

Voice of Shakthi Thursday 29 June 2000

There is no getting away from the fact that living as we do in affluent countries such as Australia, we are gradually joining the ranks of those who suffer from a peculiar illness which affect people from developed countries known as "compassion [fatigue](#)

."

The theory goes that well-to-do people in the West are so tired by the scenes of misery and horror they see everyday on their TV screens, that the milk of human kindness is quickly beginning to dry up. So the tendency nowadays, we are told, is to watch events which can have shattering consequences on thousands or tens of thousands of innocent lives in a far corner of the world and then quickly go back to your very nice evening meal.

And our popular TV channels try to spare us from all this horror as much as possible too. No matter how great the tragedy, no matter the damage caused to people physically and psychologically, you can be certain that many TV stations will cover such events in ten seconds flat. Which makes it even more easier for us to forget about it as soon as possible!

Is it any wonder then that this easy-to-digest [news](#) also produces just as easy solutions too? Take for instance the recent horrible deaths of 58 young Chinese men and women who tried to smuggle themselves into Britain inside a refrigerated [truck](#).

Their agony and suffering as they fought for breath inside the vehicle has been given great publicity in the media. But how many have bothered to think why young men and women in their prime would risk everything they have to undertake such a risky enterprise. According to reports, this was not the first time this particular group had tried to enter Britain illegally.

Right on our door-step here are the boatpeople from Iran and Afghanistan who brave stormy seas, crocodile infested waters, deserts and swamps of northern Queensland as they try to enter Australia from nearby Indonesia. As our Minister for Immigration, Mr Phillip Ruddock tells us, no one knows how many hundreds have lost their lives in making this perilous journey.

After braving these hazards they are not made to feel very welcome in this country either. They are promptly locked away in concentration-camps, as far away from human habitation as possible in desert areas where temperatures average 50 degrees. But yet they come, not in the tens of thousands as in Europe but in numbers large enough for the Honorable Minister to express deep concern.

How many people in Australia feel genuine compassion for these unfortunate people who risk their very lives to escape the tyranny and terror of their homelands?. Most importantly, how many of us from less affluent countries who have been lucky enough to find a home in Australia, empathise with and

relate to their plight? Once upon a time, many of us too wanted to leave our homelands by fair means or foul for various reasons, many of us have experienced what it is to give up everything we held dear, our families, our friends, our possessions in order to make a new life in a totally [alien](#) environment.

Or have we forgotten our origins to such an extent that we can adopt the "compassion-fatigue" of the affluent? And we can dismiss the plight of such refugees, as Minister Ruddock seems to do, by labelling them criminals, undesirables, people jumping the queue?

It is time for us to examine these issues, not in terms of dollars and cents many of today's problems are reduced to by our political leaders, but from the point of view of human dignity and the inalienable right of every human being to a full and dignified life.