



Justice for the next Generation? The Collapse of Values

Hobart Oration 23 July 2018: by Julian Burnside ¹
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The two great issues our generation is leaving the next are climate change and the treatment of refugees.

Climate change

I have no hesitation in saying that climate change is the number one issue today: refugees are a second-order issue, but they just happen to be the issue which has captured my attention.

Both are issues which the next generation will have to solve, if humanity is to survive and flourish.

It is often overlooked that climate change has been known about for a long time. The foundations were laid by the French mathematician Joseph Fourier, who noted that the Earth was too far from the Sun to account for a temperature which could support life, unless the atmosphere trapped some of the sun's heat.

Later the Irish physicist John Tyndall identified the role of water vapour, CO₂ and methane as the key factors in trapping infra-red heat and thus maintaining atmospheric temperature.

Fourier's work was done in 1824, Tyndal's in 1859. Later a Swedish chemist, Svante Arrhenius, named the 'Greenhouse effect' and calculated the relationship between CO₂ levels and atmospheric temperature with astonishing accuracy. That was in 1896.

Let's take a moment to look at what Australia is doing — or not doing — on climate change.

In November 2016 an expert advisory panel reported that coal-fired Queensland, with just 7% of its power generation from renewables at present, could lift that to 50% by 2030 with very little cost to electricity consumers. The Queensland government would subsidise renewables. The federal energy minister, Josh Frydenberg criticised the report.

We are a uniquely embarrassing case on the global stage: the Gillard Government put in place a fairly comprehensive domestic climate policy with a carbon price by that was later dismantled. Our emissions have risen every year since. Malcolm Turnbull has failed to adopt policies any more advanced than those of the troglodyte



Tony Abbott. Conservative politics in Australia will have to be dragged kicking and screaming towards energy sector reform.

To watch Malcolm Turnbull fade into a shadow of what he could have been is to watch the slow destruction of a man the country once respected on many of our most important issues. He seems unable to lead his party, and has capitulated to the hard right: intellectual giants like Tony Abbott, Peter Dutton and Eric Abetz — particularly on the issues of climate change and refugees — that Australia's global reputation on climate change has gone from global leader to global threat.

Since the world signed the Paris Agreement, here are some of our "achievements":

- Tony Abbott asked the mining industry to "demonstrate its gratitude" to the retiring Federal Resources Minister — Ian MacFarlane — who had dismantled the mining tax. The Industry paid attention, and MacFarlane got a \$500k per year job with the Queensland Resources Council — on top of his \$140k Parliamentary pension — so he can spruik for the Adani Carmichael coal mine in Queensland. And Abbott recently expressed regret that he had signed Australia up to the Paris Agreement in the first place.
- The government fast-tracked the Adani coal mine in Queensland — one of the biggest coal basins in the world which, if developed, would blow any chance the world has of remaining below 2 degrees of global warming. It continues to press for the Adani mine to go ahead.
- It has attacked environmental groups standing up for the world's climate and trying to protect our natural environment. The Turnbull Government launched a two-pronged attack on environmental groups — the first attack: seeking to amend the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. This Act allows groups and individuals to legally challenge resource projects if they are a threat to water or the environment. It is an incredibly important provision — introduced by the Howard Government — that allows for a check on the Government's power. The second attack: on the tax-deductible status of environmental not-for-profits. This is an attempt to silence groups who are standing up against fossil fuel projects. Recent changes introduced by the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2018

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present an additional threat to environmental groups with foreign affiliation.

- In May of 2016 it was revealed that the government censored a UN report on the extent of bleaching in the Great Barrier Reef and how much of a role climate change had to play in it. In 2016 the health of the reef got a "D" on the Australian government's annual report card for the fifth year in a row and large-scale bleaching in the northern part of the reef threatens to see it never return to a productive state. To put this in perspective, the world's coral reefs have perished before, but they recovered... 10,000 years later. That should be encouraging for the Great Barrier Reef tourist operators.
- The Government launched an ideological war on renewable energy after the notorious South Australian blackout. It culminated in Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg trying to bully the states out of their ambitious renewable energy targets and pushing them instead to focus on promoting onshore gas production.
- The Australian government actively resisted and watered-down restrictions on financing of coal plants by OECD export credit agencies in 2015 because the government wants more coal plants to be built so that there are new markets for Australian coal.

And we thought Donald Trump was embarrassing!

By exporting our coal, we are exporting our emissions to other countries that we are not required to take responsibility for under our UN climate commitments. Just Australia's domestic emissions equate to 1.5% of the world's carbon emissions – 16th in the world.

However, if we add emissions from our exported coal to our domestic emissions, Australia's carbon footprint trebles in size and we become the **6th largest emitter** after China, the USA, Russia, India and Indonesia – all of which have populations over 250 million.

Even worse is that if the proposed Adani coal mine and development of the Galilee Basin goes ahead, we would be responsible for 705 million tonnes of CO₂ per year.

This is at a time when reports are telling us that if there is any chance of avoiding the 'safe' 2 degree warming scenario that no new fossil fuel projects can go ahead, and that current ones need to be scaled back.

It is up to us – Australian citizens – to lead the way on climate and make the moral case for climate change leadership.

And still the climate change deniers are taken seriously by our media.

We need to force our politicians to consider the precautionary principle. About 97% of the world's climate scientists accept that climate change is real, anthropogenic and dangerous. Deniers would point out that science is not decided by popular vote. True enough, although it is sometimes useful to listen to people who know what they are talking about. But let's accept it: the scientists may be wrong.

Let's give odds of 80% against the scientists: that is, let's assume there is an 80% chance they are wrong. But if they are right, if the 20% chance comes in, the result will be catastrophic and avoidable. 20% chance of a catastrophic, avoidable result is worse

odds than Russian Roulette. So next time someone argues the denialist case, ask them if they are willing to play Russian Roulette with their children or grand-children.

And let's face it: if we spend the money to avoid climate change, and if the denialists turn out to be right, the worst you can say is that we cleaned up the planet for no reason...

Refugees

It is tempting to reach far back into history for the origins of human rights thinking. But it is not necessary to go back further than 1948.

The Universal Declaration was the work of a surprising activist: Eleanor Roosevelt. She was the widow of Franklin Delano Roosevelt who had died shortly before the end of the Second World War. She was also cousin to Roosevelt and had grown up in the rich surroundings of the Roosevelt family. But Eleanor Roosevelt was a genuine egalitarian and had set her heart on responding decisively to the horrors of the Second World War.

The Universal Declaration begins as follows:

PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law, ...

It's not widely remembered that Australia was advocating that the rights it declared should be enforceable. The inspiration for that of course came from the fact that Ben Chifley was the Prime Minister at the time and Doc Evatt, uniquely among Australians, was the President of the General Assembly on 10 December 1948 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations. Australia's influence in the formation of the declaration was very significant, especially considering that we only had a population of about 3.5 million back then.

I like to think that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a genuine reflection of the sentiment of the times: across Australia and across the world.

But things changed. At the start of 2001, John Howard was facing an election to be held in November that year. He played what he probably hoped would be a trump card and which turned out to be more successful than his devious mind could have dared hope for. He became aware that a small boat, the Palapa, carrying Hazara refugees from Afghanistan was falling apart in the Indian Ocean. He knew the Norwegian container ship the MV Tampa was in the area. He asked the Tampa to rescue the people on the Palapa.

The captain of the Tampa agreed, and when he found the Palapa he thought it might hold maybe 50 people. He was astonished when 434 people climbed out of the water, up the rope ladder and onto the deck of the Tampa.

Australia – indeed the whole world – knew about the Taliban's murderous attitude to Hazaras. In February that year, the Taliban had publicly destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas. The statues had been erected 1500 years earlier by Hazaras – thought to be descendants of Genghis Khan – when they arrived in the area now known as Afghanistan. Hazaras are readily identifiable, because they look Asian. They were Buddhists when they arrived, but later converted to Islam. But they embraced Shia Islam. The Taliban are Sunni Muslims, and claimed that they wanted to clear Afghanistan of idolatry. The division between Shia and Sunni Muslims is as sharp as the division between Protestants and Roman Catholics used to be.

When the Tampa had rescued the refugees on the Palapa, there were two problems: some of them were in bad shape and needed medical help. And the Tampa was licensed to carry 50 people: it had 47 crew, and (suddenly) 434 unexpected passengers.

Captain Arne Rinnan decided to put the refugees ashore at Christmas Island, which was on his planned route.

Christmas Island is a speck of Australian sovereignty in the Indian Ocean. It is close to the equator. It is about 2000 kilometres to the nearest point on the West Australian coast and is almost 3000 kilometres from Perth or Darwin.

When the Tampa tried to reach Christmas Island, Howard sent out the SAS, who took command of the bridge at gunpoint.

A stand-off followed. Howard closed the airspace above Christmas Island, and issued a command that no "humanising images" of the people rescued (they were called "rescuees") should be taken. A group of us went to the Federal Court to try and resolve the impasse: after all, there were more than 400 people – men, women and children – being held hostage on the steel deck of a ship, in the tropical sun. The trial was heard straight away by Justice North in the Federal Court. He delivered judgment at 2.15 pm, Eastern Australian Time, on 11 September 2001. The attack on America happened about 8 hours later.

John Howard, always quick to scramble for a political advantage, started calling boat-people "illegals". The Federal election was held two months later. Howard went to the polls with the slogan "We will decide who comes to the country, and the circumstances in which they come." The coalition election campaign had Philip Ruddock – the walking spectre – as its pin-up boy.

Australia's unhappily named "Pacific Solution" involved taking boat-people from Christmas Island to Manus Island or Nauru.

Manus is part of Papua New Guinea. Nauru is an independent republic. Both are close to the equator. Both are tiny: Nauru is smaller than Tullamarine airport in Melbourne.

Until 2013, when boat people arrived at Christmas Island, they had typically spent eight or 10 days on a rickety boat. They had typically come from landlocked countries and had typically never spent time on the ocean. Typically, they had not had enough to eat or drink on

the voyage. Typically, they had not had any opportunity to wash or to change their clothes. Typically, they arrived distressed, frightened and wearing clothes caked in their own excrement.

They were not allowed to shower or to change their clothes before they were interviewed by a member of the Immigration Department. It is difficult to think of any decent justification for subjecting them to that humiliation.

When they arrived, any medical appliances they have would be confiscated and not returned: spectacles, hearing aids, false teeth, prosthetic limbs: all were confiscated. If they had any medications with them, those medications were confiscated and not returned. According to doctors on Christmas Island, one person had a fulltime job of sitting in front of a bin popping pills out of blister packs for later destruction.

If they had any medical documentation with them, it was confiscated and not returned. The result of all of this was that people with chronic health problems found themselves denied any effective treatment. The results could be very distressing.

Doctors were required to determine within 48 hours whether a person was suitable to be moved to Manus or Nauru. The tests which are necessary for that assessment take seven days to complete. They were not given the opportunity to complete the tests properly. The detainees were nevertheless moved to Nauru or Manus.

One doctor who worked on Christmas Island told me of a woman who had been detained there for some weeks because she was generally regarded as psychotic. Her behaviour was highly erratic, but for reasons no-one understood. The consultation with this woman was very difficult because, although the doctor and the patient were sitting across a table from each other, the interpreter joined them by telephone from Sydney: over 5000 kilometres away.

Eventually, the doctor worked out the problem: the woman was incontinent of urine. She could not leave her cabin without urine running down her leg. It was driving her mad. When the doctor worked out the cause of the problem, she asked the Department to provide incontinence pads. The Department's initial response was "we don't do those". The doctor insisted. The Department relented and provided four per day: more than that would be a fire hazard, they said.

In 2012, the Pacific Solution was revived by Julia Gillard and in 2013 it became much harsher thanks to Kevin Rudd, in his second incarnation as PM.

From 2013, boat people were sent for offshore processing more or less regardless of circumstances. So, for example, we know of cases where some members of a refugee family arrived in Australia before the cut-off date, were assessed as genuine refugees, and have since been settled in the Australian community. But their family had been split up in the course of the journey, and some of the arrived just after the cut-off date, and are still held in Manus or Nauru.

From 19 July 2013, boat people have been sent offshore as a deterrent to others who might be tempted to seek asylum in Australia. Behrooz Bouchani is held on Manus. He has written a book called No Friend but the Mountains. In it he says, at page 133:

"Can it be that I sought asylum in Australia only to be exiled to a place I know nothing about? ... Clearly they are taking us hostage. ... We are being made examples to strike fear into others, to scare people so they won't come to Australia. ..."

Tony Abbott became PM later in 2013 (there's a thought to conjure with) and appointed Scott Morrison as his Immigration Minister. Later, Malcolm Turnbull rolled Abbott, and Turnbull appointed Peter Dutton as his Immigration Minister.

I mention Morrison and Dutton specifically because they are, arguably, the most dishonest hypocrites ever to hold high office in this country. "Dishonest" because they call boat people "illegal", even though the fact is that boat-people do not commit any offence against Australian law by arriving the way they do. "Hypocrites" because they both claim to be Christians, and yet their treatment of asylum seekers has been criticized by every Christian denomination and by the World Council of Churches. Their conduct is irreconcilable with Christian teaching.

So we are led by dishonest hypocrites who trade on sanctimony and imprison innocent children. Right now there are about 125 refugee children on Nauru, living in misery and hopelessness. 40 of them were born in detention and have never experienced a day's freedom in their lives.

Nauru

In the middle of 2016 The Guardian Australia published the Nauru files: more than 2000 incident reports, compiled by workers employed by Australia. More than half of the Nauru files concern mistreatment of children. They range from a guard grabbing a boy and threatening to kill him once he is living in the community to guards slapping children in the face. In September 2014 a teacher reported that a young classroom helper had asked for a four-minute shower instead of a two-minute shower. "Her request has been accepted on condition of sexual favours. It is a male security person. She did not state if this has or hasn't occurred. The security officer wants to view a boy or girl having a shower."

Reading the Nauru files, you learn that in September 2014, a girl had sewn her lips together. A guard saw her and began laughing at her. In July 2014 a child under the age of 10 undressed and invited a group of adults to insert their fingers into her vagina.

Morrison in his maiden speech in parliament said this:

"So what values do I derive from my faith? My answer comes from Jeremiah, chapter 9:24:

... I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the Lord.

From my faith I derive the values of loving-kindness, justice and righteousness, to act with compassion and kindness, acknowledging our common humanity and to consider the welfare of others..."

The Abbott government, with Scott Morrison as Immigration Minister renamed the Department of Immigration and Citizenship: it became the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Under Peter Dutton's "leadership" it became Australian Border Force and was later swept into Home Affairs. Home Affairs was established on 20

December 2017. It combines the national security, law enforcement and emergency management functions of the A-G's Department, the transport security functions of the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, the counterterrorism and cybersecurity functions of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the multicultural affairs functions of the Department of Social Services, and the entire Department of Immigration and Border Protection. It controls the Federal Police, Border Force and ASIO.

Home Affairs is the most powerful ministry in the country, and it is headed by Peter Dutton. It is hard to imagine a worse or more dangerous choice than to elevate a dishonest ex-cop from Queensland to the most powerful ministry in the land. If you feel comfortable and sleep well, you clearly do not understand what is going on.

Manus

The UNHCR recently delivered a report on the state of affairs on Manus. Their report includes these observations:

"UNHCR protection staff and medical experts observed a high level of tension and further deterioration in the mental health of refugees and asylum-seekers on Manus Island. Separation from family members and a deep-seated fear of being abandoned in Papua New Guinea by Australia without adequate support has contributed to an acute sense of insecurity and helplessness..."

Caseworkers visit refugee and asylum-seeker accommodation sites for the purpose of identifying and providing support for vulnerabilities such as medical needs and mental health issues. For people who have withdrawn and are unable to seek assistance, however, no follow up interventions are made. For those with serious mental health needs, such withdrawal may in fact be a sign of greater vulnerability. There is no systematic, ongoing process to identify those at low, medium or high levels of risk, and tailor assistance accordingly. This means that those with the most significant needs have not been monitored on a regular basis since October 2017.

UNHCR staff asked diverse stakeholders who is responsible for follow up of identified vulnerable people, and received inconsistent answers. Service providers work in silos, without clear information as to the role of others – which should be complementary and coordinated.

The Government of Australia has no continuous or regular on the ground presence to coordinate and supervise the fulfilment of contractual obligations by those it has engaged to provide basic assistance and support to refugees and asylum-seekers on Manus Island. The Government of Australia, rather than the Government of Papua New Guinea, is the contracting party for all medical, security, infrastructure, garrison and caseworker services..."

The report includes recommendations:

"...The Government of Australia should ensure that a clear strategy and critical incident response plan includes significantly bolstered mental health support..."

The Government of Australia should immediately identify and secure alternate durable solutions outside of the bilateral arrangement between Australia and the United States of America, including

acceptance of the continuing New Zealand offer. Clear information on all appropriate available options outside of Papua New Guinea should also be communicated to refugees...

Given the increasing mental health needs of the refugee population, the number and expertise of caseworkers should be increased to a level commensurate to different degrees of risk and vulnerability...

There is an urgent need for outreach medical care, enhanced general medical and specialist mental health care. The tragic death of a Rohingya refugee on 22 May 2018 underscores the criticality of these unmet needs..."

Reza Berati

In February 2014 Reza Berati was killed on Manus Island. Initially, Australia said that he had escaped from the detention centre and was killed outside the detention centre. Soon it became clear that he was killed inside the detention centre. It took nearly five months before anyone was charged with the murder of Reza Berati.

Curiously, tellingly, Scott Morrison went public after Reza Berati was killed. He said Berati had escaped the detention centre, and had been killed by locals. He said:

"...[T]his was a very dangerous situation where people decided to protest in a very violent way and to take themselves outside the centre and place themselves at great risk..."

By making up this lie, Morrison inadvertently disclosed a serious truth: that the locals on Manus are extremely hostile to the refugees.

Just a couple of weeks after Reza Berati was killed, I received a sworn statement from an eyewitness, Benham Satah. The statement included the following:

"J ... is a local who worked for the Salvation Army. ... He was holding a large wooden stick. It was about a metre and a half long ... it had two nails in the wood. The nails were sticking out ...

When Reza came up the stairs, J ... was at the top of the stairs waiting for him. J ... said 'fuck you motherfucker' J ... then swung back behind his shoulder with the stick and took a big swing at Rezaa, hitting him on top of the head.

J ... screamed again at Reza and hit him again on the head. Reza then fell on the floor ...

I could see a lot of blood coming out of his head, on his forehead, running down his face. His blood is still there on the ground. He was still alive at this stage.

About 10 or 15 guards from G4S came up the stairs. Two of them were Australians. The rest were PNG locals. I know who they are. I can identify them by their face. They started kicking Reza in his head and stomach with their boots.

Reza was on the ground trying to defend himself. He put his arms up to cover his head but they were still kicking.

There was one local ... I recognized him ... he picked up a big rock ... he lifted the rock above his head and threw it down hard on top of Reza's head. At this time, Reza passed away.

One of the locals came and hit him in his leg very hard ... but Reza did not feel it. This is how I know he was dead.

After that, as the guards came past him, they kicked his dead body on the ground ..."

A short time later, Benham Satah was taken into the Wilson Security cabin in the detention centre. Wilson Security provide the guard services on Manus and Nauru, and in your local park. They are incorporated in Panama, presumably to avoid the inconvenience of paying Australian tax on the vast amounts they are paid by the Australian government. The Wilson Security people tied Benham Satah to a chair and beat him up. They told him that, unless he withdrew his witness statement, they would take him outside the camp, where he would be raped and killed by locals.

By their threat, the Wilson Security people echoed what Morrison had conveyed: that the locals on Manus are extremely hostile to the refugees.

Several Australians involved in the killing of Reza Berati were, conveniently, able to return to Australia before any charges were laid. The people who were, eventually, two years later, convicted of murder were somehow able to escape from prison.

Benham Satah is still on Manus, still living in fear of retribution.

The treatment of boat people in offshore detention is dreadful, and I am glad that Behrooz Bouchani will be speaking to us later: it's our loss that he has to speak to us electronically rather than in person.

Peter Dutton recently had to deal with a suggestion that some people should be brought from Manus to Australia as a matter of compassion. He said:

"It's essential that people realise that the hard-won success of the last few years could be undone overnight by a single act of compassion in bringing 20 people from Manus to Australia..."

How many people in this country – how many people in this hall – would have believed it possible, even 5 years ago, that a senior Minister of the Crown would publicly dismiss the possibility of compassion?

And this from the most powerful politician in the country. But he's not invincible: for some years now I have publicly called him a dishonest hypocrite, but he has not sued for defamation. I repeat it now: Peter Dutton is a dishonest hypocrite. Dishonest, because he calls boat-people "illegal". They aren't. A hypocrite because he claims to be a Christian, but his wilful mistreatment of refugees is the exact opposite of what Christianity teaches. And now he is arguing against compassion!

In the tumult of news we get every day, especially that rich and varied diet produced by Donald Trump, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that a Minister of the Crown urged us not to act with compassion. He is the same person who recently reduced the social welfare entitlements of people living in the Australian community as they wait

for their refugee status to be decided. The government has just cut the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) program that provides a basic living allowance, casework support, help in finding housing, and access to torture and trauma counselling. Before the cuts, the SRSS payments amounted to about 89% of Newstart allowance: just \$247 per week.

Newstart is hardly the most generous scheme in the world. Surviving on \$247 per week (\$35 per day) would be unbelievably hard. In 2016, between 28 March and 2 April, Dutton attended the UNHCR high-level meeting on global responsibility sharing through pathways for admission of Syrian Refugees. He claimed expenses of \$36,221.80 for those days. That is, roughly \$8000 per day on top of his parliamentary salary, which amounts to a bit over \$940 per day (\$343 thousand per year). And since we are talking numbers, keeping refugees in offshore detention costs us about \$570 thousand per person per year. To put that in perspective, it is equal to about 44 years worth of SRSS payments. So, if we decided to put an end to the cruelty of indefinite offshore detention, we could put every refugee on SRSS for 40 years, and actually save money.

Many members of the Coalition seek to make their anti-refugee stance look respectable, and even morally worthy, by saying that they are worried about refugees drowning, so they need to deter people from using people smugglers to get to Australia. More hypocrisy: I do not for one minute believe them. They are not being sincere or honest when they express concern about people drowning: if they were genuinely concerned about people drowning, they would not punish the ones who don't drown. They would not use the survivors as hostages, to deter others from trying to get here.

If our politicians were genuinely concerned about people drowning in their attempts to escape persecution, why are we not allowed to know the fate of people whose boats are turned back? We are told this is an "on-water matter". If boats are turned back, there is clearly a risk of people drowning, but we know nothing of it. If people are deterred from trying to come here and instead head to the Mediterranean, they still risk drowning, but we know nothing of it. And if our deterrent measures persuade them to stand their ground and they are killed by their persecutors, they are just as dead as if they had drowned, but we know nothing of it.

We are not well-served by our Coalition government: it has lied to us repeatedly on this issue, and has induced the country to descend into behaviour which contradicts our national values.

We are not well-served by the Labor party, which has never contradicted the Coalition's lies. If the Labor Party had a shred of decency, Bill Shorten would make a speech before the next election in which he would tell the nation what we are actually doing. Imagine the impact if the Murdoch press reported Shorten saying:

"Men and women of Australia.

We are not behaving well.

Australia is paying billions of dollars a year to hold people hostage on Nauru and Manus.

They arrived in Australia seeking to be protected from persecution. Most of them are genuine refugees. Australia took them to Nauru or Manus by force, against their will.

For 17 years, the Coalition has, called them "illegal". They aren't "illegal". We should have pointed out that the Coalition was lying to you. We didn't. I am sorry we didn't.

The way we are treating refugees is a betrayal of what Australia stands for.

What does this country stand for? The statement of national values, which was introduced by the Turnbull government and is now part of the citizenship ceremony, says in part:

"I understand Australian society values respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual, freedom of religion ... and a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect, tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good; ..."

If that is who we are, then what we are doing to refugees is simply un-Australian.

It is un-Australian to mistreat innocent people, which we are doing to people held on Manus and Nauru.

It is un-Australian to hold innocent people hostage, which we are doing to people held on Manus and Nauru.

It is un-Australian for political leaders to lie to the public in order to frighten them into tolerating the wilful mistreatment of innocent people.

If the Turnbull government was honest, it would have included something about cruelty and dishonesty in the statement of Australian value

I am sorry it has taken us so long to tell you truthfully what is being done in your name..."

But somehow, I don't think Bill Shorten has the courage to make a speech like that.

And, if I may return to the issue of climate change, here's a thought to finish on. If the Tony Abbott attitude to climate change ultimately prevails, then in 8 or 10 generations we will all be history. The collapse of agriculture and of complex supply lines will spell the end for most members of the human race. Presumably there will be some survivors: the Kalahari bushmen, the Inuit, the outback aborigines...

So: if the Tony Abbott view of climate change ultimately prevails, the Aborigines will get their land back. I'm not sure that is what he intends.

About Grandparents Victoria

Grandparents Victoria is a state - wide non-for-profit organisation of grandparents who believe that grandparents have a role to play in supporting families, particularly children.

GPV believes that:

- Grandparents have an important role within their families, their communities and as global citizens
- The needs of families are complex and collective action by grandparents to support families is required

GPV understands that grandparents are a valuable resource with wide ranging skills and knowledge. They play a role in voicing opinion and reminding decision makers the importance of investing in society's future.

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