

Immigration lawyers acting for asylum seekers are "unAustralian". Respond.

The question of Australian identity is often one that is met with much controversy and media coverage. Immigration lawyers are no exception to this; the recent public comments by Peter Dutton which accused immigration lawyers of being "Un-Australian," were met with a diverse spectrum of public opinions, ranging from very supportive to downright disgust. However, let me remind you of an instrumental piece of statutory legislation - the Australian Citizenship Act 2007 (cth). By definition, being "Australian" is a title that can be automatically acquired as a birth right, through adoption or as an abandoned child who happens to be within Australian borders. It can also be earned by descent or through an application to the Department of Home Affairs. However, at the same time, this may be revoked - the case of Khaled Sharrouf, the first individual to be stripped of his citizenship for terrorist-related offences enforced under the Australian Citizenship Amendment (Allegiance to Australia) Bill 2015 S33AA. So this then raises the question - is representing an asylum seeker as bad as a terrorist-related offence?

Let's analyse examples of where politicians have produced a scathingly blatant critique on this matter. "If you arrive in a leaky boat, we will demonise you for that," "That boat will never land in our waters - never!", "Stop the boats." These are the words of Paul Keating, John Howard, and Tony Abbott, who have been instrumental in the creation of our current asylum seeker policy. They, like every Australian citizen, have the right to speak their mind, the right to education and, as elected leaders of our nation, they also have the right to create legislation. That should mean that we should also respect the rights of those seeking asylum, too right? Well, under article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asylum seekers too, should not be subjected to torture, inhumane or degrading treatment. A fundamental right that should be granted to all people stripped because of a belief that asylum seekers aren't deserving of life, of a fair go. Is now helping achieve justice for those who are less fortunate and suffer daily considered to be an Un-Australian trait?

Let us not forget the circumstances that these Asylum seekers face. According to an investigation by the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees, "The situation is critical. There are many victims of torture, who have been deeply traumatised, having no idea what is going to happen next to them, with each person experiencing on average nine months of indefinite detention, which is much higher than the international average". To put that in perspective, kids my age and adults like the rest of you, will go without education, family or friends for about nine months. The simple values we were raised up with as Australians; selflessness, respect for others, integrity, safety and the importance of health and wellbeing - has that now just disappeared?

The journey for those who seek asylum into Australia isn't exactly pleasurable either. My mother, a refugee from Vietnam, really opened up my eyes to the degrading nature of the asylum seeker situation. She would describe it like this. Imagine yourself, at 11 years-old self, squished with 25 others in a boat, the kind that fishermen drive in developing nations, as the means of transport across the vast oceans in conditions that we would consider life-threatening. From being held at gunpoint by pirates, to being thrown into a detention camp off the coast in Thailand, my mother had faced it all at the age of 11. That was just the

experience of one asylum seeker, and currently, Australia detains 1285 of these in detention facilities.

Now, to the average Australian, we aren't particularly shocked by all this. The amount of asylum seeker related news and the constant verbal and literary communication fed to the public by the government has almost desensitised the nation towards this issue. Sure, there are still protest groups actively fighting for the Asylum seekers, but let me remind you they are indeed a minority. Based on this, we should consider what immigration lawyers do for our Asylum Seekers as genuinely remarkable - in the face of tremendous public adversity, they still brave the public backlash of our politicians to fight for what they believe is right. That, in my opinion, is what I consider truly Australian.

Before you decide on this topic, let me briefly remind you of the travesty that is our asylum seeker policy. Each refugee, who seeks asylum, has gone through weeks of what most of us would call, the most traumatic experience of our lives. Then they arrive on Australian shores, only to be whisked off to an unknown island where, the UN describes as unliveable, filled with rape and violence. On top of that, they remain in a state of complete oblivion with no promise of citizenship - and no, I am not exaggerating. Whilst Australia does face the issue of having their citizenship system exploited by cunning asylum seekers, is our current treatment of the majority of Asylum seekers morally correct? Should humans, people, who also breathe and walk, just like the rest of us, be exploited to such degrading and dehumanising treatment?

Comments like Peter Dutton's only incite fear amongst those who do wish to do good within society, a somewhat ironic statement which shouldn't occur from those who with the intellect of being elected into the "high office of Australia." Therefore, the efforts of GLOMO and other immigration lawyers should be commended. Despite the political propaganda, they remain persistent in their efforts to uphold Australian values of selflessness, bravery and giving everyone "a fair go" - endeavours which need to be recognised rather than scrutinised.