

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Sunday, 18 January 2015

Subscribe and become a member here: <http://www.safecom.org.au/ref-member.htm>

1. Coalition climate policy under fire hottest year on record
2. PM warned over undermining courts by attack on magistrate
3. Hicks officially innocent, Pentagon admits
4. Antony Loewenstein: WikiLeaks more important than ever for free speech
5. Jonathan Holmes: We're all supporters of free speech ... when it suits us
6. Richard Ackland: Gillian Triggs is the Australian's latest victim
7. Don't shoot the messenger, Gillian Triggs tells critics
8. Gillian Triggs: Committing a crime does not mean forfeiting human rights
9. Sri Lanka coup allegations worth investigating: Gordon Weiss
10. MEDIA RELEASE: Mass hunger strike & protest sweeps Manus Island
11. Manus Island detention centre riot claim refuted
12. More than 100 Manus Island asylum seekers go on hunger strike
13. Hundreds of asylum seekers stage protest on Manus Island
14. Manus hunger striker pleads to see daughter before he dies
15. Guards could use PNG police to end Manus Island protest
16. Detention centre at risk of another riot as 500 join hunger strike
17. Manus Island asylum seeker hunger strike escalates protest
18. Asylum seeker on Manus Island 'swallows razor blades'
19. Manus Island asylum seekers write to Minister Dutton
20. MEDIA RELEASE: Protests & self-harm escalate on Manus Island
21. Detainees continue self-harm on fourth day of protests
22. Peter Dutton 'worried' about 'volatile' Manus Island protests
23. Peter Dutton warns asylum seekers their protests will fail
24. Hunger strikers collapse as unrest grips detention centre
25. MEDIA RELEASE: Security guards attack Manus compounds
26. Violent clashes break out between PNG police and detainees
27. MEDIA RELEASE: Tensions high as Manus hunger strike protest continues
28. Hunger strikes continue as detainees vow not to give up protests
29. Police, refugees reportedly clash on Manus Island
30. PNG government denies reports of Manus Island clashes
31. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus in meltdown
32. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus witch hunt for protest leaders
33. Asylum seekers barricade Manus compounds, issue letter
34. Shopper verbalised for wearing pro-asylum seeker shirt
35. The Smith Street Band attacks Tony Abbott's refugee policy
36. Australia and Cambodia delegations make secret Nauru visit
37. Months after deal, no refugees choose Cambodia as new home
38. MEDIA RELEASE: Refugee activists appeal to Minister about hunger striker
39. Hunger-striking asylum seeker paints grim detention picture
40. Advocates write to UN over detention at Darwin Wickham Point
41. Red-alert asylum seeker in Villawood refusing food
42. Asylum seeker on hunger strike sent to hospital
43. Tony Abbott calls new Sri Lankan leader about the boats

1. Coalition climate policy under fire after 2014 shown to be hottest year on record

Labor environment spokesman says: 'Tony Abbott is frozen in time while the world warms around us' following release of Nasa-Noaa global warming data

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Saturday 17 January 2015 15.35 AEST

Anthony Albanese has attacked the Coalition's record on climate change following new data showing 2014 was the hottest year on record.

The Labor frontbencher says Tony Abbott can no longer ignore the evidence on climate change.

Data released on Saturday by Nasa and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (Noaa) confirmed last year as the hottest 12 months since record-keeping began in 1880.

Albanese criticised the government for removing a cap on carbon pollution and damaging the renewable energy industry.

"Tony Abbott is frozen in time while the world warms around us," he said.

Albanese said the government should join climate change discussions before the 2015 United Nations climate change conference in Paris.

"(The G20 was) a pathetic and embarrassing attempt to ensure there was indeed no discussion of climate change on the agenda, but of course that happened anyway," he said.

Albanese told reporters Labor would not reintroduce a carbon tax, but rather introduce a cap and trade system.

"But we've said very clearly, our principles are there ... of having a price on carbon, having a cap on the amount of emissions."

Environment minister Greg Hunt rejected claims that a price on carbon would benefit emissions reduction targets.

"Emissions fell by six times the rate in the five years before the carbon tax than they did under the carbon tax," he said.

"The ALP must make clear what will be the electricity slug they are proposing for Australian families and pensioners."

In 2014, the average global temperature was 0.69C above the 20th century average, beating the previous record-holding years of 2005 and 2010 by 0.04C.

The international data came a week after the Bureau of Meteorology confirmed Australia in 2014 experienced its third hottest year – and hottest decade – on record.

Professor Will Steffen of the Climate Council said incidences of heatwaves, bushfires and other extreme weather in Australia are increasing.

"Climate change is a major factor in the increase in extreme heat that Australians have experienced over the last few decades," Prof Steffen said.

"Heatwaves are becoming hotter, longer and more frequent. This is worsening bushfire danger weather."

The long-term warming trend has been driven by the increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuels, he said.

Climate change groups say the Nasa-Noaa data shows now is the time to act.

"Australians were right on the front line of climate change in 2014, experiencing deadly heatwaves, bushfires and other extreme weather," said Victoria McKenzie-McHarg of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/17/coalition-climate-policy-under-fire-after-2014-shown-to-be-hottest-year-on-record>

2. PM warned over undermining courts by attack on magistrate

The Age

January 16, 2015 - 4:31PM
Michael Gordon

Tony Abbott has been warned that he risks undermining public confidence in the courts by attacking the decision of a senior Victorian magistrate to grant bail to an alleged terrorist sympathiser.

The Prime Minister has said he can understand that people are "aghast" at the decision to grant bail to Khodr Moustafa Taha, who has been accused of threatening police and using social media to support terrorist group Islamic State.

"This is someone who appears to have a history of violence, a commitment to extremism and he has made explicit threats against the police," the Prime Minister told Fairfax Radio on Wednesday.

"It does seem a very, very questionable bit of judicial judgment – injudicious judgment by the judiciary. That's how it seems to me."

Mr Abbott's attack is not supported by an examination of the case by the Victorian Office Of Public Prosecutions and has been criticised by the Law Institute of Victoria and the Human Rights Law Centre.

While Victoria Police asked the Victorian Office of Public Prosecutions to consider an appeal against the decision by Deputy Chief Magistrate Jelena Popovic, the office has rejected the request after reviewing the case.

"The Director (of public prosecutions) has carefully considered this request for an appeal, and has concluded that an appeal pursuant to Section 18A Bail Act 1977 should not be brought," a spokesperson for the office told Fairfax Media.

"From the available material, we do not detect any clear error, or error that can be inferred, or miscarriage of approach in the way the magistrate approached this case," the spokesperson said.

Ms Popovic made the bail decision last week, saying the conditions imposed would reduce any risk.

The matter will return to her on 22 January 2015, when the OPP says the question of bail "can be re-ventilated then if necessary".

While not commenting on the case, the State Attorney-General, Martin Pakula, has asked the Department of Justice to examine if there are any "gaps" in the state's bail laws.

The president of the Law Institute of Victoria, Katie Miller, described Mr Abbott's remarks as "unhelpful", saying it was well-established that it was not appropriate for politicians to comment on cases still before the courts.

"We are talking about the integrity of the court system and its processes and magistrates need to make decisions based on the evidence before them and not on political comments that might be made through the media," Ms Miller told Fairfax Media.

"That's not just about fairness to the accused. It's also about ensuring that the public has confidence in the court processes and that they are independent from government."

While Ms Miller said she had every confidence that magistrates made decisions based on the facts before them and without regard to political commentary, she added: "What these unhelpful comments do is raise the question in the minds of the public of whether a magistrate is going to make a decision based on fear of possible criticism from a politician."

Hugh de Kretser, the executive director of the Human Rights Law Centre, said Mr Abbott's comments went "too far", adding that it was open to the prosecution to appeal if they felt a magistrate had erred.

"These comments aren't isolated. The government is criticising the courts for decisions it doesn't like," Mr de Kretser said.

"It's attacking the Australian Human Rights Commission for doing its job and has slashed its funding. It's cut the funds of NGOs that criticise it and changed funding agreements to make it harder for NGOs to speak out."

Mr Abbott said in the radio interview that he accepted the doctrine of the separation of powers, "but you really want to see a bit of common sense on the bench". The case is back before Ms Popovic next week.

Tensions between the judiciary and the federal government last flared in 2002, when the then chief justice of the Federal Court, Michael Black, effectively accused then immigration minister Philip Ruddock of intruding on judicial independence and trying to pressure the court over appeals by asylum seekers.

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/pm-warned-over-undermining-courts-by-attack-on-magistrate-20150116-12rx55.html>

3. Hicks officially innocent, Pentagon admits

Civil Liberties Australia

By Bill Rowlings, CEO

Posted by CLA Editorial Team on 11 January 2015

The government lie that claimed David Hicks committed any crime is now done and dusted, officially.

Hicks was, and is, innocent of any crime he has been charged with.

The lie that he was a terrorist who had committed a crime was promoted by the Howard government, notably Prime Minister John Howard and Attorney-General Philip Ruddock, and by the Pentagon and US Administration. It has been perpetuated by the Abbott government, notably by AG George Brandis. But all their claims have now been officially admitted to be false and wrong in law.

The Australian government faces the prospect of a considerable payout – in the many millions of dollars range – to Hicks for false imprisonment and for defamation.

Hicks was sold to US forces in Afghanistan in December 2001 by the Northern Alliance militia for about \$6000. He was kidnapped by the US and flown secretly to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba, where he remained for six years and was tortured, he says. His claim is entirely believable, because the CIA and the US military have now admitted being involved in torture at Guantanamo.

In February 2007, Hicks was repatriated to Australia after agreeing to a plea deal on the single charge of “providing material support for terrorism”. At the time, Hicks says, he was being beaten and being deprived of sleep.

He was given a seven-year suspended sentence by the Guantanamo kangaroo court on what has turned out to be a non-legal charge. At the behest of the US Administration, Hicks was jailed in Australia for nine months at Yatala prison in Adelaide to complete the terms of his sentence.

Essentially, Hicks “copped a plea” to get out of the torture hellhole that was Guantanamo. But, as it turns out, the “crime” that the Pentagon and US Administration – and the Howard government – claimed Hicks had committed was, in fact, not a crime. There was no such crime (material support for terrorism) on the statute books of the USA.

The Pentagon, after years of claiming the white was black, has now in 2015 finally admitted white is white, and Hicks is innocent...and could never have been guilty.

On Friday, 9 January 2015, a former prisoner of Guantanamo won a legal victory in the US, a year after he was sent back to his homeland in Sudan, the US Military Times newspaper reported in relation to another case with the same charge as that levelled against Hicks.

Noor Uthman Muhammed pleaded guilty in February 2011 at a special US court for wartime offenses known as a military commission. The crime he pleaded guilty to was providing material support to a terrorist organisation and conspiracy.

He was sentenced to 34 months on top of the nine years he had already spent at Guantanamo.

But the Pentagon said on 9 Jan that the charges had been dismissed. A brief statement cited rulings by an appeals court that material support is not a legitimate war crime under the law authorising military commissions.

Noor is officially innocent. Therefore, so too is David Hicks.

Ruddock is still an MP in the federal parliament. He should be called to account by the parliament for why he jailed an Australian who had committed no crime. He, John Howard and their advisers were told clearly at the time by all sorts of people that material support for terrorism was not a legal charge available to the Pentagon and the US Administration, and that Australia should have no part in jailing someone charged with a non-crime.

Howard, Ruddock and Australia had no right to jail Hicks: they acted illegally. Hicks has every right to sue the current Australian government for false imprisonment and for defamation for all the lies told about him being a terrorist and a criminal.

In a world where there was better justice, he would be able to sue the US government also for kidnapping, false imprisonment and torture. But the US government does not play by the rule of law: it refuses to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

<http://www.cla.asn.au/News/hicks-officially-innocent-pentagon-admits/>

4. Antony Loewenstein: WikiLeaks: not perfect, but more important than ever for free speech

Just before Christmas, WikiLeaks released its latest round of explosive leaks. The organisation may not be perfect, but it's more important than ever

The Guardian

Antony Loewenstein

Tuesday 13 January 2015 10.29 AEST

he secret CIA files appeared just before Christmas. One detailed how CIA operatives could maintain cover, using fake IDs, when travelling through foreign airports. Israel's Ben Gurion airport was said to be one of the hardest to trick.

The other document, from 2009, was an assessment of the CIA's assassination program. It raised doubts about the effectiveness of the program in reducing terrorism. Likewise with Israel's killing of Palestinians.

In Afghanistan, the CIA discovered that murdering Taliban leaders could radicalise the militants, allowing even more extreme actors to enter the battlefield. The Obama administration ignored this advice and unleashed "targeted killings" in the country. Unsurprisingly, the insurgency is thriving.

These vital insights into the "war on terror" were released by WikiLeaks and received extensive global coverage.

Since 2010, when WikiLeaks released Collateral Murder, showing American forces killing Iraqi civilians, there have been multiple covert – and public – attempts to silence the organisation. Julian Assange has now been stuck in London's Ecuadorian embassy for two and a half years fighting an extradition order from Sweden over allegations of sexual misconduct. There is an ongoing US grand jury examining the organisation's role in publishing war and State Department cables. On Christmas Eve, WikiLeaks revealed that Google had turned over the Gmail account and metadata of a WikiLeaks employee in response to a US federal warrant.

The organisation's ability to stay afloat – and continue to source and release insightful documents – among all this is remarkable.

There is some good news: Visa and MasterCard are being sued for refusing to allow funds to flow to WikiLeaks, and Assange's lawyers are confident that the current impasse with Sweden will be resolved (although the irregularities over the case are deeply disturbing).

But the reality remains that the public image of Assange has taken a beating after years of legal fights, the botched Australian WikiLeaks political party and constant smears by journalists and politicians. We apparently want our heroes to be mild mannered and non-combative. We supposedly need them to be polite and not uncover countless, dirty abuses by western forces. We clearly don't forgive them for not being perfect. Or perhaps we have a limit to how many war crimes we want to hear about with nobody facing justice? That's hardly WikiLeaks' fault. The group has made mistakes, and will make many more, but as a supporter since its 2006 inception, I'm struck by its resilience.

WikiLeaks has been warning against the dangers of mass surveillance for years. The 2014 Assange book, When Google Met WikiLeaks, features an insightful essay on the dangers of Google's desire to lead American interventionist foreign policy. The book gained headlines across the world. In the month of its release, the organisation offered new documents on German company FinFisher selling its spying equipment to repressive regimes.

The emergence of NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden and his ability to live a relatively free life in Russia is partly thanks to WikiLeaks, which helped him escape Hong Kong and claim asylum in Moscow. Snowden remains free to continue campaigning against the dangers of global surveillance, unlike Chelsea Manning who is now suffering in an American prison for bravely leaking American cables. WikiLeaks' Sarah Harrison, a British citizen, lives in exile in Germany due to fears of returning home after working to protect Snowden. This is the definition of heroism.

Just because WikiLeaks' Assange and Harrison no longer appear in the media daily doesn't mean their contribution isn't significant. Take the recent report published by Der Spiegel that showed western policy in Afghanistan aimed to kill as many Taliban leaders as possible, regardless of the number of civilians caught in the crossfire. The thinking was summarised by the head of the International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) intelligence in Afghanistan, who once said during a briefing: "The only good Talib is a dead Talib."

This story built on the 2010 WikiLeaks release of Afghan war logs and uncovered yet another level of the "kill everything that moves" mentality that's been unofficial US military policy since at least Vietnam.

The danger of discounting or ignoring WikiLeaks, at a time when much larger news organisations still can't compete with the group's record of releasing classified material, is that we shun a rebellious and adversarial group when it's needed most. The value of WikiLeaks isn't just in uncovering new material, though that's important, it's that the group's published material is one

of the most important archives of our time. I've lost count of the number of journalists and writers who tell me their work wouldn't have the same insights without the State Department cables. My recent books have been similarly enriched.

States across the world talk of democracy and free speech but increasingly restrict information and its messengers.

"This war on whistleblowers is not ancillary to journalism, but actually it directly affects it," says Trevor Timm, executive director of the Freedom of the Press Foundation. "It's making it much more difficult for the public to get the information they need."

WikiLeaks remains at the forefront of this struggle.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/13/wikileaks-not-perfect-but-more-important-than-ever-for-free-speech>

5. Jonathan Holmes: We're all supporters of free speech ... when it suits us

For better or for worse, most Australians are not Charlie Hebdo.

The Age
January 14, 2015 - 10:15AM
Jonathan Holmes

Some issues aren't complicated. They are simple black and white. The murder of 17 French innocents, 10 of them simply for being involved in a publication that ridiculed Islam, is an outrage. It should be condemned. Je suis Charlie.

But is it so simple? Andrew Bolt doesn't think so. We Australians are NOT Charlie, he declares, because we don't have the guts: "This fearless magazine dared to mock Islam in the way the left routinely mocks Christianity. Unlike much of our ruling class, it refused to sell out our freedom to speak."

Bolt omits to point out that the murdered editors and cartoonists were quintessential lefties themselves, who mocked and lampooned the French state and the Roman church with every bit as much gusto as they ridiculed Islam.

But Bolt is certainly right that most Australians have shown quite recently that they don't share Charlie Hebdo's uncompromising views on freedom of speech.

It is unlawful in Australia to do anything in public – including the publishing of articles and cartoons – that is "reasonably likely, in all the circumstances, to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another person or group", if "the act is done because of the race, colour, or national or ethnic origin" of that person or group.

There are exemptions to section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act for the publication of fair comment on a matter of public interest, published "reasonably and in good faith". But as Bolt discovered when Justice Mordecai Bromberg found him in breach of the act, whether an article is covered by that exemption depends not just on its accuracy, but on whether "... (in)sufficient care and diligence was taken to minimise the offence, insult, humiliation and intimidation suffered by the people likely to be affected ..."

Bolt had not taken enough care, Justice Bromberg found, and not just because he had been inexcusably sloppy with his facts. "The derisive tone, the provocative and inflammatory language and the inclusion of gratuitous asides" in the articles complained of satisfied him that "Mr Bolt's conduct lacked objective good faith".

I was one of those who agreed with Bolt that to make it unlawful merely to offend someone, on any grounds, is an assault on freedom of speech. I found Justice Bromberg's judgment disturbing, and initially I supported the Abbott government's determination to revise the act.

When Attorney-General George Brandis published his proposed revision, I changed my mind – it seemed to me that it went absurdly far in the opposite direction. (By contrast, I have no problem with the much simpler bill on the table, sponsored by Senator Bob Day and others.)

But most submissions on the government's draft bill went further. Any revision to the act was opposed by almost every influential ethnic group; every lawyers' organisation in the land; the entire human rights and social welfare establishment; and by Jewish, Christian and Muslim organisations. Seldom has a proposed legislative reform met such universal condemnation.

In the face of that chorus of disapprobation, and to Bolt's disgust, the government backed down, and the act stands.

Now, of course, the federal Racial Discrimination Act does not apply to acts that concern a person's religion – though the Victorian Racial and Religious Tolerance Act does.

Nevertheless, the very Australians who are most likely to be out on the streets today with their "Je suis Charlie" placards made it clear less than a year ago that in their view, at least so far as race is concerned, publications should not be free to give offence or to insult.

Let's be clear: Charlie Hebdo set out, every week, with the greatest deliberation, to offend and insult all kinds of people, and especially in recent years the followers of Islam, whether fundamentalist or not.

Look at some of the magazine's recent covers: An Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood protester in a hail of gunfire crying "The Koran is shit – it doesn't stop bullets"; a full-on homosexual kiss between a Charlie cartoonist and a Muslim sheik with the ironic headline "Love is stronger than hate"; a naked woman with a niqab thrust up her backside.

Most of those who were so outraged by Bolt's columns about fair-skinned Aboriginal people, and supported the use of the law against him, would find themselves equally appalled by much of Charlie Hebdo's output. Even though the late Stephane Charbonnier, the magazine's editor, inhabited the opposite end of the political spectrum, he shared Bolt's determination to shock the chattering classes.

But whereas Bolt is an unashamed supporter of the Abbott government, Charlie Hebdo mocks all governments. If it were published in Melbourne rather than Paris, the magazine would be scathing about Australia's new anti-terrorist laws, under which the government can guard all of its secrets from scrutiny and threaten any who reveal them with five years in prison, but we can keep none of ours from the government.

Yet the new laws have been greeted with tepid acceptance by most Australians. In protesting their over-reach, the media have been largely on their own. In this respect, too, nous ne sommes pas Charlie.

Perhaps that's not surprising, when so many commentators are prepared to wind up the scary rhetoric. "A de facto world war is under way, and it has everything to do with Islam," declared Fairfax's Paul Sheehan on Monday.

That the murder of Charlie Hebdo's staff was a hideous crime is beyond debate. It should be treated as such. But talk of world war brings with it a grave risk: that it will legitimise the remorseless encroachment by government on our liberties.

The enemy of my enemy is my friend, the saying goes. But the enemies of Islamic fundamentalism are not necessarily the friends of free speech. Just ask Peter Greste.

For better or for worse, most Australians ne sont pas Charlie. It's not such a black and white issue, after all.

Jonathan Holmes is a Fairfax columnist and former presenter of Media Watch.

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/were-all-supporters-of-free-speech--when-it-suits-us-20150113-12myyx.html>

6. Richard Ackland: Gillian Triggs is the Australian's latest victim

The Australian has launched a campaign to discredit the president of the Australian Human Rights Commission. It comes just before the release of her report into children in detention

The Guardian
Richard Ackland
Thursday 15 January 2015 15.21 AEST

Professor Gillian Triggs, president of the Australian Human Rights Commission, is the latest victim of a heavy-handed campaign by the Australian newspaper.

The pattern is familiar. A daily barrage, tirelessly repeating the same details, with context and unhelpful facts omitted. On and on it goes, until the hapless victim is supposed to crumple under the barrels of splattered ink.

Manning Clark, Julia Gillard, Simon Overland, Christine Milne, virtually anyone with progressive ideas slightly to the left of the soup spoon, are among the cohort who have been targets of the paper.

In the most recent instance, it is not because Triggs has done anything improper, in fact she was doing what she is required to do under the law.

There are ulterior factors in the wings. Her disturbing report on children in immigration detention is due to be released, which makes her vulnerable as a subject of political assault from a media organisation largely dedicated to fearless cheerleading for the Coalition government.

Last June Triggs wrote a report in response to a complaint to the commission from a refugee held for over seven years at the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre.

In these cases she is obliged to inquire and report her recommendations if a suitably mediated outcome is not possible.

John Basikbasik, a West Papuan activist opposed to the Indonesian annexation and occupation of his country, arrived in Australia by canoe in 1985. He was granted a protection visa 11 years later, but this was after he had committed a range of criminal offences dating from 1986.

In May 2000, he was charged with the manslaughter of his partner. He was sentenced to seven years imprisonment, with a non-parole period of two-and-a-half years. His protection visa was cancelled in 2003 and subsequently he was detained at Villawood, where he's been since.

He complained to the commission that his human rights have been violated under the article 9 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, which Australia has ratified:

"9 (1). Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law."

The ICCPR is actually a schedule to the Australian Human Rights Commission Act.

Triggs examined the case and found that his detention is arbitrary under the law. He is being held without charge, potentially indefinitely, while the government has failed to determine other forms of less restrictive detention or take action to find a third country of resettlement.

Further, his detention is "disproportionate to a legitimate aim of the Commonwealth".

The department of immigration rather fetchingly says it can't send Basikbasik back to Indonesia because that would be contrary to our non-refoulement obligations under the Refugee Convention.

This moment of enlightenment has not lived on, for as we know the current government's most recent amendments to the Migration Act have given the minister the power to refole refugees and asylum seekers to his heart's content.

The Australian Human Rights Commission Act requires the commission to inquire into "any practice that may be insistent with or contrary" to any human rights. The international obligations are the principle ones in this context that the commission is required by law to uphold.

Various medical reports that were examined by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in 2010, which confirmed the minister's decision to refuse a protection visa, indicated that at least a proportion of Basikbasik's more recent behavioural problems are attributed to his long period of detention. It was found there is a risk that his mental health will deteriorate if incarceration continues.

What the president of the commission has recommend to the attorney general, George Brandis, is that the the complainant be released from Villawood and some other form of community detention be found for him.

Contrary to a belief that finds its way into the media, she had not recommended that he be sent into the community at large.

As her report said:

"There is no information before me to indicate that the Commonwealth considered whether any risk which Mr Basikbasik posed to the community could be mitigated by a management plan to assist with his rehabilitation or by a requirement to reside at a specified location, with curfews, travel restrictions or regular reporting. It does not appear that it was necessary to detain Mr Basikbasik in an immigration detention centre."

What added to the breathless condemnation of Triggs was her recommendation that Basikbasik be compensated for his arbitrary detention for seven or so years, and she fixed on an amount of \$350,000.

Compensation is a remedy available under the AHRC Act. Triggs used as a guide damages that have been awarded by the courts in cases of false imprisonment.

She pointed to the case of one illegally detained prisoner who was awarded damages of \$100,000 for loss of liberty for a period of 16 months.

Another case involved wrongful imprisonment for nearly a year following the cancellation of a permanent residency visa on character grounds. The prisoner was awarded \$116,000 by the courts.

In another cited case of wrongful imprisonment in immigration detention, the judge said he would have awarded \$265,000 for just over three years.

On this basis, a recommendation of \$350,000 for over seven years arbitrary detention is not excessive.

This morning Triggs came out from undercover in the Sydney Morning Herald and made an obvious point: "human rights apply to everyone - to people convicted of crimes and to those with no criminal record."

The implications to be drawn from the assaults in the Murdoch press is that human rights are a very selective thing. This line of thinking takes us into the realm that it is acceptable to detain someone at the government's pleasure, without charge, without trial, forever.

In lockstep with the Coalition, the Murdoch press has long been an opponent of any formal regime for the enforcement of human rights.

The prime minister has said: "The problem with a bill of rights is that it takes power off the elected politicians."

In response to questioning about the Human Rights Commission's Basikbasik recommendations, Abbott helpfully told the media that this represented "extremely questionable judgment".

It is doubtful that he even read the recommendations, which did not suggest that Basikbasik be given an uninhibited pass into the community.

This is nothing short of a political campaign to take Triggs and the Human Rights Commission down a peg, if not severely damage both of them, on the eve of discomfiting news about Australia's treatment of children in immigration detention.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/15/gillian-triggs-the-australians-latest-victim>

7. Don't shoot the messenger, Gillian Triggs tells critics

The Age
January 14, 2015 - 11:45PM
Michael Gordon

The head of Australia's human rights watchdog has vowed to continue to investigate complaints against the government without fear or favour after Tony Abbott branded a recent decision "pretty bizarre".

Professor Gillian Triggs has strongly defended her finding that the government breached international law by keeping a refugee in detention for more than seven and a half years after he served his sentence for killing his pregnant partner.

The Prime Minister last week declared Professor Triggs had shown "extremely questionable judgment" in the case, saying it was likely to "shake people's confidence in institutions such as the Human Rights Commission."

Criticism from other government figures has prompted Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young to accuse the government of trying to discredit Professor Triggs before the release of a report on children in immigration detention.

The government has had the report for several weeks, but chose not to table it before Christmas. It will now be released after parliament resumes next month.

While the government has moved to release children from detention on the mainland and on Christmas Island, the report makes reference to more than 150 children who remain in detention on Nauru.

Professor Triggs is unbowed over her decision on the detention of John Basikbasik, who served a seven-year jail term after being convicted of the manslaughter of his de facto wife in 2000.

"Not only will I continue to do my job, but I'm bound legally to do that job," she said in an exclusive interview with Fairfax Media, "I cannot say, 'I don't like this complaint. It's politically dangerous. I won't do it'. I'm bound to do it."

After a complaint by Mr Basikbasik, Professor Triggs ruled that his detention since his release from prison was "arbitrary" and contrary to human rights law. She noted the absence of a plan to rehabilitate him in detention or to consider conditions that would minimise the risk of him re-offending.

Professor Triggs said she respected the government's right to reject her findings, including her recommendation that Mr Basikbasik receive \$350,000 in compensation, but insisted it was unfair to "shoot the messenger".

"I'm simply explaining what the law is and I fully respect the government's position that it chooses to protect the national interest in the way that it sees fit," she said.

"It has to act in the public interest and it's likely in some instances to take a view of the need to detain people where I might say that's technically illegal.

"But it's not appropriate in my view to attack the commission or the president for simply telling them the truth about the law."

Professor Triggs also noted that the government had the right to challenge her decisions in the courts, but had chosen not to do so. "One reason it doesn't is there is a very strong risk that my views will be upheld."

Her stance is supported by prominent lawyers including her predecessor at the Human Rights Commission, Catherine Branson QC, who says: "I've got no reason to think that her decision wasn't entirely in accord with international law as it's understood and applied throughout the world.

"It's at the very heart of human rights that they are for the unpopular as well as the popular and for the powerless as well as powerful."

The director of legal advocacy at the Human Rights Law Centre, Daniel Webb, said it appeared the commission was being punished for doing its job.

"Once a person has served their time the government can't just leave them locked up forever without at least fairly, thoroughly and regularly considering whether there are any viable alternatives," Mr Webb said.

"A few weeks ago the government announced plans to slash the commission's funding. Now the Prime Minister and other senior ministers are publicly criticising the president. It's hard to avoid the conclusion that both the cuts and the criticism are politically motivated – retribution against the commission for doing its job."

Senator Hanson-Young went further, saying the attacks on Professor Triggs were timed to weaken the impact of the report on children in detention.

"In an attempt to distract from the serious findings in the report, the Abbott government has gutlessly launched a cowardly attack on the integrity of the president of the commission," she said.

Professor Triggs said she had no had any contact with the government since the Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis, attended the commission's awards night in December as a guest speaker and was well-received.

In his speech, Senator Brandis thanked Professor Triggs and the commission for "its constructive contribution in further enshrining human right protections in our national security architecture". Senator Brandis is on leave and has not commented on the recent controversy.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/dont-shoot-the-messenger-gillian-triggs-tells-critics-20150114-12o1gh.html>

8. Gillian Triggs: Committing a crime does not mean forfeiting all human rights for the future

The Age
January 14, 2015 - 11:45PM
Gillian Triggs

There has been considerable public interest in some recent findings of the Australian Human Rights Commission that the Australian Government is in breach of our human rights obligations. While, as President of the Commission, I seldom comment on individual cases, the justifiable community concerns raised about one of these cases, the Basikbasik case, warrant a response.

The factual and legal reasons for my recommendations to the Minister for Immigration in the Basikbasik case are publicly available and my report has been tabled in Parliament. Before considering this case, however, it might be helpful to understand the role that the Commission is required to play under our governing statute.

The Commission is the necessary first, but not the last step, in Australia's legal regime to protect fundamental freedoms.

A key function of the Commission is to consider the 21,000 inquiries we receive each year. About 2,500 of these inquiries become formal complaints alleging discrimination or a breach of human rights obligations under the treaties to which Australia is a party. The Commission's statutory obligation is to investigate each of them and attempt to reach a conciliated outcome accepted by all parties.

In around 70 per cent of complaints, conciliation is successful. Indeed, long-term systemic changes can be achieved confidentially and at no cost to either the complainant or the person complained against. If a complaint is not settled through conciliation, the complainant may, in some cases, bring the matter to the Federal Court for judicial determination.

Some complaints are from people who are held in immigration detention and claim that their detention is contrary to the right under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights not to be detained arbitrarily. Wherever such complaints are not successfully conciliated, the Commission is required to conduct an inquiry and report to the Attorney-General if the

Commission finds that there has been a breach of human rights. The Government then has complete discretion to decide whether to accept or reject the Commission's recommendations or, alternatively, it may ask the courts to review the decision.

Human rights apply to everyone. They apply equally to people convicted of crimes and to those with no criminal record, they apply to people with mental disabilities, and they apply to people whose opinions or character we may dislike.

The fact that a person has committed a crime in the past, and been imprisoned for that crime, does not of itself justify the continued detention of that person at the discretion of the Minister for Immigration after their term of imprisonment has been served.

The Basikbasik case related to a man who first arrived in Australia from Indonesia in 1985 and was granted a protection visa in 1996. In May 2000 he was charged with the manslaughter of his de facto wife. He was convicted and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.

On being released from prison in 2007 after serving his term, he was detained again, this time in the Villawood Immigration Detention Centre, as his visa had been cancelled by the Minister on character grounds. Mr Basikbasik has been detained at Villawood for the past seven and a half years at the discretion of the Minister, without charge or trial in relation to any criminal offence.

The Department of Immigration has recognised that Australia could not return Mr Basikbasik to Indonesia because there was a real risk that he would be persecuted there.

On three occasions, the relevant Minister declined to place Mr Basikbasik in community detention or in some other less restrictive form of supervision.

Mr Basikbasik is now 59 years old. The Commission's task was to consider whether his continued detention for more than seven years after he was released from prison was arbitrary, as he alleged. The relevant legal principle is simply stated. The detention for a further seven and a half years, after his sentence had been served must be both necessary and proportionate to achieve a legitimate aim.

Clearly, one legitimate aim is community safety, a priority that the Commission considered seriously. In particular, the Commission took into account the views of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal that it was "comfortably satisfied" that Mr Basikbasik posed a real or significant risk of harm to the Australian community.

However, part of the reason for the Tribunal's finding was its concern that, contrary to the recommendations of a psychologist, there was no proper management plan in place for Mr Basikbasik's rehabilitation, nor did he appear to have any support in the community.

There was no evidence provided to the Commission that, when considering community detention for Mr Basikbasik, the Minister considered whether any risk to the community could be mitigated by a management plan for rehabilitation. Nor was there evidence that the Minister considered imposing conditions such as a requirement to reside at a particular place, with curfews, travel restrictions or regular reporting.

On these grounds, the Commission found that it was not necessary to continue to detain Mr Basikbasik in an immigration detention centre for seven and a half years. On the basis of the material before the Commission, his detention was arbitrary, contrary to human rights law. As is usual, the Commission recommended that compensation be paid, consistently with recent Federal Court judgments dealing with wrongful imprisonment.

It is understandable that some Australians find it hard to accept the recommendations of the Commission in cases where individuals seem undeserving. This is especially so where a person whose freedoms have been denied has, in turn, egregiously breached the rights of others.

But those who commit a criminal offence, and serve the sentence provided by law, do not forfeit all their human rights for the future. Indeed, it is a vital element of our modern criminal justice system that those who commit offences should have the opportunity to reintegrate into the community once their sentences have been served.

Certainly, the Government must act to protect the community against violent and aggressive behaviour. But the executive power to detain indefinitely should be tempered by regular judicial oversight and fair consideration of less restrictive means of supervision, consistent with community safety.

Professor Gillian Triggs is President of the Australian Human Rights Commission

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/committing-a-crime-does-not-mean-forfeiting-all-human-rights-for-the-future-20150114-12nrjz.html>

9. Coup allegations against Sri Lanka's former president worth investigating: Gordon Weiss

ABC Radio CAF - TWT
Eleanor Hall
Monday, January 12, 2015 12:13:00

ASHLEY HALL: To Sri Lanka now, where the newly elected government is vowing to investigate allegations that the former president plotted with the military to stage a coup once it was clear he had lost last week's election.

A spokesman for Mahinda Rajapaksa has dismissed the allegations as baseless.

Gordon Weiss is a specialist on Sri Lanka who worked for the United Nations for more than a decade and has been closely following the Sri Lankan election.

I asked him whether an investigation into these coup allegations should be a priority for the new Sirisena government.

GORDON WEISS: I think there are a whole series of very clear priorities for the Government. This would be a matter of criminality. I think myself that the allegations are fairly thin, but of course it's worth investigating.

Sri Lanka has a very long history of non-interference by the armed forces in government. The last coup was a very small and unsuccessful one in 1962.

ELEANOR HALL: Now the new president is promising to build a government of national unity. To what extent though will he have to first deal with the political baggage of having defected from the Rajapaksa government?

Does he have a loyalty or credibility deficit to overcome?

GORDON WEISS: No, I don't think so at all. Of course he has a close association with the Rajapaksas, he was part of that government. Many people were.

The Tamil parties who have joined Sirisena were part of the Rajapaksa government at some stage.

Sirisena is the first viable opposition leader to emerge in the last decade so it is actually a chance for real change, and 10 years of Rajapaksa government has brought about a rainbow of losers in Sri Lanka, from people who have been excluded from due process, whether that's access to education or access to the professions, right down to the village level - fishermen and trishaw drivers who have been over taxed and unfairly taxed.

ELEANOR HALL: You say that Sirisena is the first credible opposition candidate in a decade. Do you see him as a game changer for Sri Lanka?

GORDON WEISS: Yeah I mean I would guess that this is the first big 21st Century moment for Sri Lanka because they came out of 30 years of civil war, it was expected and hoped that Rajapaksa would take that opportunity to bring about a political reconciliation for the Tamils in Sri Lanka and he didn't - quite the opposite.

He began strengthening his personal power and the power of his family, all of whom have high positions in government. At one stage it was thought that they had amassed about 70-75 per cent of the administration of finances in Sri Lanka under their personal control.

And so, in a sense, there was just a continuation of the old style of government that had dogged Sri Lanka since independence, including the divisions between the ethnic groups, which were not being satisfactorily dealt with by Rajapaksa.

And even some of his former government ministers have turned and said that pouring concrete, which is the very visible sign of reconstruction in the north of Sri Lanka, which is the predominate Tamil area, is not enough to bring about reconciliation.

And in fact that was one of the very arguments that was being put forward by our government, which is that there was such obvious signs of progress in Sri Lanka, that surely they were making progress between the ethnicities, but that wasn't the case.

ELEANOR HALL: So if there is reconciliation, real reconciliation, what is this likely to mean for the flow of asylum seekers to Australia.

GORDON WEISS: Oh I think it would undoubtedly reduce it. I mean it's not just about reconciliation, it's really about the rule of law.

Because the rule of law has been severely undermined under the Rajapaksas from the High Court right down to the magistrates as well as the police forces.

So I think one of the reasons why people leave their shores is because they feel insecure. It's one thing to say you don't have a future in a place it's another thing to say 'I feel so insecure that I can't protect my family', and I think that's been one of the drivers of the Tamils leaving Sri Lanka.

So the potential is that that can change under the Sirisena government.

ELEANOR HALL: Presumably one Australian who won't be impressed with the new president is James Packer. Is there any likelihood that his \$450 million casino proposal will go ahead?

GORDON WEISS: I think there's a possibility that it can go ahead but my reading of Sirisena's manifesto and there's a very specific point about casino licences is that due process was not followed.

That's the suggestion in Sirisena's manifesto. So I think at the very least there will be a review of the Packer casino.

I think if there weren't a proper, open, transparent review of the Packer casino it would be a poor sign of what's to come.

ASHLEY HALL: That's Gordon Weiss, a specialist on Sri Lanka. His book on the civil war is called *The Cage: the fight for Sri Lanka and the last Days of the Tamil Tigers*. And you can hear more from him on our website later this afternoon.

<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2015/s4160815.htm>

10. MEDIA RELEASE: Mass hunger strike & protest sweeps Manus Island

PROTEST SWEEPS MANUS ISLAND -- MASS HUNGER STRIKE PROTEST; NO RUNNING WATER

Wednesday January 14, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Hundreds of asylum seekers in Mike Compound are on hunger strike and refusing to return to their compounds as a wave of protest sweeps Manus Island detention centre from Tuesday morning and into the night.

Other compounds are expected to join the hunger strike on Wednesday as chants of "Freedom, What do we want, Freedom" were going back and forward between Mike, Foxtrot and Delta compounds Tuesday night.

At least one asylum seeker in Mike Compound has stitched his lips in protest. The protest began on Tuesday morning as running water stopped on Manus Island --meaning there is no water for the showers or to wash. Hundreds of plastic bottles are piling up in shower blocks.

Threats by guards to send in PNG police to disperse the protesters and force the asylum seekers in Mike Compound back to their rooms have only added to the fears and the tensions in the detention centre.

Tensions have been rising in recent days as most of the asylum seekers approach 18 months of detention on Manus Island. There has also been threats that those who have been determined to be refugees will be taken by force into insecure accommodation at Lorengau, where they fear they will be vulnerable to attacks by locals.

The anniversary of the savage attacks in which Reza Barati was killed in Mike Compound is only a month away. Fears have been heightened in recent days by the actions of locals smashing the kitchen in Foxtrot Compound on Saturday, January 10, while more locals massed outside the compound fence.

The first group of refugees is expected to be moved to Lorengau on 22 January. The lack of security and the enforced stay on Manus Island without the possibility of work has highlighted the farce of resettlement in PNG.

One message from Mike Compound said, "If we are sent to Lorengau, they [the locals] will kill us. Please help us."

Concerns for the future has also come to a head as the hundreds of asylum seekers who have refused to be processed on PNG have been told that unless they sign to be processed in PNG, they will be forcibly deported to their home countries.

An audio file of message from one asylum seeker on Manus Island is attached.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

11. Manus Island detention centre riot claim refuted

PerthNow / news.com.au
January 11, 2015 12:53AM

Refugee activists claimed a riot had broken out at the Manus Island immigration detention centre last night, with reports armed islanders had stormed the compound and trashed a kitchen.

But the Department of Immigration and Border Protection quickly refuted the claims labelling them “false”.

The Labor For Refugees activist group posted on social media that detainees at the Foxtrot compound were claiming to be “afraid” after a separate group of up to 70 locals, some armed with machetes, allegedly massed outside the detention centre.

The reports, which could not be independently confirmed late on Saturday night, come after a troubled month for the detention centre.

Asylum seekers were on hunger-strike in December in protest over the slow processing of their claims for refuge.

The centre is being wound down by the Abbott Government, which announced in September it would begin sending asylum seekers to Nauru instead of Manus Island.

One asylum-seeker, Reza Barati, died in February after a violent clash at the centre.

Two Papua New Guineans were charged with murder over Mr Barati’s death — a Salvation Army worker deployed to the centre, and a security guard employed by contractor G4S.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton did not respond to requests for comment last night. Labor For Refugees also did not respond to requests to elaborate on the claims.

<http://www.news.com.au/national/western-australia/manus-island-detention-centre-riot-claim-refuted/story-fnii5thn-1227180975731>

12. More than 100 Manus Island asylum seekers go on hunger strike

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson
Tuesday 13 January 2015 17.44 AEST

More than 100 asylum seekers on Manus Island have gone on hunger strike, protesting at their treatment in detention and the threat of being sent to live in the local community.

They say they fear being attacked if they are forced from detention into the Papua New Guinea community.

At least one detainee has been told he will be moved into the community-based refugee transit centre in nearby Lorengau before the end of this month.

Detainees and staff have told Guardian Australia at least 50 men in Mike compound are refusing food.

It is believed men in other compounds are also striking and that across the Manus Island detention centre more 100 have vowed not to eat.

“All of the nationalities [are involved], we will only stop when we have freedom,” one detainee told Guardian Australia.

He said the asylum seekers were protesting at being held on Manus, in squalid conditions, for more than 15 months.

But he said, more, they feared being forcibly pushed outside the wired compound. Detainees are regularly threatened by guards that they will be attacked once they leave the compound.

“They killed our friend Reza [Barati, murdered in a riot last February]. And they will kill us.”

Last month, four asylum seekers sewed their lips together in protest in Oscar compound. More men are believed to be preparing to sew their lips shut now.

This week’s protests follow a weekend of unrest on Manus Island. Detainees and staff on the island told Guardian Australia that several men had broken into the main kitchen in Foxtrot compound on Saturday night and trashed it. They were not stopped by security or arrested by police.

In a tweet, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection denied the incident took place: "Reports of a disturbance at the Manus Offshore processing centre are false."

Detainees and staff on the island insist it did take place. The department has not responded to inquiries about the hunger strike.

There were also reports Tuesday of no water for showers and toilets for detainees and staff within the detention centre.

Meanwhile in Darwin, a 33-year-old Iranian asylum seeker remains in hospital after 16 days on a renewed hunger strike.

The man was on hunger strike for 53 days until 23 December. He resumed the strike on 28 December, and at that stage had lost more than 23kg. He may have already sustained permanent organ damage and there are fears he could die in coming days.

He is also suffering cellulitis, the infection that killed fellow Iranian asylum seeker Hamid Kehazaei in September.

The man is protesting his re-detention by Australian authorities after two years living in the community. Australia found he did not meet refugee convention criteria for protection, and re-detained him last year, but the man is refusing to return home to Iran.

Iran does not accept involuntary returns, so the man is stuck in legal limbo, along with 35 other Iranian asylum seekers who have been re-detained for their proposed deportation.

The man's lawyer, John Lawrence, told Guardian Australia the man has grown steadily weaker.

"He steadfastly maintains his resolve, he will not return to eating food. He'll continue on his hunger strike in protest on behalf of himself and the 35 other Iranians who are in the same legal situation as himself."

Elsewhere in the Australian immigration detention system, the latest statistics released by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection show all children have been released from detention on Christmas Island.

But 468 children remain in Australian immigration detention: 333 on the mainland and 135 offshore on Nauru.

This week on Nauru, Cambodian government officials have arrived on the tiny Pacific island, seeking to promote the deal with Australia to transfer refugees from Nauru to Cambodia.

The Cambodians have met with Australian government officials and representatives of the government of Nauru.

It is not known whether Cambodian officials have met with refugees yet, to "pitch" the Australian-sponsored resettlement program.

Under the Cambodia deal, Australia will pay for the resettled refugees' "daily subsistence", such as housing, food and clothing costs, Khmer language training and health services.

In addition to the resettlement costs, Australia has committed an extra \$40m in aid to Cambodia in exchange for taking the refugees.

Cambodia and Australia cannot force a refugee to accept the resettlement arrangement and Cambodia has stressed that it will only take people who volunteer to move. The first cohort is likely to be only "four or five" refugees.

The Cambodia deal was first proposed in February and signed in September. No refugee has yet said they will accept a move.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/13/more-than-100-manus-island-asylum-seekers-hunger-strike>

13. Hundreds of asylum seekers stage protest on Manus Island, detainees and advocates say

ABC News Online

By Papua New Guinea correspondent Liam Cochrane and staff

First posted Wed 14 Jan 2015, 7:20am

Updated Wed 14 Jan 2015, 10:23pm

Asylum seekers inside the Manus Island processing centre have sewn their lips together in protest at their lengthy detention, poor living conditions and the prospect of resettling in Papua New Guinea.

An asylum seeker who spoke to the ABC said 15 people have sewn their lips together and 400 men are on hunger strike.

Australia's Immigration Department runs the centre and confirmed that detainees were protesting, but said it was a passive protest and asylum seekers were not refusing food.

The asylum seeker, who asked not to be named, sent photographs of several asylum seekers with stitches through their lips, holding a banner saying: "We are asylum seekers [and] fear to be resettled in PNG please hand us to the United Nations."

From a hiding place within the Australian-run centre, the man said he was in his 20s and had gone without food for two days.

"We don't need food anymore, we don't need water, we just need a better life," the asylum seeker said.

"We're living in hell... I don't know why [there's] no justice in this universe.

"Some of us have wives, some of us have children.

"This man from Burma he said, 'I don't have any place to go back, if I go back the Government will kill me, they will burn even if I'm alive'."

There are currently 1,035 men detained at the Regional Processing Centre on PNG's Manus Island.

The PNG government has announced that 50 men have been granted refugee status and will soon be moved to a transit centre near Lorengau, Manus Island's main town.

But the asylum seeker who spoke to the ABC said he was scared of further attacks from locals, almost a year after guards and workers stormed the detention centre, beating to death Reza Barati and injuring dozens of other detainees.

"We don't like this country, we cannot live in this country," the man said.

"We didn't come to PNG country, we came to Australia and if Australia don't want us, it's easy brother – let them give us to United Nations or another country.

"I'm scared after all this hunger strike [the guards will] come to us and beat us again, [while we have] no power in our body."

Insecure accommodation sparked protest

The Refugee Action Coalition said the asylum seekers were fearful about their future and wanted refugee status and permanency.

The group released audio it said was from an asylum seeker on Manus Island.

"More than 220 people didn't go to breakfast or lunch today and others will join us tomorrow," the man said.

"All of us we are standing under the shelter in Mike Compound and we will never go back to our room until we die."

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said most of the asylum seekers have been in Manus for almost 18 months.

"For most of them there is still no refugee determination and no end in sight to the indefinite detention for what is perhaps the worst hell-hole that Australia has created," he said.

Mr Rintoul said recent tension came to a head over plans to move those who have gained refugee status to insecure accommodation in Lorengau.

He said only 71 out of 1,000-plus asylum seekers had been granted refugee status.

"I think that this has just heightened the fears that they're extremely vulnerable to the locals. The memory of the killing of Reza Barati is very fresh in their minds," he said.

The detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island and the resettlement of those found to be refugees in PNG is a major plank of the Australian Government's asylum seeker policy.

At times on Wednesday, phone lines to the detention centre were interrupted by electronic interference, beginning moments after contact was made with asylum seekers.

The media is denied access to the Manus Island detention centre and the ABC is unable to independently verify the extent of the reported hunger strike.

PNG's foreign affairs and immigration minister Rimbink Pato could not be reached for comment.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-14/manus-island-asylum-seekers-protest-png/6016126>

14. Manus Island hunger striker pleads to see Australian daughter before he dies

Sister passes on request of ailing asylum seeker to see teenage daughter who arrived in Australia eight years ago and is now a citizen living in Sydney

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 14 January 2015 15.04 AEST

The Australian sister of the first asylum seeker to stitch his lips in the latest Manus Island protest has begged for the man to be allowed to see his daughter before he dies.

Hani (not his real name) has stitched his lips together and is refusing all food, water and medical treatment.

"He asks for his daughter always," Hani's sister told Guardian Australia. "He wants to see his daughter again. Before ... I don't know what happens."

Before sewing up his lips in protest at his ongoing detention on Manus Island, Hani said his final request was that he be able to see his teenage daughter, also an Australian citizen, who lives in Sydney.

"I'm want to die", a fellow detainee reported Hani as saying before he stitched up his lips. "I just have one option, I just want to see my daughter and my sister. They are live in Australia for the last eight years. I miss them. I have to see them."

Hani is a 40-year-old Egyptian Christian. He has been on Manus Island since December 2013. He has been unwell. Twice last year, in June and October, he was medically isolated because of a contagious illness.

His sister and daughter arrived in Australia eight years ago. They were granted refugee status seven years ago, and are now Australian citizens.

Hani last saw his daughter in 2012, when his wife – the mother of his daughter – died.

"He has suffered too much," Hani's sister said. "I love him very much, I am so worried about him ... so worried he will die, he will be killed by [the] Australian government."

Hani's sister said she applied to travel to Manus Island to visit her brother, but was refused permission.

Hani's sister said his daughter was "sad all the time, every day". She said: "She has problems at school. She cannot go, because she worries for her father."

Hani's sister said she and other family members fled Egypt for other countries because of persecution faced by Egypt's Christian minority.

Egyptian Christians have historically endured, and continue to face, systemic persecution.

The Human Rights Watch 2014 world report documented a series of instances of sectarian violence, including lynchings and attacks on churches, amid increasing Muslim-majority hostility towards religious minorities.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/14/manus-island-hunger-striker-pleads-to-see-australian-daughter-before-he-dies>

15. Refugee advocates claim guards threatened to use PNG police to end Manus Island protest

AAP / The Age
January 14, 2015 - 8:19AM

Asylum seekers at the Manus Island Detention Centre are staging a protest but authorities have denied claims by a refugee advocacy group that they are on a hunger strike.

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said early on Wednesday that hundreds of asylum seekers at the centre on the Papua New Guinea island were on hunger strike and refusing to return to their rooms.

At least one detainee in Mike compound had stitched his lips together in protest, Mr Rintoul said in a statement.

He said the protest began on Tuesday morning as running water stopped on Manus Island, meaning there was no water for showers or other washing.

Mr Rintoul said other compounds were expected to join the protest on Wednesday.

"Threats by guards to send in PNG police to disperse the protesters and force the asylum seekers in Mike compound back to their rooms have only added to the fears and the tensions in the detention centre," he said.

But a Department of Immigration and Border Protection spokesman said claims that transferees at the processing centre were "involved in food and fluid refusal" were incorrect.

"The department can confirm a number of transferees are engaged in a peaceful protest within the centre," the spokesperson said in a statement.

"The centre remains calm and service provider staff are engaging with the group."

Mr Rintoul said detainees deemed to be genuine refugees by authorities are soon to be transferred to a new centre on the island at East Lorengau, where they fear they will be vulnerable to attacks by locals.

Meanwhile, an asylum seeker from Tehran who staged a hunger strike for 53 days last year has resumed his protest, saying he is now acting on behalf of 35 other Iranian migrants who are being forced to return home by the Immigration Department or face indefinite detention.

The 33-year-old man, who was admitted to the Royal Darwin Hospital with an infected foot as a result of a mosquito bite on Friday, has not eaten since December 27 and has told his lawyers that he will now continue the hunger strike "to the end".

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/refugee-advocates-claim-guards-threatened-to-use-png-police-to-end-manus-island-protest-20150113-12nmij.html>

16. Manus Island detention centre at risk of another riot as 500 join hunger strike

Detainees and staff face weeks without access to running water and local security guards are on strike after going unpaid

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and agencies
Wednesday 14 January 2015 11.10 AEST

Manus Island detention centre is on the verge of another riot, with more than 500 men now joining a mass hunger strike and at least two men having stitched their lips together.

Water pumps at the centre have broken, meaning there is no access to running water for showers.

The 1,000 men in detention and staff have been given bottles of water to shower with, and staff have been told they cannot shower, flush toilets, or wash their clothes. It could be weeks until water is restored.

Already, the shower block in Mike compound is littered with discarded bottles. There has been a shortage of soap for weeks.

The hunger strike which began in Mike compound yesterday has now spread to other compounds. Oscar compound detainees have voted to hunger strike, and men in Foxtrot compound say they will also join.

Men from Mike are refusing to return from their dorms, camping out in a central area in the compound, and refusing orders to disperse.

The immigration department in Canberra told AAP no detainees are "involved in food and fluid refusal". But department staff on the island have told Guardian Australia this is not true, and that the hunger strike is now widespread.

Pictures obtained by Guardian Australia from the centre also demonstrate this.

Photographs show at least two men have stitched their lips together and are refusing all food and water.

The first man to sew his lips, a 40-year-old Egyptian Christian, told fellow detainees before he started his protest: "If I don't go from this place in four days I will kill myself. I don't care about my life."

He has been on Manus since 12 December 2013, but he has been in Australia's immigration detention system almost 450 days.

A fellow detainee in Mike compound said: "Today, at 8.30am on Manus Island in my compound, medical staff came to check one of the boys who sew his lips from yesterday. They come to check his health. This man rejects them to check him. He says 'I want to die. I just have one option, I just want to see my daughter and my sister. They are live in Australia for the last eight years. I miss them, I have to see them'."

The man's sister, an Australian citizen, spoke to Guardian Australia from Sydney saying she was "so worried he will die, he will be killed by [the] Australian government".

The second man with stitched lips is a 27-year-old Iranian asylum seeker who has been on Manus for 17 months, since 8 August 2013.

Detainees are protesting because they fear being forced out of detention into the community, where they believe they will be attacked by the local population which resents the men being forcibly resettled in their community.

One local security guard in Oscar compound told detainees the local people would not allow any of them to live in their community.

Staff have reported local men standing at the fence of the detention centre making throat-slashing gestures.

The detainees are asking that their claims for refugee status are properly and quickly assessed. Some have been in detention for more than 18 months.

The detainees have asked that instead of being resettled in Papua New Guinea – where they believe they will be attacked, and possibly killed – that they are handed over to the care of the United Nations high commissioner for refugees.

A protest sign put up at the detention centre reads: "We asylum seekers fear to be resettled in PNG. Please hand us over to the UN. Two years in detention. Enough is enough".

One detainee told Guardian Australia through an intermediary: "We we have to suffer like this. What we did?"

Distraught and in tears, he appears to address the Australian people: "Let your government to kill us. Let your government to kill us. We are human beings. We are not bad people ... Please help us. Please help us. We begging you to help us."

Adding to the distress of detainees, local security guards have told Guardian Australia that they have not been paid for several weeks and several have gone on strike, often leaving detainees without any guards.

One PNG guard said his pay, and that of his colleagues, was stopped without explanation three weeks ago, and that dozens of security guards have refused to report for shifts in protest.

Staff on the compound have been told the water supply is broken.

A sign posted by the private firm with the contract to run the detention centre, Transfield Services, says some of the water equipment has "broken down".

"For transferees, this means you cannot have showers. For staff, this means no showers and no washing of clothes. These restrictions are effectively immediately."

It is unknown when water will be restored to the detention centre, but Guardian Australia has been told it could be three weeks.

Immigration department staff say the situation on Manus is "chaotic" and "deteriorating".

In February last year, three days of rioting resulted in more than 70 men being seriously injured, and one, 23-year-old Reza Barati, being killed.

He was allegedly attacked by local men who worked in the detention centre, and reportedly died after he was beaten with a wooden pole and had a rock dropped on his head.

A parliamentary inquiry last month found the violence which resulted in Barati's death was "eminently foreseeable" and that the Australian government was responsible for protecting the detainees under its control.

The office of the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has not returned calls. The department of immigration and border protection has been contacted for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/14/manus-island-detention-centre-risk-riot-hunger-strike-grows>

17. Hunger strike by asylum seekers at Manus Island detention centre escalates protest

The Age
January 14, 2015 - 5:59PM

Sarah Whyte, Michael Gordon

Asylum seekers in detention on Manus Island have demanded that they be handed over to the United Nations refugee agency, as a hunger strike spreads throughout the centre's four main compounds.

The escalating protest, which has been bluntly denied by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, now involves more than half the population of the centre, asylum seekers and refugee advocates have told Fairfax Media.

The main protest, which began on Tuesday, is in the Mike compound, the scene of most of the violence that engulfed the centre last February, where sources claim more than 10 asylum seekers have sewn their lips together.

One of the witnesses to last year's murder of Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati told Fairfax Media more than 200 detainees in the Mike compound had joined the hunger strike and were refusing to return to their rooms. There are 1035 detainees in the centre.

The asylum seeker said the group wanted to be handed over to the UNHCR if there was no prospect of resettlement in Australia.

While water shortages had been a catalyst for protests, several sources said the main factors were fears for their safety if they were released into the community in Papua New Guinea, and a burning sense of injustice that others who arrived at the same time were on bridging visas in the community in Australia.

"What is our difference with Christmas Island people? We came with same boat," one said.

A sign in the centre posted on social media says: "We asylum seekers fear to be resettled in PNG. Please hand us over to the UN. Two years in detention centre. Enough is enough."

Water has now been cut off in the centre and there are reports of acts of self-harm, including one man swallowing a razor blade.

Mr Dutton, who replaced Scot Morrison as immigration minister last month, denied any asylum seekers were staging a hunger strike. "The government is advised by the department that a number of transferees have engaged in a peaceful protest and that media reporting that transferees are refusing food and fluid is incorrect," he said. "Centre staff are engaging with the group."

The minister confirmed there were water restrictions in place but "water production" was meeting the centre's needs. "Supplies of bottled water are readily available," he said.

Greens immigration spokeswoman Sarah Hanson-Young said the violent attacks in February last year were at the forefront of the asylum seekers' minds as the anniversary of the riots approached. She called on Mr Dutton to be up front and transparent about the conditions in the centre.

"The protest and hunger strikes at the Manus Island detention centre are a call for help," Ms Hanson-Young said. "The refugees are at the brink of despair. They are fearful of what lies on the other side of the wire fence; they know they are not safe in PNG," she said.

"The government cannot continue to dismiss the concerns of those detained at the centre. We know that such actions will only lead to further anxiety and tension."

Ian Rintoul, of the Refugee Action Coalition, said guards had threatened to send in PNG police to disperse the protesters and force them back to their rooms.

Victoria Martin, of the Refugee Action Network, said the centre had turned into "utter chaos" as refugees said they were desperate and that they would not be safe in the local community.

"The conditions are inhumane," Ms Martin said. "Manus is never going to be safe."

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/hunger-strike-by-asylum-seekers--at--manus-island-detention-centre-escalates-protest-20150114-12o0h9.html>

18. Asylum seeker on Manus Island 'swallows razor blades' in protest at detention

ABC News Online

By Papua New Guinea correspondent Liam Cochrane

First posted Thu 15 Jan 2015, 4:32am

Updated Thu 15 Jan 2015, 6:12am

An Egyptian asylum seeker is believed to be undergoing medical treatment on Manus Island after swallowing razor blades in a protest against his detention.

The 39-year-old asylum seeker was said to be part of Egypt's minority Christian community, fleeing religious persecution.

The ABC spoke to an asylum seeker who said he translated for health workers treating the man.

"He go and swallow four razor [blades]. He vomit one and three [are] still inside his body," the Middle Eastern man said.

"I was there, I was with him, I went with him to the medical, to IHMS [contractor International Health and Medical Services] to translate for him because he refused to get anyone with him."

The Egyptian man's health began to deteriorate rapidly, according to the witness.

"His body become white, his skin become totally white... and his leg... become blue, so terrible."

The claim could not be independently verified but it came as other asylum seekers sewed their lips together in acts of increasing desperation.

Asylum seekers said hundreds were participating in a hunger strike and the ABC had obtained photographs of eight different men with their lips sewn together.

The Egyptian asylum seeker reportedly stitched his lips together on Tuesday, but health workers convinced him to remove the stitches and accept medical treatment in exchange for a phone call to his sister in Sydney.

An asylum seeker who spoke to the ABC said 15 people had sewn their lips together and 400 men were on a hunger strike.

"They start begging him and they made a deal with him, they said we'll let you call your sister if you get your lips out."

The asylum seeker who spoke to the ABC said the three razor blades remained inside the Egyptian man.

"All of them are still inside his body. When I was there they were telling him that they would make [an] X-ray to him."

The Middle Eastern man translating was sent back to his compound and the current condition of the Egyptian asylum seeker was not known.

Officials from the Papua New Guinea (PNG) government were not available for comment.

Australia's Immigration Department released a statement on Wednesday.

"The Government is advised by the department that a number of transferees have engaged in a peaceful protest and that media reporting that transferees are refusing food and fluid is incorrect," a department spokesman said.

"Centre staff are engaging with the group.

"Limited water restrictions are in place at the centre, but water production is meeting the centre's needs.

"Supplies of bottled water are readily available."

A notice posted on social media said equipment providing water to the Regional Processing Centre had broken down.

"For transferees, this means that you can't have showers today but you can continue to use the washing machines [which use a different system to provide water]."

It noted that staff would not be able to wash clothes or shower until the problem was fixed.

Another problem adding to tension on the island was the reported lack of pay for locally-hired guards, under the control of Wilson Security.

Almost a year ago, local guards, support staff, police and residents stormed the detention centre, beating Iranian Reza Barati to death and injuring dozens of other asylum seekers.

As of 31 December 2014, 1,035 men remained in detention at the Australian-run facility on Manus Island.

The processing of applications was taking place and the PNG government had said 50 men had been given refugee status and would soon be moved to a separate transit centre on Manus Island for language lessons and job placement.

However, some asylum seekers said they did not feel safe resettling in PNG and feared attacks by locals.

They had vowed to fast to the death.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-15/asylum-seeker-on-manus-island-swallows-razor-blades/6018102>

19. Manus Island asylum seekers fear locals, beg Minister Peter Dutton to show compassion

The Age
January 15, 2015 - 4:48PM
Sarah Whyte

Asylum seekers on Manus Island have written a letter to Immigration Minister Peter Dutton begging him to bring them to Australia, saying they will be killed by locals if they are resettled in Papua New Guinea.

Hundreds of asylum seekers in the compound are refusing food as they protest against the upcoming plan to move them into temporary accommodation on the outskirts of Lorengau, the island's capital. They say it would be more honourable to die from a hunger strike than to be killed by PNG locals.

In a recording obtained by Fairfax Media on the island, asylum seekers can be heard loudly clapping and repetitively chanting: "We don't want PNG! What do you want? Freedom!"

In the recording their chanting then turns to asylum seekers screaming "Freedom" as they whistle and clap their hands.

The escalating protest was first acknowledged by the government on Thursday afternoon after Immigration Minister Peter Dutton previously denied it existed. It is believed to involve more than half of the 1035 detainees in the centre, asylum seekers and refugee advocates have told Fairfax Media.

Refugee advocates also estimate that more than 14 people have sewn their lips together.

A handwritten letter from asylum seekers at the centre's Foxtrot compound says: "We will die in PNG if Australian government resettle us in PNG.

"Take us to Australia please or we will die here.

"Please hear us Mr Peter Dutton. We know you are different, not cruel."

In a separate letter from the Mike compound, the asylum seekers write: "Frustrated refugees are tired of being mistreated and not heard after 18 months in inhumanly [sic] detention decided to act for the last time.

"This time but, all strikers prepared themselves for death. Desperate refugees and asylum seekers stopped eating and drinking and gathered under the open shelter in Mike compound from [Tuesday]."

Last week, Papua New Guinean immigration authorities issued a blunt statement to the asylum seekers, saying those who are given refugee status will need to make PNG their home, "or leave".

The statement said "basic security" would be provided for the refugees in Lorengau but once they left Manus Island, no security would be offered. They would also not be able to gain employment on the small island.

After denying the hunger strike existed, a spokesman for the Minister for Immigration confirmed that some asylum seekers at the centre had stopped eating and drinking.

"There are ... a number of transferees who are refusing food and fluids, again they are being offered appropriate support," he said on Thursday afternoon.

The spokesman also confirmed that a "small number" of asylum seekers had engaged in self harm.

"They have been offered appropriate medical care."

"The Australian and Papua New Guinean governments remain committed to the regional resettlement arrangements," he said.

Greens Immigration spokeswoman Sarah Hanson-Young said she held grave concerns for the asylum seekers detained in the centre.

"As the level of self-harm escalates it is clear that the refugees inside feel they have nothing more to live for," Senator Hanson-Young said.

"We are a better country than this and the government must start to act with compassion before more harm is done."

A comment has been sought from the PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/manus-island-asylum-seekers-fear-locals-beg-minister-peter-dutton-to-show-compassion-20150115-12qtor.html>

20. MEDIA RELEASE: Protests & self-harm escalate on Manus Island

Friday January 16, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

The Manus Island detention centre is engulfed in the largest protests in a year, as more asylum seekers join the hunger strike.

Sudanese asylum seekers in Mike Compound joined the hunger strike protest last yesterday (Thursday 15 January) -- video on request. There are now around 300 on hunger strike in Mike Compound alone and around 170 in Foxtrot.

Between 30 and 40 people have now stitched their lips together. Four Pakistani asylum seekers were taken to the medical centre after swallowing washing powder. Last night another two Iranian asylum seekers swallowed razor blades.

The Egyptian man who swallowed razor blades on Wednesday was medivacced to Port Moresby hospital yesterday (Thursday, 15 January) afternoon.

There have been some attempts by guards to force people out of the compound shelter back into their rooms in an attempt to break the solidarity of the protest -- but they have been unsuccessful.

"Everybody worries about the safety here," one asylum seeker in Mike Compound told the Refugee Action Coalition, "No one forgets that night [that Reza Barati was killed]."

The protests have come to a head as the Immigration Department threatened to forcibly move 50 people determined to be refugees to insecure accommodation at the Lorengau settlement on Manus.

The refugees are not allowed to work and would live for up to a year on Manus before being relocated elsewhere in PNG.

"The Immigration Department tried to hide the fact that there were protests on Manus Island. But the department can't hide the fact that there is a gaping hole at the end of its offshore processing policies. PNG is not safe and the PNG government has no political will to allow secure resettlement in PNG," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The government should call off the threat to forcibly move refugees on 22 January. All the asylum seekers and refugees should be brought to Australia where their processing and resettlement can be guaranteed."

For more information, contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713

21. Asylum seeker says Manus Island detainees continue self-harm on fourth day of protests

ABC News Online
By Papua New Guinea correspondent Liam Cochrane
Posted Fri 16 Jan 2015, 9:45am

An asylum seeker on Manus Island says a second Iranian man has swallowed razor blades and four Pakistani men have consumed washing powder as part of ongoing protests.

Images of asylum seekers receiving medical treatment overnight have been received by the ABC, with two men appearing to be taken away on stretchers.

An asylum seeker said the images showed Pakistani men who had consumed washing powder and then collapsed.

He said another Iranian man swallowed razor blades, the second such alleged case this week.

The ABC cannot independently verify the reports, and the condition of those who have collapsed is not known.

Other footage, said to be from Delta compound, showed asylum seekers chanting for freedom while guards patrolled on the other side of a fence.

The Federal Government confirmed on Thursday there was a hunger strike underway at the detention centre.

An asylum seeker who spoke to the ABC on Wednesday said 15 people had sewn their lips shut and 400 men were on a hunger strike.

The protest and hunger strike continues into its fourth day.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-16/asylum-seeker-self-harm-manus-island-reports/6020964>

22. Peter Dutton 'worried' about 'volatile' Manus Island protests amid reports asylum seekers continuing self-harm

ABC News Online

By Julie Doyle and PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane

First posted Fri 16 Jan 2015, 9:45am

Updated Fri 16 Jan 2015, 1:02pm

The Immigration Minister says he is worried about the "volatile" situation at the Manus Island detention centre, where asylum seekers have reportedly swallowed washing powder and razors as part of ongoing protests.

Peter Dutton said he was concerned about the behaviour of asylum seekers, but would not give any detail about the information he had received.

"I'm worried about developments across the last 24 hours, I'm concerned about what I've learnt in the last hour or so and the situation is volatile there's no question about that," he said.

Mr Dutton said people outside the centre had been encouraging the behaviour by telling asylum seekers it could help them get to Australia.

"I'm very concerned that somehow people are conveying a message that through non-compliant behaviour, by refusing to take food or water that somehow that behaviour will change the outcome for those individual cases in terms of their desire to be settled in Australia," he said.

"If people are acting on that advice they should dismiss that advice."

Mr Dutton confirmed there had been incidents of self-harm at the centre and said asylum seekers had been offered medical help.

He said one detainee had been transferred from the facility for X-rays and more specialised treatment.

The Minister said the behaviour would not change the Government's resolve on border security and detainees on Manus Island would never be resettled in Australia.

"My message today is very clear to the transferees on Manus and in other facilities: whilst there has been a change of minister the absolute resolve of me as the new minister and of the Government is to make sure that for those transferees they will never arrive in Australia," he said.

Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young said there was a "human disaster" unfolding inside the detention centre and the minister's response was "woefully inadequate".

"I fear that the harsh message that he attempted to send to those who are already showing such awful, tragic signs of desperation will simply inflame the situation," she said.

"What we need is not harsh sound bites from the Immigration Minister but a little more heart and a little more compassion and empathy."

After Mr Dutton's suggestion people outside the centre were encouraging the asylum seekers' behaviour, Senator Hanson-Young made clear her message for the protesters:

"Please don't harm yourselves, involve in a constructive discussion with those inside, those who work at the centre and of course those who represent the Immigration Minister."

Men being taken away on stretchers

Video appears to show men being taken away on stretchers

The ABC has obtained video from inside the detention centre showing what appears to be two men being taken away on stretchers.

An asylum seeker said the images showed Pakistani men who had consumed washing powder and then collapsed.

He said another Iranian man swallowed razor blades, the second such alleged case this week.

The ABC cannot independently verify the reports, and the condition of those who have collapsed is not known.

Other footage, said to be from Delta compound, showed asylum seekers chanting for freedom while guards patrolled on the other side of a fence.

An asylum seeker who spoke to the ABC on Wednesday said 15 people had sewn their lips shut and 400 men were on a hunger strike.

The protest and hunger strike continues into its fourth day.

Hunger striker moved from hospital

Meanwhile, an asylum seeker on an extended hunger strike in Darwin has been moved from hospital - where he was being treated for an infected foot - back to the Wickham Point Detention Centre.

The 33-year-old Iranian man has spent the past four years in immigration detention, and stopped eating in November last year in protest over losing his visa application.

He was near death seven weeks later, when a renewed legal appeal persuaded him to break his strike for just a few days.

But he has since resumed the hunger strike and is now emaciated and disabled from infected mosquito bites that saw him sent to hospital, according to his lawyer John Lawrence.

Mr Lawrence said though his client said he is prepared to die, he was making a rational political protest.

"The ethical issues that persist in this case are complex and very difficult, minute by minute, day by day hour by hour," he said.

"Ultimately I am his lawyer and I'm satisfied that his mental faculties are in order, I'm satisfied that what he's doing is what he has chosen to do despite daily persuasive efforts made by his advisors."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-16/peter-dutton-concerned-by-volatile-situation-at-manus-island/6020964>

23. New Immigration Minister Peter Dutton warns asylum seekers their protests will fail

Sydney Morning Herald
January 16, 2015 - 4:26PM
Lisa Cox

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has dismissed pleas from asylum seekers for a more compassionate approach, warning he is going to be just as tough as his predecessor Scott Morrison.

In his first media conference since taking over the Immigration portfolio, Mr Dutton said it was his "absolute resolve" to ensure asylum seekers detained on Manus Island and in other facilities never arrive in Australia.

The warning comes amid escalating unrest on Manus Island and signs the stand-off between authorities and asylum seekers is increasing.

Refugee advocates say security guards on Manus Island on Friday afternoon began attacking asylum seekers protesting at the centre.

The Refugee Action Coalition said guards had begun attacking peaceful protests in the Oscar and Delta compounds on Friday afternoon.

The advocacy body said there was no warning before security guards began beating protesters.

"It is this kind of attack that the asylum seekers have feared all along," Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said.

Earlier on Friday, Mr Dutton said he wanted escalating unrest at the detention facility to be resolved peacefully.

He said there had been "a number of incidents of self-harm within Manus" and medical assistance had been offered to asylum seekers, but some had rejected that offer.

He said security providers were dealing with the situation on the ground.

Mr Dutton described the situation as very serious, saying he had been worried by developments over the past 24 hours and, in particular, by further reports of unrest and self harm on Friday morning.

He said asylum seekers refusing food and water or conveying other "non-compliant behaviour" were wrong to think it would change the outcome for their individual cases and they would not be settled in Australia.

"The situation is volatile there's no question about that.

"But I would say to those people that are stirring trouble, advocates who may be well-intentioned that they're advising in some way or ring-leaders in the minority within the centre who are advising some of the transferrees to change their behaviour or to misbehave, that information is dead wrong.

Mr Dutton warned asylum seekers who were "stirring trouble" that information from well-intentioned advocates or ring-leaders within the centre suggesting that they should misbehave was "dead wrong".

"It is causing trouble. It's causing unnecessary trouble," he said.

Mr Dutton warned a change in minister would not change the circumstances for asylum seekers who attempted to arrive by boat.

"The absolute resolve of me as the new minister and of the government is to make sure that for those transferrees, they will never arrive in Australia. They will never be settled in Australia," he said.

"That's the commitment we have given over a long period of time and that remains absolutely the case. So whilst people who might hold themselves out to be your friends are telling you that somehow the situation or the approach of the government has changed, they are not telling you the truth."

Refugee advocates said on Friday that nearly 500 asylum seekers were now involved in hunger strikes as they protest against a plan to move about 50 people determined to be refugees into temporary accommodation on the outskirts of Lorengau, the island's capital.

Mr Rintoul said between 30 and 40 asylum seekers had now stitched their lips together and four Pakistani asylum seekers had been taken to hospital after swallowing washing powder.

He said a further two Iranian asylum seekers had swallowed razor blades.

He estimated 300 people in the Mike compound at Manus were refusing food, as were a further 170 people in the Foxtrot compound.

Asylum seekers had earlier written a letter that says "We will die in PNG if Australian government resettle us in PNG."

Greens immigration spokeswoman Sarah Hanson-Young said on Friday the government's response to the unrest was "woefully inadequate" and its secrecy about Manus Island and other detention facilities was "out of control".

"What we need is not harsh sound-bites from the Immigration Minister, but a little more heart and a little more compassion and empathy," Senator Hanson-Young said.

"I'm extremely concerned that the minister doesn't seem to be taking this situation as seriously as he should. Granted, he's new in this portfolio area, but we're talking about human lives."

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/new-immigration-minister-peter-dutton-warns-asylum-seekers-their-protests-will-fail-20150116-12rusc.html>

24. Manus Island hunger strikers collapse as unrest grips detention centre

Incidents of self-harm, including swallowing razor blades and detergent, rise as detainees vow not to break demonstrations until demand to be released is met

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 16 January 2015 10.28 AEST

--- Read a letter signed by more than 80 detainees asking to be handed over to the care of United Nations:
<http://static.guim.co.uk/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2015/1/15/1421361990696/ManusLetter.jpg>

Hunger-striking asylum seekers on Manus Island have begun to collapse after three days without food and water, while others have reportedly swallowed detergent and razor blades in protest.

Unrest has seized the entire Manus detention centre, with detainees vowing not to break their demonstration until their demands are heard.

They want to be released from detention, and many have asked to be handed over to the UN.

In Mike compound, where the protest started, men have begun falling unconscious.

One asylum seeker told Guardian Australia overnight: "it is too much, too much to see. My friends, they fall down, one by one ... they need us to die, please God, make it easy for us."

Another said the hunger-strikers were unafraid to die.

"I don't care for anything, I'm not scared for anything. For what I care, what more can they do to me? We will keep fight, and we will get something."

A detainee contacted Guardian Australia on Friday morning saying the men in his compound were weak and that many could not sit or stand anymore.

"I don't want to be dead. I'm really scared. Every 30 minutes someone faints, but no-one is coming to help us."

He said he did not want to be resettled in Papua New Guinea.

"Here is no safety. I am sure they will attack us. I remember last time ... they make a death threat with gun," he said, referring to the riots last February during which local guards and police broke into the detention centre and attacked detainees, killing one, 23-year-old Reza Barati.

Pictures from Mike compound show medical staff caring for several unconscious men, while other protesters lie on the ground.

The 40-year-old Egyptian asylum seeker in Mike who reportedly swallowed three razor blades remains in medical care. His condition is unknown.

There are reports from the island Friday morning, not yet confirmed, that a second detainee, an Iranian, has also swallowed razor blades.

A video secretly shot on the island, and obtained by Guardian Australia, shows an unconscious detainee being loaded onto a stretcher.

A detainee off-camera says: "This is 1am in the morning, two of Pakistanis swallowed some detergent right now, they [are] being moving by staff here in Manus Island".

In Oscar compound, where the hunger strike started a day later, protesting asylum seekers chanted at the gates: "Freedom, Freedom, Freedom."

The men in Foxtrot held a silent protest at the wire gate of the compound, standing in the rain for two hours in an unspeaking vigil.

Detainees have also hung a banner across an accommodation block that reads: "Dying proudly is more honourable than suffering miserably here."

Detainees, some of whom have been in detention on Manus since August 2013 and have still not had their refugee claims assessed, say they don't care if they never reach Australia, but do not want to be resettled on Papua New Guinea where they fear being attacked.

A letter signed by more than 80 detainees asks to be handed over to the care of the United Nations.

"These days we are witness... [to] another disaster about to happening in Manus, a disaster which is caused by the department of immigration and border protection ...

"Eighteen months of desperate prison seems to be enough for us that had many years of hard life - trauma, torture, threat and disturbance in our countries.

"The group hunger strike in Manus which includes water is putting many people's life in danger but unfortunately the stone heart and cruel politicians are still not hearing about it. The request of those who signed this paper is only freedom today, nothing can be an answer but FREEDOM.

"None of us would ever go to PNG and if Australia cannot answer us so hand us to the UN."

The office of immigration minister Peter Dutton has been contacted for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/16/manus-island-hunger-strikers-collapse-as-unrest-grips-detention-centre>

25. MEDIA RELEASE: Security guards attack Manus compounds

Friday January 16, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Security guards including PNG locals began attacking peaceful protests in Oscar and Delta Compounds on Manus Island around 4pm Manus Island time -- photos attached.

Only four hours ago, Immigration Minister told a press conference that he wanted to deal with the issues peacefully, and stated that, "We're happy to negotiate and discuss the situation."

But the action of Transfield's Emergency Response Team has put the lie to the Minister's statement. There was no discussion and no warning before the security guards began attacking and beating protesters.

"It is this kind of attack that the asylum seekers have feared all along," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson from the Refugee Action Coalition.

"This is exactly the way that the attacks on asylum seekers began in February last year. It was the ERT that was responsible for vicious attacks on peaceful protests asylum seekers on 16 February 2013, the day before Reza Barati was killed.

"It is very clear that the minority responsible for the violence on Manus is the security force itself. It is shocking brutality against people already weakened from two days of fasting."

Yesterday's attempts to force asylum seekers in Oscar, Delta and Foxtrot compounds out of the shelters and back into their rooms, failed.

"It was the threat of using force to move refugees out of the detention centres and into insecure housing at Lorengau that precipitated the peaceful protests and hunger strike, said Rintoul.

"The actions of the ERT are likely to inflame the situation even further. The Minister has just proved what the asylum seekers have been saying all along -- they are not safe inside or outside the detention centre."

For more information, contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713

26. Violent clashes break out between PNG police and detainees

As mass hunger strike enters fourth day, immigration minister accuses refugee workers of 'coaching' detainees in self-harm, but advocates deny Peter Dutton's claim

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 16 January 2015 18.06 AEST

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has accused refugee advocates of coaching asylum seekers to self-harm and of creating a "volatile" situation on Manus Island, where a mass hunger strike has entered its fourth full day.

After denying a hunger-strike was occurring for two days, Dutton said on Friday he was very concerned for the welfare of striking detainees, but alleged they were being "coached" to self-harm by refugee advocates in Australia and workers on Manus Island.

Late on Friday afternoon, violent clashes broke out between Papua New Guinea police and detainees.

Detainees said several hundred security guards and police had entered the compounds and fights had broken out as detainees were pushed into their rooms.

“The police and guards attack to us ... it is really bad situation,” a panicked man said in a message sent to Guardian Australia. The sound of yelling could be heard in the background.

Earlier, Dutton said protests by asylum seekers would not change the government’s resolve and that the detainees would never be moved to Australia.

“My very clear message today is to people that would seek to misinform those transferees, that somehow if their behaviour is changed or that they become noncompliant, that somehow that will result in them settling in Australia: it will not,” he said.

“That is a very clear, strong and determined message from me as minister. And that will not change.”

Detainees have denied being encouraged to protest or to harm themselves.

“No, never ever. Never,” one detainee told Guardian Australia in response to the minister’s comments. “He’s a liar.”

And refugee advocates have reacted furiously, saying they had spent the past week urging asylum seekers not to go on hunger strike or commit acts of self-harm.

“I am affronted by this allegation,” said Ben Pynt of advocacy group Humanitarian Research Partners, “when I have spent the last week trying to stop people doing this, telling them not to self-harm. The minister offers no evidence for his accusations. I can show plenty of evidence of me saying to these men ‘do not do this’, ‘do not hurt yourself’, ‘you need to live’.”

Pynt sent Guardian Australia transcripts of electronic conversations with detainees on the island.

The latest information from the island suggests up to 500 men are engaged in a hunger strike that started in Mike compound on Tuesday but has since spread to other compounds.

At least 20 men have stitched their lips shut in protest. Two men have swallowed razor blades, while four men drank detergent overnight Thursday as the protest worsened.

Staff on the island have told Guardian Australia the entire detention centre is on lockdown, meaning no staff are permitted in the compounds because of a “high security alert”.

Security teams have judged that it is unsafe for staff to enter. There have been reports of fights breaking out between guards and protesting detainees.

Non-essential staff have been sent to their accommodation – including some medical staff removed from the International Health and Medical Services medical centre – and only emergency patients can get treatment.

Video footage obtained by Guardian Australia shows several unconscious detainees being taken to the medical centre on stretchers.

Men are falling unconscious at rate of about one every half-hour, according to detainees. Many can no longer stand or walk, but lie on blankets on the ground at the wire fence of their compound.

Those who can stand chant “What do we want? Freedom!”

“I don’t want to be dead,” one detainee told Guardian Australia. “I’m really scared. Every 30 minutes someone faints, but no one is coming to help us.”

This protest of the last four days follows weeks of increasing tension on the island and escalating desperation among asylum seekers.

Detainees are protesting the following:

- The length of time it has taken to process their refugee claims (some have been on the island 18 months with no decision)
- The conditions under which they are being held, particularly their medical care, the lack of running water and threats of violence against them
- The fear of being forcibly resettled on Papua New Guinea where they believe they will be attacked by locals resentful of the imposition of a new population on their island.

During riots in the centre last year, Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati was killed after local police and guards invaded the centre and attacked asylum seekers.

On Friday, Dutton alleged some refugee advocates in Australia, as well as “a small number” of staff on Manus Island, were encouraging detainees to go on hunger strike, to self-harm or disobey the orders of staff.

“I very concerned that somehow people are conveying the message that through noncompliant behaviour, through refusing to take food and water, that that behaviour will change the outcome for those individuals in terms of their desire to be settled in Australia. It will not.”

The minister did not present any examples or evidence. The allegation was rejected by detainees on the island.

“No one told [us] anything to do,” a detainee told Guardian Australia from inside the detention centre. “We did it, and [are] keeping it because this is our last way. We would like to show to everybody our protest because we are victims.”

Another said: “Minister, why did he say like that? He needs to encourage us to keep going? No problem. The boys they will never give up, they said ‘grave or freedom’.”

Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition, rejected the minister’s allegation, and said the minister was ignoring the “desperation and very real fears” of the asylum seekers on Manus.

“Typically, the government seeks to blame some unnamed minority for the protests. But the asylum seekers are ‘coached’ by the brutality of the government’s offshore processing policy,” Rintoul said.

Victoria Martin-Iverson from the Refugee Rights Action Network said there was “zero evidence” that advocates had coached detainees, and said the men on Manus had a right to speak publicly and to protest.

“These men have clearly said they are losing their mental health, they are not safe to either return home or be forced to live in danger on Manus ‘in the community’. Indeed they have been begging to be turned over to the UN. They have lost faith that Australia will do the just or decent thing.

“These men are asking for other solutions to be found. Does anyone really believe that the government is genuinely concerned that they are harming themselves?”

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said the protests were not encouraged, but the “human result of cruelty”.

“Refugees are suffering and I am worried that the minister’s harsh response will only inflame the situation,” she said. “For the minister to try and blame everyone else for the tragic situation is ridiculous and cowardly.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/16/manus-island-peter-dutton-says-refugee-workers-coached-detainees-to-self-harm>

27. MEDIA RELEASE: Tensions high as Manus hunger strike protest continues

TENSIONS HIGH ON MANUS AS HUNGER STRIKE PROTEST CONTINUES: STOP THE FORCED TRANSFERS

Saturday January 17, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Tensions remain high on Manus Island following attempts by Transfield’s “riot squad” to enter Delta Compound yesterday afternoon.

Asylum seekers in both Delta and Oscar compounds have now barricaded the gates to their compound to prevent any further attempts to attack the protest.

In retribution, no food has delivered to either compound since yesterday afternoon, meaning even those not on hunger strike are being collectively punished for the protest. To make matters worse, there is no running water in the compounds again.

Bottled water also ran out at Delta Compound. Shamefully, Transfield refused to distribute the water that was stockpiled just outside the compound’s fence, after asylum seekers refused to open the gate to allow a forklift to enter. Asylum seekers were forced to reach underneath the fence to try to retrieve the water – see attached photo.

Yesterday’s attempt to break up the protest came after threats from Transfield management that unless the protest was ended and asylum seekers co-operated, the protest would be forcibly broken.

As the hunger strike entered the fifth day, scores of asylum seekers are being treated in the medical clinic after collapsing in their compounds.

More medical staff reinforcements are expected to arrive on Manus Island today.

Asylum seekers are demanding that the immigration department halts the forced transfer, scheduled for 22 January, of those found to be refugees to insecure temporary housing in the Lorengau settlement.

"Yesterday, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, claimed, 'We're happy to negotiate and discuss the situation,' but there have been no attempts to discuss or negotiate -- only threats," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The asylum seekers are terrified of a repeat of the February attacks last year. They have good reason. Just this morning, Wilson security guards made more threats they refugees will die as soon as they move out of the detention centre.

"One of them said, 'You should keep on hunger strike and die here, because you will be killed as soon as you are outside.'

"The government should halt the forced transfer of the refugees on 22 January. The ad hoc transit accommodation on Manus is no solution. Refugees cannot work and cannot stay on Manus Island.

"The stark fact is that the refugees cannot be safely resettled in PNG. The new Immigration Minister will have to face up to the gaping hole in the government's offshore processing policy."

For more information, contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713

28. Manus Island hunger strikes continue as detainees vow not to give up protests

More than 100 asylum seekers are being treated for dehydration in makeshift medical centre, but minister for immigration says 'they will never be settled in Australia' despite protests

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson
Saturday 17 January 2015 09.55 AEST

Protests continue on Manus Island, with detainees vowing not to give up their protest, and the government equally unbowed they must be resettled in PNG.

Some men in the detention centre have been refusing food and water since Tuesday and are dangerously unwell.

International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) staff on the island have converted the staff mess hall into an overflow emergency medical centre.

More than 100 men from Mike compound, where the hunger strike started on Tuesday, are now under medical care, most from severe dehydration.

Two men who swallowed razor blades, and four who drank detergent, are also in medical care.

In the Delta and Oscar compounds, where the protests have spread and the tension has been greatest, men not on hunger strike spent the night clapping and cheering and shouting "What do we want? Freedom?".

Some men have spent 18 months in detention on Manus and have asked to be handed over to the care of the United Nations. Others still want to be moved to Australia, where their families live.

Video seen by Guardian Australian shows PNG riot police walking between the Delta and Oscar compounds.

Reports that riot police entered Delta and clashed with detainees in an effort to force them back into their rooms, remain unconfirmed.

Guardian Australia has obtained video footage that shows boisterous, but peaceful protests in the camp.

Detainees say they will not yield.

They are protesting against the length of their detention, the conditions under which they are being held, and against the threat of being forcibly sent to live in the PNG community, where they fear they will be attacked.

Less than a year ago, Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati was murdered during riots in the centre, allegedly by PNG nationals who invaded the centre and attacked detainees.

The detainees wrote in a letter to the Australian government on Friday: "some of us are about to die, but will still continue our way [protest] and we will never change our decision".

"Dear Mr Minister, PNG is not safe place for us and if we are supposed to die there, we will die here in the centre. Our message today is very clear to the immigration of Australia, our decision will never change. Hand us over to the UN."

But immigration minister Peter Dutton said the government will not change its policy.

"Whilst there has been a change of minister, the absolute resolve of me as the new minister and of the government is to make sure that for those transferees, they will never arrive in Australia. They will never be settled in Australia."

A PNG government spokesman told Guardian Australia no police had entered the detention centre but that amid the heightened tensions "security had gone in with workers".

He had not seen the images from Manus Island, but said a senior person from there had conveyed the information.

"It wasn't extraordinary but of course with the tension there as we know, I think it was just extra precautions."

He said he had seen reports of locals going in with police "but it was nothing like that".

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/17/manus-island-hunger-strikes-continue-as-detainees-vow-not-to-give-up-protests>

29. Police, refugees reportedly clash on Manus Island

Sydney Morning Herald
January 17, 2015 - 2:11AM
Liam Mannix and Lisa Cox

Papua New Guinea police in riot gear have reportedly entered the Manus Island Detention Centre as tensions continue to escalate.

Violent clashes between guards and asylum seekers are being reported.

The clashes come after several days of hunger strikes being staged by the asylum seekers. Refugee advocates said on Friday that nearly 500 asylum seekers were now involved in hunger strikes as they protest against a plan to move about 50 people determined to be refugees into temporary accommodation on the outskirts of Lorengau, the island's capital.

Between 30 and 40 asylum seekers had now stitched their lips together and four Pakistani asylum seekers had been taken to hospital after swallowing washing powder, according to refugee advocates.

A further two Iranian asylum seekers had swallowed razor blades.

The entire detention centre is reportedly in lockdown as security staff move to quell the riot.

The ABC has reported an asylum seeker saying that "local guards" and "Wilson guards" threw stones at the asylum seekers.

"They start throwing the stone from outside the compound," the ABC reported him as saying.

"Maybe many people will die more, other than Reza Barati and Hamid Kehazaei, our brothers."

The Refugee Action Coalition said guards had begun attacking peaceful protests in the Oscar and Delta compounds on Friday afternoon.

The advocacy body said there was no warning before security guards began beating protesters.

The Refugee Action Coalition says this picture shows the attacks on protesters at Manus Island on Friday.

"It is this kind of attack that the asylum seekers have feared all along," Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said.

Earlier, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton dismissed pleas from asylum seekers for a more compassionate approach, warning he is going to be just as tough as his predecessor Scott Morrison.

In his first media conference since taking over the Immigration portfolio, Mr Dutton said it was his "absolute resolve" to ensure asylum seekers detained on Manus Island and in other facilities never arrive in Australia.

He said there had been "a number of incidents of self-harm within Manus" and medical assistance had been offered to asylum seekers, but some had rejected that offer.

Mr Dutton described the situation as very serious, saying he had been worried by developments over the past 24 hours and, in particular, by further reports of unrest and self harm on Friday morning.

"The situation is volatile there's no question about that."

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/police-refugees-reportedly-clash-on-manus-island-20150116-12s4vt.html>

30. PNG government denies reports of violence between asylum seekers, Manus Island detention centre staff

ABC News Online

By PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane

First posted Fri 16 Jan 2015, 10:41pm

Updated Sat 17 Jan 2015, 3:01am

The Papua New Guinean government has denied reports of a violent confrontation between asylum seekers and security staff at the Manus Island detention centre.

Photographs sent to media by asylum seekers on Friday appeared to show security staff in riot gear responding to an incident at the facility.

Asylum seekers said there had been a clash and sent images of two men with minor head injuries and another being carried away on a stretcher.

But the PNG government denied that version of events. The Australian Government has been approached for comment.

"There was no physical engagement between asylum seekers and security personnel," a PNG government spokesman said.

"Security [staff] were on standby for safety reasons considering the reported rise in tension.

"This is only natural to ensure the safety of the workers as well as people in the facility following media reports of self-harm.

"Workers have essential tasks to maintain such as cleaning and the delivery of other services."

The spokesman said "at no time did police enter the facility".

One asylum seeker insisted the clash did take place.

"They fought together, with IRT [Incident Response Team] and with the local people," he told the ABC, saying he had spoken to a man in Delta compound where the incident was reported to have occurred.

"They threatened the boys. They told them tomorrow ... the new group will come from Australia and we will come and will enter into the camp and we will beat you," the asylum seeker said.

Guards attacked and beat protesters: activists

The Refugee Action Coalition (RAC) said on Friday that a violent clash had taken place.

"Security guards, including PNG locals, began attacking peaceful protests in Oscar and Delta compounds on Manus Island around 4:00pm Manus Island time," a statement from the RAC's spokesman Ian Rintoul said.

"There was no discussion and no warning before the security guards began attacking and beating protesters."

In a later statement, Mr Rintoul clarified the man seen on the stretcher was an asylum seeker who collapsed from hunger, not injury.

The claims cannot be independently verified as the centre is off limits to media.

The ABC has obtained fresh footage of noisy protests continuing into Friday night.

Since Tuesday, a group of asylum seekers have been protesting their lengthy detention, living conditions at the centre and the prospect of resettling in PNG.

At least 10 men sewed their lips shut and asylum seekers said four Pakistani men swallowed washing powder, while two Iranians swallowed razor blades as part of the protest.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said on Friday hunger strikes or acts of self-harm would not affect the outcome of asylum applications and reiterated that the men on Manus Island would never settle in Australia.

He accused people in Australia and "ringleaders" at the centre of encouraging self-harm to get attention.

The PNG government has strongly supported the Australian Government's position, saying any asylum seeker who poses a threat to others will be moved to another more secure facility while their application is processed.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-17/png-government-denies-clash-on-manus-island-asylum-seekers/6022662>

31. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus in meltdown

Sunday January 18, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Up to 700 asylum seekers are now on hunger strike on Manus Island. Noisy protests continued into the night at Delta compound despite the fact that no water had been delivered to the compound and seekers had to burrow under the perimeter fence to reach bottled water left outside the compound fence.

But on Saturday, more than 200 asylum seekers were taken to the medical centre for treatment after collapsing in their compounds.

At times asylum seekers have been left lying unconscious in their compounds or left the ground outside the make-shift field clinic because there are not enough stretchers or mattresses for the numbers requiring treatment.

Another two people swallowed washing powder in the early hours of this morning.

Two supposedly 'ring-leaders' have also been taken into the notorious isolation unit Chauka.

A letter (attached, and text below) signed by over 80 asylum seekers in Foxtrot Compound has spelled out their fears about resettlement in PNG.

"As the asylum seekers' letter says, there is a disaster happening on Manus Island. The real fears of the asylum seekers can't be ignored. There is no viable prospect for refugee to be resettled in PNG. The first step is to stop the forced removal of refugees to insecure temporary housing on 22 January," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"There needs to be urgent discussions about possible third country resettlement. The asylum seekers are asking for the UNHCR to be involved with resettlement discussions. The ball is in the Minister's court. He can keep pretending that the protests aren't happening or he can act to prevent the unfolding disaster."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

Foxtrot letter:

To whom it may concern:

It is been a week that hundreds of asylum seekers of Australia are on hunger and water and it is because of 18 months of indefinite detention without any clear future in Manus Island.

Here a disaster is about to happen, please prevent this disaster. The Australian government is planning to resettle us in PNG against our will, by forcing us.

We are not willing to be resettled in PNG because there is no safety [or] any future for us and our family.

Today we consider us to be hostage for the Australian government so they can deter others not to come to Australia.

32. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus witch hunt for protest leaders

MANUS WITCH HUNT FOR PROTEST LEADERS. STOP THE 22 JANUARY TRANSFERS

Sunday January 18, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

In an attempt to break up the hunger strike protest, Transfield officers have begun rounding up asylum seekers' compound leaders.

At least four leaders of different nationalities -- one from Mike, one from Oscar, and two from Foxtrot - have been seized and taken to the high security Chauka isolation unit.

Up to 40 Transfield riot squad officers raided the Foxtrot compound around 1.00am this morning (Sunday 18 January), looking for other community leaders.

The riot squad also attempted to force water down the throat of two unconscious asylum seekers in the compound. They also threatened that a special forces unit will come from Port Moresby 'to deal with you' unless the hunger strike was ended by this morning.

Foxtrot asylum seekers have sent another letter explaining that PNG is not safe and appealing to the Minister to halt the forced transfers of asylum seekers on 22 January (photos attached).

"Taking leaders hostage or using the riot squad won't stop the hunger strike protest," said Ian Rintoul, from the Refugee Action Coalition. "The tactics are eerily similar to those that ended in tragedy in February last year.

"The Minister has said he supports 'discussion and negotiations'. He must act urgently to prevent a tragedy on Manus Island."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713 or Chris Breen 0403 013 183

33. Asylum seekers barricade Manus compounds, issue letter

Asylum seekers barricade compounds at Manus Island detention centre; letter from detainees warns of 'disaster'

ABC News Online

By PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane

First posted Sun 18 Jan 2015, 11:07am

Updated Sun 18 Jan 2015, 11:33am

Groups of asylum seekers have barricaded two compounds within the Manus Island detention centre and are not allowing staff to enter.

Protesters in the Delta and Oscar compounds of the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre placed boxes in front of gates to keep out security staff and government officials.

"People in Delta compound fear from guards," one asylum seeker said.

They said they were being denied food and water and have sent photos of men burrowing beneath a fence to reach crates of bottled water placed just outside the compound.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said the Government had been "advised that food and water continue to be available".

"However, normal services and supplies in certain areas of the centre have been affected by the disruptive behaviour of some transferees. Normal services are ready to resume in those areas as soon as the situation allows," the spokesman said.

A PNG government source also said food and water were not being denied to asylum seekers.

The source said staff were engaging with protesters to de-escalate tensions and had not tried to force entry into the barricaded compounds.

"At this time the government of PNG has refrained from forcing entry to the two compounds," the source said.

"However, while we respect the right of asylum seekers to protest and voice their concerns, we will not permit them to do so in a way that endangers other asylum seekers, staff or the centre."

Some asylum seekers who do not want to be involved in the protest have been moved to other parts of the Manus Island facility.

'A disaster about to happen'

On Sunday, the Refugee Action Coalition published a letter it said was signed by 80 asylum seekers in Foxtrot compound.

"Here a disaster is about to happen, please prevent this disaster," the letter read.

"The Australian Government is planning to resettle us in PNG against our will, by forcing us.

"We are not willing to be resettled in PNG because there is no safety [or] any future for us and our family.

"Today we consider us to be hostage for the Australian Government so they can deter others not to come to Australia."

Australians tired of secrecy: Shorten

The protests began on Tuesday, apparently sparked by plans to transfer some of the 50 men given refugees status to a transit centre near the main town of Manus Island.

The Australian and Papua New Guinean governments have said "non-compliant behaviour" will not change the outcome for those detained at the Australian-run facility.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten said the Government needed to be upfront about what was happening on Manus Island.

"I think most Australians are sick and tired of the culture of secrecy surrounding Manus Island," he said.

"We've got to have the right policies in terms of deterring people smugglers. The people that come into the care of Australia must be treated properly."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-18/asylum-seekers-barricade-compounds-at-manus-island-centre/6023812>

34. 70-year-old Kenmore Village shopper verballed for wearing pro-asylum seeker shirt

Courier Mail

January 13, 2015 10:00pm

Amanda Horswill

A 70-YEAR-OLD Kenmore Village shopper has been left shaken after a man waiting behind her at a supermarket check-out hurled abuse because she was wearing a T-shirt supporting asylum seekers.

Former immigration officer Frederika Steen, of Chapel Hill, said she was wearing a blue polo shirt embroidered with the slogan "Seeking asylum is legal" when she was confronted while paying for her groceries at Coles last month.

She said a "middle-aged man in a suit" yelled at her: "Don't you know that one of your asylum seekers was the murderer at Martin Place?"

Ms Steen said she was shocked by the man's "blatant ignorance".

"I was reeling back in shock and horror, and I said that '(Martin Place siege perpetrator Man Haron Monis) came here on a business visa'. But the man wouldn't listen," she said.

"He kept on walking, then turned around for a parting shot: "Australians have to come first."

"I think he was a bit emotional. But for me it was a symbolic, iconic reaction of the ignorance in the community (about the asylum seeking process)."

She said she knew the law from working with migrants for more than 40 years, and that seeking asylum was a legal right.

She called on the Federal Government to publicly clarify that Monis was first issued a visa, then applied for asylum, and then became an Australian citizen.

"I would like to say to the man, can we please discuss this issue," she said. "I don't want to ram my views down his throat, I want to present him with the facts."

Ms Steen said she regularly wore the shirt, which she had embroidered after being escorted out of a large shopping centre carrying a poster with the message. "I sit at Cafe Bliss often with my back to passing pedestrians so they can see the slogan, and someone always comes up to me, taps me on the shoulder and says "I love your T-shirt, and I agree with you'," she said.

"The reactions have all been positive until that outburst."

<http://www.couriermail.com.au/questnews/west/year-old-kenmore-village-shopper-verballed-for-wearing-pro-asylum-seeker-shirt/story-fni9r1r4-1227183484608>

35. The Smith Street Band attacks Tony Abbott's refugee policy with new song

The Age
January 14, 2015 - 7:55AM
Martin Boulton

From Bob Dylan's classic 1960s folk songs to the shocking, electric frenzy of the Sex Pistols in the '70s, the most compelling popular music often reflects the political climate and turbulent times in which it was created.

Credence Clearwater Revival, Woody Guthrie, Billy Bragg and United States rock band Rage Against the Machine all penned protest songs that targeted hot-button political issues, opening a wider public discussion about the tragedy of war, the role of government or social injustice.

In time for Australia Day this year Melbourne four-piece the Smith Street Band have taken a swipe at the Abbott government's policies on asylum seekers with the provocatively titled track Wipe That Shit-Eating Grin Off Your Punchable Face in a bid to keep the plight of refugees firmly in the spotlight and on the political agenda.

The group's 24-year-old songwriter and frontman, Wil Wagner, told Fairfax Media that money from this month's sales of the song would be donated to a charitable fund for refugees, but the aim was primarily to shift focus from a "political vote-winning monster" to those "fleeing something really horrible" in the hope of a better life.

"We were a bit apprehensive putting it out, thinking people might take it the wrong way or there might be a bit of backlash, but the response has been pretty amazing," Wagner says. "It's been a really uplifting, quite powerful response to what is such a massive issue. All the horrible rhetoric that gets thrown around about refugees is so poisonous, so it's our little way of putting a point forward and trying to stand up for people who really don't have a voice."

A powerful, rollicking live show and three albums over four years have earned the Smith Street Band a strong local following, which is likely to grow when they return overseas later this year following a national tour.

Meanwhile, Wagner hopes their new song is not seen as "unnecessarily aggressive" but rather "a bit jokey" in a way that raises awareness of an issue he's passionate about. "We have so much space, money and resources here, surely we should be doing what we can to save people who are fleeing the most horrible, barbaric situations," he said.

"Who really gives a shit what a 24-year-old in a band thinks, but hopefully a lot of people around our age and our demographic will think about it and become a bit more aware of this issue."

<http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/music/the-smith-street-band-attacks-tony-abbotts-refugee-policy-with-new-song-20150113-12nc0z.html>

36. Australia and Cambodia delegations make secret Nauru visit

The Age
January 13, 2015 - 5:00PM
Sarah Whyte

A convoy of high-ranking Australian and Cambodian officials have arrived in Nauru to secretly progress the controversial deal to resettle refugees in Cambodia.

The Australian delegation, including the head of Operation Sovereign Borders, Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, and deputy secretary of Immigration Mark Cormack, arrived on the small Pacific island this week to meet with Cambodian and Nauruan officials. A small number of refugees were expected to voluntarily take up the offer to relocate to Phnom Penh for permanent resettlement by the end of 2014 as a "trial", but so far no refugees have arrived in the country.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton refused to confirm the meetings were taking place, saying: "It would be inappropriate to comment on ongoing discussions between governments on this matter."

"The Australian government welcomes Cambodia's commitment and work under way to implement the MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] on refugee settlement," he said.

But the International Organisation for Migration said the meetings would be observed by its Cambodian representative, Leul Mekennon.

The delegation visit coincides with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen marking his 30th year in power on Wednesday, which human rights advocates argue has been entrenched authoritarian rule and repression.

"Instead of cosying up to Hun Sen for a refugee deal, Australia should be looking at how it can support the Cambodian people in their struggle for free and fair elections, the rule of law and an end to corruption and land grabs," said Elaine Pearson, Australia director at Human Rights Watch.

Fairfax Media understands a number of Rohingya refugees are expected to take up the offer to resettle in the South Asian country, under the deal forged in September last year. At the same time as the deal was signed the Australian government gave Cambodia's Hun Sen government \$40 million in "assistance development" over four years.

The agreement said Cambodia would decide on the timing and number of refugees that would voluntarily come to the country, while Australia was expected to bear the "direct costs" of the arrangement, including initial support to refugees and infrastructure.

According to the latest immigration statistics there are 895 people, including 135 children, being held in the Nauruan detention centre. There are another 100 refugees who have been resettled into the Nauruan community.

The meetings, which suggest a movement towards the resettlement deal, comes as the non-government organisation Save The Children has been replaced as the resettlement partners on Nauru by a consortium of resettlement services including Connect Settlement Services. The charity will still work within the detention centre.

A spokeswoman from Save the Children said they were proud of the work they did in a "very difficult environment".

"Save the Children believes that Nauru is not a sustainable, long-term option for the resettlement of humanitarian refugees," she said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/australia-and-cambodia-delegations-make-secret-nauru-visit-20150113-12n37h.html>

37. Months after deal, no refugees choose Cambodia as new home

Sydney Morning Herald
January 13, 2015
Lindsay Murdoch

Bangkok: Months after former immigration minister Scott Morrison toasted with champagne a deal with Australia to send refugees to Cambodia in exchange for an additional \$40 million in aid, no refugees have arrived in the impoverished south-east Asian nation.

But the government in Phnom Penh has confirmed that a small group of Cambodian officials has travelled to Nauru to tell refugees there about the "reality of Cambodia" ahead of them deciding whether they want to locate to the country.

"This is not a trip to advertise and to attract tourists to Cambodia; this is a trip to tell them about Cambodia," Interior Ministry spokesman Khieu Sopheap said in October.

Refugee advocates doubt that many will accept an offer where they would receive accommodation and other services for 12 months and then be required to live without further assistance outside the capital Phnom Penh.

Cambodia is one of Asia's poorest nations ruled for three decades by strongman Hun Sen, who has often acted brutally against his political opponents.

Under the agreement announced in September, Cambodia will decide the timing and number of refugees that would voluntarily come to the country while Australia would pay all costs, in addition to the \$40 million in "development assistance."

An initial trial group of four refugees was meant to have arrived in Phnom Penh by the end of 2014.

The Phnom Penh Post reported that Canberra was paying the costs of the officials to visit Nauru, home to almost 1000 asylum seekers who risked their lives to get on boats to try to reach Australia.

Officials of the International Organisation for Migration, which provides services for refugees, will monitor the talks in Nauru, the newspaper said.

Cambodia's agreement with Australia has been condemned by refugee and human rights advocates and Cambodia's opposition parties.

Human Rights Watch reported in November that Cambodian authorities often extort money from asylum seekers already living in the country, most of whom want to leave.

"This [Cambodia] is a corrupt country," one refugee said. "You will not find jobs. We have been here more than two years and we have no money and not enough to eat. It's better to wait in Nauru. It's a very, very bad life in Cambodia...there is no future."

Human Rights Watch on Tuesday released a 67-page report on the 30th anniversary of Mr Hun Sen's rule calling for urgent reforms in Cambodia "so that its people can finally exercise their basic human rights without fear of arrest, torture and execution".

"For three decades Hun Sen has repeatedly used political violence, repression and corruption to remain in power," said Brad Adams, Asia director at Human Rights Watch and author of the report.

Mr Adams called on influential governments and donors to end their passive response to decades of rights violation, repression and corruption.

"After 30 years of experience, there is no reason to believe that Hun Sen will wake-up one day and decide to govern Cambodia in a more open, tolerant and rights-respecting manner," Mr Adams said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/world/months-after-deal-no-refugees-choose-cambodia-as-new-home-20150113-12nf48.html>

38. MEDIA RELEASE: Refugee activists appeal to Minister about hunger striker

REFUGEE ACTIVISTS APPEAL TO MINISTER: DON'T LET IRANIAN HUNGER STRIKER DIE

Monday January 13, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

It is feared that a 33 year old Iranian asylum seeker on hunger strike may have only days to live.

Refugee activists have launched an appeal to Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Peter Dutton and Assistant Minister, Michaelia Cash, to urgently act to prevent his death.

The hunger striker, known as "Martin" was on hunger strike for 53 days until 21 December last year. He resumed the hunger strike on 27 December, and has entered a critical stage of the hunger strike. He may have already suffered permanent organ damage.

He is presently in hospital suffering from cellulitis, ironically the infection that ultimately took the life of another Iranian asylum seeker on Manus Island, Hamid Khazaie in September last year.

Martin is one of around 35 Iranian asylum seekers in Wickham Point detention centre who have been re-detained since August with a view to removing them to Iran. Martin had been living in the community with a bridging visa for two years prior to being re-detained in August.

However, the government knows that the Iranian government will not accept the forced removal of asylum seekers. Faced with indefinite detention, Martin began his hunger strike in November to draw attention to the plight of Iranian and other asylum seekers in this situation. There are around 1400 asylum seekers presently in the community who are at risk of being re-detained although the government cannot remove them.

"Martin and the other asylum seekers are victims of a cruel, domestic political agenda. The re-detention of asylum seekers who cannot be removed is a completely pointless policy," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Martin's fate is literally in the hands of the Minister. We are appealing for the Minister to urgently act to release Martin and save his life.

"An act of compassion to release Martin would cost the government nothing. We wait in hope, but Martin may have only days to live."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

39. Hunger-striking asylum seeker paints grim picture of life in Darwin detention centre

ABC News Online
First posted Sat 17 Jan 2015, 2:25pm
Updated Sat 17 Jan 2015, 2:44pm

A man claiming to be dizzy and weak on a hunger strike at a Darwin immigration detention centre has criticised care at the facility.

The asylum seeker from Iran, who does not wish his name to be made public, painted a grim picture of life in detention in an audio interview obtained by the ABC.

"If for example you want to go to medical, you need a doctor, you need to go to hospital, they just refuse you, they say 'no, no, no you OK, you don't want anything, you don't need anything'," he said in the interview recorded at the Wickham Point Detention Centre on Thursday.

"But after three days they say 'oh you have a very bad feeling', you are sent to hospital."

Although not commenting on the man's specific case, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection maintained that it meets its duty of care to all people in detention, including necessary health care.

The asylum seeker said all the detainees had mental problems.

"Some person is killing themselves, some person doesn't talk to another person, some person is not eating. It is all crazy," the man said.

"It is very bad, I can't stay here a long time."

The man had been on a 51-day hunger strike that ended in December after a fresh legal bid convinced him to resume eating. But he resumed the fast later that month.

"It is the same as before, the same situation," he said.

The man's lawyer, John Lawrence, SC, said the man had now been on hunger strike for about 70 days and had lost more than 30 kilograms of weight.

Mr Lawrence said that the man did not expect to be given a visa into Australia, even though he had an appeal still left to be heard, and was prepared to die.

"He is choosing to go out in protest and demonstrating what we have done to him and what we are continuing to do to others," Mr Lawrence said.

Ben Pynt from the Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (DASSAN) said the man was among a group who had been told they needed to return home voluntarily or be left in indefinite detention in Australia.

"They think it is better to die under their own terms," Mr Pynt said.

Mr Pynt rejected claims from Immigration Minister Peter Dutton that some asylum seeker advocates had encouraged misbehaviour.

"We categorically deny ever having had any involvement in encouraging hunger strikes or any other form of protests," he said.

In a statement the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said that for privacy reasons it would not go into detail about individual cases.

The Department takes all advice from the detention service provider on medical issues, it said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-17/hunger-striking-asylum-seeker-paints-grim-picture-of-detention/6023216>

40. Asylum seeker advocates write to UN over indefinite detention at Darwin's Wickham Point centre

ABC News Online

By Xavier La Canna

Posted Sun 18 Jan 2015, 8:55am

Asylum seeker advocates have written to the United Nations asking for an investigation into the treatment of 15 Iran asylum seekers in indefinite detention at Darwin's Wickham Point Detention Centre.

Following the publication on Saturday of an interview with one of the Iranian men, said to be weak after a long hunger strike, asylum seeker advocates revealed they had contacted the UN to investigate the men's treatment.

Ben Pynt from the Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (DASSAN) said he had asked the Special Rapporteurs on the Human Rights of Migrants to investigate the indefinite detention of 15 men at the centre, out of 35 said to be held without a release date.

Mr Pynt said detaining people without letting them know when they may be released constituted a form of torture under UN ruling.

"I've raised those issues with special rapporteurs as violation of article 9.1 of the international covenant on civil and political rights that prohibits arbitrary detention, and of article 16 of the convention against torture that prohibits torture," Mr Pynt said.

He said an adverse finding about Australia's treatment probably would not change the Government's policy.

"I have been very up front with the asylum seekers about the capacity of the UN to effect change," Mr Pynt said.

"However they do believe its important that the international community is aware of their situation, as do I.

"And I think it is important that we get a finding from the united nations to tell Australia, what it is doing is unlawful."

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection was not immediately able to comment on the developments.

Last year a report from the UN criticised Australia for its policy of transferring asylum seekers to processing centres in Papua New Guinea and Nauru.

"The combination of the harsh conditions, the protracted periods of closed detention and the uncertainty about the future reportedly creates serious physical and mental pain and suffering," the UN report said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-18/asylum-seeker-advocates-write-to-un-over-treatment-of-detainees/6023630>

41. Red-alert 'pool fence' asylum seeker refusing food in Sydney detention centre

Sydney Morning Herald
January 12, 2015 - 12:15AM
Daniel Flitton

An Egyptian man falsely accused of murder who fled to Australia, only to be branded by Tony Abbott as a convicted jihadist "kept behind a pool fence", remains isolated from his family in a Sydney detention centre.

The condition of Sayed Ahmed Abdellatif has sharply deteriorated in the past week after he began to refuse food or speak to guards.

His wife and six children fear for his health and believe the Abbott government has deliberately left them to languish in detention to avoid embarrassment over past claims he posed a security threat.

The family has been denied permission to apply for a visa in a ruling criticised as "arbitrary" by the federal Human Rights Commission in September.

"Our life is just frozen," Mr Abdellatif's daughter told Fairfax Media at the weekend from the detention centre in Sydney.

"We are nearly three years now in detention. All I've seen of Australia is detention."

Mr Abdellatif's case shot to national prominence in April 2013 after it was revealed he was the subject of an Interpol "red notice" for murder and firearms charges.

The Coalition, then in opposition, seized on the case to criticise the Gillard government's handling of border controls because Mr Abdellatif had been held at a low-security immigration centre in Adelaide.

Mr Abbott said at the time a "convicted Jihadist terrorist was kept for almost 12 months behind a pool fence".

But soon after Mr Abdellatif's case became public, Interpol took the rare step to withdraw all the charges relating to violence from its red notice, which dated from the Mubarak dictatorship era.

Egyptian courts have also since discredited earlier convictions that stem from a mass trial in 1999.

The Coalition insisted its criticism was of the failure to quickly connect Mr Abdellatif to the original red notice after he and his family arrived by boat in May 2012 on Christmas Island.

Shortly before his case became public, Mr Abdellatif was moved from Adelaide to the high-security section of Sydney's Villawood detention centre, with his wife and children held in a separate family compound.

There they remain in detention after successive immigration ministers have refused to allow them to apply for an Australian visa – although Mr Abdellatif has since been transferred to a low-security area.

The family no longer have a legal representative and feel their treatment is unfair.

Mr Abdellatif's daughter – who Fairfax Media has agreed not to name – said her father had declined to eat since last Monday and on Friday was taken to a nearby hospital.

She said she had spoken to him "a few times" by internal telephone and doctors at the hospital had declined to intervene, stating Mr Abdellatif was not mentally ill.

"I'm worried about his health ... [it] is getting worse and worse," she said.

Mr Abdullatif suffers Crohn's disease, she said.

An Immigration department spokesperson said arrangements for Mr Abdellatif "will continue in line with the Government's policy on managing detainees with adverse security assessments" and it would not be appropriate to go into further detail.

An investigation into his case by Inspector General of Intelligence and Security Vivienne Thom last year found Mr Abdellatif had not sought to conceal his identity or past convictions after arriving in Australia.

But Dr Thom was critical of the Immigration department, ASIO and federal police for "a lack of urgency" in identifying a person suspected to match a national security alert.

She found guards at Villawood had for several months continued to treat Mr Abdellatif as an "extreme" risk on the mistaken basis he was subject to an adverse assessment by ASIO and the original red notice – despite Interpol removing all charges relating to violence.

An unclassified version of Dr Thom's report, made public last year, also revealed immigration officials believed as early as July 2012 that the family's claim for asylum was likely to succeed, but a submission to allow them to apply for a visa was "misplaced" in then minister Chris Bowen's office.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/redalert-pool-fence-asylum-seeker-refusing-food-in-sydney-detention-centre-20150111-12lx4b.html>

42. Asylum seeker on hunger strike sent to hospital after condition deteriorates

Iranian man held in Darwin detention centre, who is refusing to eat in protest at the 'legal limbo' he and other asylum seekers face, is being treated for infection

The Guardian
Helen Davidson in Darwin
Monday 12 January 2015 15.12 AEST

A 33-year-old man held in Darwin detention centre who restarted a hunger strike has been admitted to hospital.

The asylum seeker has gone more than two weeks without food since restarting a hunger strike three days after his lawyers and advocates persuaded him to take food shortly before Christmas.

He had previously gone 53 days without eating and had lost 23kg as a protest against his ongoing detention and treatment.

On Friday evening he was admitted to Darwin hospital for treatment to cellulitis in his foot. The man has been in a wheelchair after mosquito and midge bites became badly infected several weeks ago and advocates said it had not been adequately treated.

While the man had been on antibiotics, he had not been given pain medication for a number of days as he had not been eating.

He has since been given pain relief intravenously, Guardian Australia has been told, but is still very weak, and there are fears he will not survive.

The man's lawyer, John Lawrence, told Guardian Australia doctors wanted to keep him in hospital for five days of antibiotic treatment and observation. Lawrence said his client was constantly in pain when he had seen him over recent weeks, but the stronger medication from the hospital on Friday prompted an immediate improvement in his mental state.

However by Sunday "he had deteriorated quite a bit, he got a lot weaker which I think is down to the hunger strike", said Lawrence.

Hospital staff have been given a copy of the man's advanced personal plan – a living will-type document which outlines a person's decisions, future health, financial and lifestyle preferences should they lose decision-making capabilities – which includes a request for palliative care only.

Lawrence said the advanced personal plan was formalised as a “pre-emptive” action in anticipation of forced feeding.

Lawrence last week told Guardian Australia his client was demonstrating on behalf of other asylum seekers from Iran and Sri Lanka believed to be in the same “legal black hole”.

His client's application process has been protracted, Lawrence said. After two rejections of an application for refugee status – the second making redundant a successful appeal of the first – the man is now in legal limbo as he refuses to return home and Iran will not take involuntary returns.

An application has been filed with the federal court for a judicial review of the second rejection, but the man has little hope of success.

“He is of the view this protest will not be successful in obtaining freedom, justice, a protection visa or even release into the community, but he still chooses to make this final protest as to how he is being treated,” Lawrence said.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection told Guardian Australia last week it would not comment on individual cases because of privacy concerns, but said the department “ensures it meets its duty of care” – including providing medical care if necessary – to all people in detention, including those who are facing removal.

“People who have exhausted all outstanding avenues to remain in Australia and have no lawful basis to remain are expected to depart,” she said.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/12/asylum-seeker-on-hunger-strike-sent-to-hospital-after-condition-deteriorates>

43. Tony Abbott calls new Sri Lankan leader to emphasise cooperation on boats

The Australian prime minister spoke to Maithripala Sirisena two days after his election as president, praising the peaceful transition of power.

The Guardian
Calla Wahlquist
Sunday 11 January 2015 17.58 AEST

The Australian prime minister, Tony Abbott, has personally congratulated the Sri Lankan president-elect, Maithripala Sirisena, two days after Sirisena was declared the victor in a surprise election result on Friday that ended the 10-year rule of Mahinda Rajapaksa.

Abbott's office said he spoke to Sirisena on Saturday night and emphasised Australia and Sri Lanka's “continuing cooperation” on people smuggling and other issues.

He also paid tribute to Rajapaksa for his “positive role in supporting a peaceful transition of power.”

Sri Lanka is important to the Abbott government's efforts to turn back Australia-bound boats containing asylum seekers.

Abbott was criticised for brushing aside the Rajapaksa government's human rights record at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Colombo in 2013, after he said that while his government, “deplores the use of torture we accept that sometimes in difficult circumstances difficult things happen”.

He then announced a deal to give Sri Lanka two ex-Australian navy patrol boats to help intercept boats leaving its shores.

An Australian government statement announcing the deal said the Sri Lankan navy had stopped 12 boats leaving its waters that year.

The opposition spokeswoman for foreign affairs, Tanya Plibersek, congratulated Sri Lanka on conducting a “peaceful and credible” election.

Plibersek said Australia had a “robust relationship” with Sri Lanka, “not the least because Australia is home to around 110,000 people of Sri Lankan descent”.

She didn't mention the country's human rights record, but said: “Labor continues to support reconciliation for the people of Sri Lanka.”

Rajapaska conceded defeat early in the vote count on Friday. Fears of widespread violence following the election result proved unfounded.

Opposition parliamentarian Rajitha Senaratne, who defected to Sirisena from Rajapaska's government, said that was because senior army officials ignored government calls to deploy troops in Colombo.

"Rajapaksa tried to stay in power till the last moment. It was when he realised that he could not, that he left," Senaratne said.

The election has been heralded as Sri Lanka's last chance for democracy.

Sirisena appears to have received strong support in the polls from Tamil and Muslim dominated areas.

Australian Sri Lankans told Guardian Australia on Friday that they welcomed Sirisena's election, but Sam Pari, from the Australian Tamil congress, said the incoming president had questions to answer from his time in Rajapaska's ministry.

Amnesty International said the new government needed to make addressing its human rights legacy a priority issue.

"The new government now has an opportunity to usher in a new era of genuine respect for human rights – it is one that must not be missed," deputy Asia Pacific director, David Griffiths, said

Griffiths said the government reverse the 18th constitutional amendment, introduced in September 2010 to strengthen presidential power over state institutions like the judiciary, and repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

"The lack of accountability for past human rights violations has been the tragic norm in Sri Lanka over the past decade," Griffiths said. "Tens of thousands of victims and family members are still waiting for the justice they deserve and the new administration must work to deliver it."

Sirisena has already promised to change the constitution to return to reduce presidential powers and return to a prime ministerial system. He said he would also conduct an inquiry into journalistic deaths.

A UN inquiry into alleged war crimes during conflict with the Tamil population is due to present its findings at the UN Human Rights Council in March.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/11/tony-abbott-calls-new-sri-lankan-leader-to-emphasise-cooperation-on-boats>