

MEDIA RELEASE

Detention centres meet NGO demands

20 April 2006

Five non-government organisations (NGOs) have announced their success today in encouraging British-owned Global Solutions Ltd (GSL), which runs Australia's immigration detention centres, to implement significant changes to ensure they operate under international human rights standards.

An international complaint to the OECD National Contact Points in the UK and Australia was made in June 2005 by the five NGOs. A final statement and response from the Australian National Contact Point (ANCP) was received on 6 April 2006 outlining agreed outcomes to provide a basis for GSL to improve its administration and operation of immigration detention services within a human rights framework.

"Companies have obligations under international human rights standards and this is the first time that these responsibilities have been examined in an official complaints procedure in Australia using the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises," Serena Lillywhite from the Brotherhood of St Laurence said today.

"The outcome of this case in particular means greater accountability for those operating Australian immigration detention centres, which has been of great concern to the Brotherhood of St Laurence and our partners in this complaint for some time."

Patrick Earle from the Human Rights Council of Australia said evidence of a range of human rights violations were outlined in the complaint. "The company has now accepted the value of applying international human rights standards to its operations. If international standards had been applied in the past, the human rights violations that have been associated with the detention of asylum seekers could have been avoided."

Mr Earle also called on "the Australian government to match the commitment of GSL to introduce measures to ensure human rights standards guide its policy and practice".

Elizabeth Evatt, representing the International Commission of Jurists, said that the key outcomes of the case include GSL agreeing that international human rights standards should provide the framework for its operations.

"GSL has undertaken to implement some significant changes and they have accepted the urgent need to seek advice from external and independent human rights experts. The process brought about a new attitude and willingness to respond positively to human rights issues, something that might otherwise have not been possible," Ms Evatt said.

“This will include GSL agreeing to review the GSL community advisory committee to ensure human rights experts are involved, revising their internal monitoring processes to allow for external scrutiny and the engagement of human rights experts to deliver training to GSL staff.”

The NGOs caution that the real success of the outcome of the case will only be measured by the actual implementation by GSL of its undertakings to respect international human rights standards in its operation of the detention centres. NGOs welcome the fact that the OECD Australian National Contact Point has agreed, at their request, to forward findings to DIMA, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Immigration Detention Advisory Committee.

The five NGOS are the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID), the Human Rights Council of Australia (HRCA), Children Out of Detention (ChilOut) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL).

Media contacts:

Serena Lillywhite (BSL) at +61 (0)3 9483 1379

Patrick Earle (HRCA) at +61(0) 401 932 196

Elizabeth Evatt (ICJ) at +61 (0) 411 151 367