation to the child.
3. The liberty of the child is a fundamental human right.

This campaign then is about child rights but equally about human rights and refugee rights. This campaign focuses specifically on children detained for immigration purposes, including child refugees, asylum seekers and irregular migrants, however the IDC vision of alternatives to detention is far broader. You can read more about why and how immigration detention should only be used as a very last resort in the IDC handbook "*There are alternatives*" (www.idcoalition.org/cap).

We are looking for organisations to support our campaign in a number of ways.

- The IDC will organize a side event at the **UN Human Rights Council on the 21st of March 2012** to present the child focused research at a panel discussion on child detention. Also on that day, the official campaign film clip and website will be launched publicly and a number of countries will engage media with formerly detained children or by other means. Let us know if you can help.
- We also need help with collecting more written or recorded stories, data about child detention or good practices in various countries, campaign representatives at regional and international forums and more.
- We are looking for partners who are willing to endorse the campaign with their ongoing national or international work or directly participate in campaign activities. The alliance will be broader than just IDC members and open to everyone who can adhere to our position.

Let me know whether your organisation will endorse this critical campaign. If yes, we will ask you separately whether you wish your endorsement to be public or not. Non-members can fill out the form at www.idcoalition.org/children. IDC members can also send an email to the IDC Secretariat expressing your interest.

Don't hesitate to contact me for more information.

Kind regards

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www.idcoalition.org/children

IDC Children's Campaign

Background

Every day, all around the world, tens of thousands of children and young people are affected by immigration detention.

An unknown number of minors, potentially many thousands, are detained. These include refugees and asylum seekers, trafficking victims, and economic and environmental migrants. They are incarcerated in detention centres, jails, police cells, and in closed refugee camps, often in squalid conditions.

Malaysia

I got one small bowl of food a day. We were never allowed to go outside. In the night I had to give massages to some of the men.

- Burmese boy, detained in Malaysia and separated from his mother

While some are released shortly after being arrested, some are detained for months or even years. In many places, children, even those who are unaccompanied, are detained with adults. Children also are affected by the detention of their parents or guardians, even

when the children themselves are not detained.

Whether detained themselves or impacted by the detention of their guardians, children and young people are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Because they are minors, often they are unable to advocate for their social, legal and economic rights.

The detention of children often contravenes international laws and conventions. The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children should be detained only as a last resort. According to the UNHCR's 1999 Revised Guidelines on the Detention of Asylum Seekers, children who are asylum seekers 'should not be detained.'

Australia

I felt like I knocked on someone's door for help and instead he locked me up.

- Essan, 17, from Afghanistan

The general prohibition on the detention of children is in recognition that detention can have significant negative impacts on their health and well-being. Studies have

shown that the detention of children undermines their cognitive, emotional and physical development. In a number of countries government records confirm the findings of scholarly research, detailing that detained children suffer anxiety, distress, bed-wetting, suicidal ideation and self-destructive behaviour including attempted and actual self-harm.' Other children suffered from specific psychiatric illnesses such as depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Greece

Some police guys took us to a small prison. There were too many people there. We were living in one big hall. We were eating together inside that place. We were not able to go outside. We walking inside that place until we get our freedom. It was very difficult. Because I come from a very bad situation.

- Hassan, 16, detained in Greece.

United States

I was really confused and stuff. I was kind of like ...cos it was really small. And being in that space, kind of like tripped something in my mind. Like I felt like an animal. I felt, and I was believing myself that I was bad. Like I had something that other people could see, but I couldn't see...and I started believing that I deserved to be there.

- Carlos, 16, from Honduras

United States

I felt bad ... because I always felt as if I was locked up. We couldn't go outside. I cried a lot because it reminded me of when I was locked up in the kidnapping.

- Maria, 17, from Honduras, who was kidnapped on the Mexican border en route to the US