

# The Sydney Morning Herald

News and Features - Letters

## Letters

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12

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## Cardinal failure to dismiss bill of rights over Zimbabwe

The comments by Cardinal George Pell, using the example of Zimbabwe as proof that having a bill or charter of human rights is not effective, are less than convincing. The dire situation in Zimbabwe is a result of a total failure of both the Government and the judiciary to protect those rights. No one who advocates a bill of rights claims that it will withstand tyrants such as Robert Mugabe, who has an army to administer his rule and gives little credence to genuine democracy or the human rights of his people.

Why would we think that Australia, alone among the world's democracies, does not need a bill or charter of rights? Nothing is infallible but at least a bill or charter sets ground rules. One of the advantages of developing such a firm statement about what we believe to be inalienable human rights is that we might, as a nation, enter into a real and deep discussion on the subject - something we have never really done.

Dorothy McRae-McMahon Rozelle

Any legitimacy that Cardinal Pell may claim to damn the introduction of an Australian bill of rights is diminished by his silence through the recent abuse of non-citizens.

Where was his voice when children were weeping, wetting their beds and banging their heads in terror in desert and city detention centres? Where was the call for respect for personal liberty in a country that claims to be a democracy when people seeking our protection were locked up for years?

Cardinal Pell's claims that politicians are more accountable than judges because they are elected may be technically true but it has been demonstrated by recent events that this is no substitute for enshrining our human rights in law and beyond the machinations of crafty politicians.

Pamela Curr Brunswick (Vic)

## Hicks case proves the point

It is ironic that the day the inquiry into the Mohamed Haneef case opens, the matter of David Hicks resurfaces ("Hicks case flawed all along, says prosecutor", April 30). It is becoming clear that there may also need to be an inquiry into the case of David Hicks, especially regarding the Australian government's obligations to its citizens overseas, regardless of the nature of charges brought against them. It should never be forgotten that early last year the then prime minister, John Howard, said he could have had Hicks repatriated at any time. Instead, Hicks was abandoned to an obviously flawed process. How can it be argued that we are not in need of a bill of rights?

Dennis Hale Beecroft