

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Tuesday, 3 March 2015

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1. Muslim leaders outraged by Tony Abbott's chiding over extremism

Islamic leaders are furious at the prime minister's suggestion that the community does not do enough to stamp out extremism

The Guardian

Shalailah Medhora and Michael Safi

Monday 23 February 2015 18.01 AEDT

Muslim leaders are furious at Tony Abbott's suggestion that the community does not do enough to stamp out extremism, saying the statement is the "last card" of an embattled leader who is using dog-whistle politics to "inflame racism".

On Monday Abbott delivered a speech on national security, in which he said: "I've often heard western leaders describe Islam as a 'religion of peace'. I wish more Muslim leaders would say that more often, and mean it."

The head of the Arab Council of Australia, Randa Kattan, said the comments were "promoting hatred and inflaming racism".

Kattan said she had seen a sharp increase in racism levelled at Muslim Australians since the Martin Place siege in Sydney last year, and that the comments by the prime minister are "dog-whistling to the racists out there".

"It's not helpful, it's divisive. It labels our community as being responsible for the actions of a few," Kattan said. "It's not helpful for anyone to make these statements ... How much more can we condemn?"

At least one organisation has announced it will boycott a government consultation session on deradicalisation programs scheduled for Monday evening over Abbott's remarks.

Zaahir Edries, the president of the Muslim Legal Network, said the group particularly objected to the prime minister's comment that Muslim leaders should promote Islam as a religion of peace more often.

"This clearly shows that the government has not engaged in sincere and genuine communication with the Muslim community. We have incessantly denounced violence and encouraged peace, not simply as a responsive measure but because those are our core religious beliefs," he said. "Consequently, we are of the view that tonight will not be genuine consultation with our community and we will advise our community of our reasons for non-attendance."

The head of the Lebanese Muslim association, Samier Dandan, said the community "has had enough" of the prime minister using national security as a way of "scapegoating" Muslims.

"This is your last card, prime minister, your last card to save your career."

He told Guardian Australia that Abbott is blaming other leaders for his electoral unpopularity.

"Stop asking us what we've done [to stamp out extremism]," Dandan said. "Mr Prime Minister, what have you and your government done?"

He said the community had done everything it could, other than getting "a tattoo imprinted on our forehead" to condemn violent extremism.

"He's living in his own cocoon where he wants to look for scapegoats," Dandan said.

The foreign minister, Julie Bishop, stepped back from Abbott's statements in question time on Monday.

"I want to applaud members of our Muslim community here in Australia who are taking a stand against extremism and working with the government, with mosques and community groups to keep our people safe," Bishop said.

Sheikh Mohamadu Nawas Saleem, spokesman for the Australian national imams council, said the prime minister's statements failed to take into account the "silent, behind the curtains" efforts of Muslim leaders to eradicate terrorism.

"I'm sure imams around Australia collectively already speak out against Daesh," Saleem told Guardian Australia. "What we said against violent extremism, we meant." Daesh is another term used to refer to Islamic State.

The sheikh said that community intervention had worked better than the security agencies in identifying radicals.

"It is because of the efforts of imams that Australia is safe," Saleem said, adding that Abbott's comments "demonise Muslims at large".

The imams' council has regular meetings with the attorney general's department, police and security agencies on how to identify people who could fall into the clutches of terrorism and work against it.

Saleem said this collaboration has been working well, but there is always more that could be done.

The government initially set aside \$13.4m over four years to fund community engagement programs as part of its counter-terrorism strategy, but only \$1m was set aside in 2014-15 for the program.

Individual groups can receive grants of up to \$50,000 each, which some groups say is not enough.

"Is the government serious about solving this problem, or is this just to inflame racism?" Kattan said.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/23/muslim-leaders-outraged-by-tony-abbotts-admonishment-over-extremism>

2. Tony Abbott angers backbench with dismissive 'slap-down'

Brisbane Times

February 24, 2015 - 4:56PM

Mark Kenny, James Massola, and Richard Baker

Tony Abbott has done nothing to salve discontent on his backbench with a dismissive party-room "slap-down" of MPs who advocated a less combative approach to the issue of children in immigration detention, by telling voters how successful the Coalition had been in reducing the number of minors locked up.

On the same day as government senators eviscerated Human Rights Commission President Gillian Triggs for the commission's Forgotten Children report which criticised successive Australian governments for detaining children, Mr Abbott slammed Professor Triggs, telling Parliament she had lost the confidence of the government.

He had earlier told Liberal MPs his uncompromising approach would not change, rejecting their advice to go positive and telling them he would always call out a political "stitch-up" when he saw it.

Mr Abbott also faced strong criticism from his backbench over the broken promise of future submarine construction in South Australia and on the "captain's call" decision to dump Philip Ruddock as chief whip.

In a further sign of the internal discontent now gripping the government, Mr Abbott weathered what one MP called a "cavalcade of complaints" in the meeting with MPs continuing to push back against his "aggressive" style, his method of decision making, and his public presentation.

An MP present at the meeting confirmed that two Liberals, Craig Laundy (NSW) and Andrew Laming (Qld), suggested to Mr Abbott that he concentrate on getting the remaining children out of detention rather than attacking Ms Triggs.

The MP described Mr Abbott's response as "a complete slap-down", noting that it surprised others at the meeting, and had only fuelled concerns over Mr Abbott's tendency to put "politics over policy".

Fairfax Media has been told by several MPs that Don Randall - the WA MP who seconded the spill motion against Mr Abbott two weeks ago - repeatedly questioned the Prime Minister about the sacking of former chief whip.

An MP said it had been "tense" with another calling it "an ugly moment".

Mr Abbott was also pressed by South Australian MPs on submarines with Rowan Ramsey warning him he would be breaking an election promise "if the hulls aren't welded" in South Australia.

Andrew Southcott adopted a more conciliatory tone, asking for better communication of the Commonwealth's considerable defence acquisition budget being spent in South Australia.

But tensions within the Liberal Party show no sign of abating.

One day after a damaging leaked email from the party's honorary treasurer Phil Higginson to executive members, there are claims that federal executive members could "rise up" against Richard Alston, the party's president, and federal director Brian Loughnane unless they implement governance changes recommended by Mr Higginson.

A prominent member of the executive said there was a strong feeling of frustration at the "lack of accountability, openness and fairness" within the Liberal's organisational wing.

Although the federal Liberal Party's 2013-14 accounts were belatedly signed off by Mr Higginson last week, the executive member said excessive secrecy around the spending of funds remained a big concern.

"This issue has been swept under the carpet for years by the previous president (Alan Stockdale) and by the current president (Richard Alston)," the executive member said. "I think Phil Higginson was very polite in what he wrote. If he is not taken seriously, then who knows what else could happen? The executive could get a backbone and rise up."

Another executive member described the mood within the party's organisational wing as restless and frustrated. The member said it was obvious to all on the executive that the party's system for managing finances was inadequate and non-transparent.

The member said it was difficult to fathom how the Liberal's federal executive had yet to meet in 2015 given the multitude of problems being faced by the Abbott Government.

"The upcoming meeting on March 6 should be very lively," the member said.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/tony-abbott-angers-backbench-with-dismissive-slapdown-20150224-13nchd.html>

3. George Brandis censured by Senate over treatment of Gillian Triggs

Labor motion accuses attorney general of being unfit for the office and follows evidence last week suggesting the human rights chief was pressured to resign

The Guardian
Daniel Hurst, political correspondent
Monday 2 March 2015 14.13 AEDT

The Senate has censured the attorney general, George Brandis, over his treatment of the president of the Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs.

The censure motion, which also accused Brandis of being unfit to hold the office of attorney general, passed the Senate 35 votes to 32, with support from Labor, the Greens, the Palmer United party, and the independent senator Jacqui Lambie.

The outcome prompted government senators to exclaim "shame". The motion has no direct legal consequences but it formally registers the Senate's displeasure at Brandis's conduct.

Monday's vote came three months after the Senate censured the then defence minister, David Johnston, who was subsequently removed in a cabinet reshuffle.

It followed testimony in Senate estimates hearings last week suggesting the government attempted to pressure Triggs to resign and indicated it would consider her favourably for another position.

Labor's Senate leader, Penny Wong, moved the motion accusing Brandis of a range of matters including failing to defend Triggs "from malicious attacks" and "seeking to obtain the resignation of Professor Triggs by facilitating the offer of an alternative role that would have required her to relinquish her position as president".

Brandis was also accused of "refusing to fully account for his conduct when appearing before a committee of the Senate, undermining Australia's commitment to upholding human rights, and being unfit to hold the office of attorney general".

Defending his conduct in a speech to the Senate, Brandis said the public was entitled to know that he had lost confidence in Triggs.

"This parliament should be a fierce guardian of its rights to call members of the executive and its agencies into account," he said.

Brandis said he disagreed with the notion that the Human Rights Commission should be considered like a court.

But he added that if it was treated like a court then the commission president should apply the same principles as judges in "deciding whether or not to recuse themselves from a case".

Brandis said the commission was "not absolutely independent". He said the consequence of the argument it should be above criticism would also shield other agencies such as the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission or the auditor general from criticism.

Lambie said it was a pleasure to support the censure motion against Brandis, arguing the attack on Triggs was "so vicious and extreme there are no shades of grey in this debate".

"For someone who has high regard, as he has said, for Professor Triggs, he sure has one hell of a way of showing it," Lambie said.

Labor senator Jacinta Collins denounced the government over its handling of the "tawdry episode".

"Labor does not take censure motions lightly but with respect to Senator Brandis there is a pattern of behaviour that has grown into this most outrageous incident," she said.

The Greens senator Penny Wright said Triggs, in her report on children in detention, had done nothing more than “embarrass an acutely sensitive and vengeful government”.

“It’s a frightening thing when our government believes it can attack the very institutions that are designed to hold it to account and that is why we must show our censure and take action,” Wright said.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/mar/02/george-brandis-censured-by-senate-over-treatment-of-gillian-triggs>

4. Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children rally for Gillian Triggs

Advocates say political agenda and attacks on Human Rights Commission president are overshadowing urgent need to free asylum seeker children

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Saturday 28 February 2015 16.37 AEDT

Political agenda is overshadowing the urgent need to free asylum seeker children from detention, an Australian advocate group says.

Grandmothers Against Detention of Refugee Children gathered in Melbourne on Saturday to rally for the release of all asylum seeker children and their families, chanting “free the children” while walking through the CBD.

The group is also critical of the federal government’s battle with the Human Rights Commission president, Gillian Triggs, after her report into children in immigration detention.

Clare Forbes, one of the groups’s co-founders, says Triggs’ recommendations, including the release of all asylum seeker children, must be implemented immediately.

“Vilifying Dr Triggs, the messenger, who criticised conditions under both Labor and Coalition governments, must stop now,” she told the crowd of grandmothers aged 40 to 90, who attended from around Victoria.

“Australia’s reputation as a nation that cares about decency, justice and compassion is at stake.”

The groups’s chairwoman Dr Gwenda Davey said children were kept in detention for an average 400 days in Australia, compared with Britain’s limit of 72 hours.

“We should free all these children and their families and welcome them into the Australian community,” she said.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/28/grandmothers-against-detention-of-refugee-children-rally-for-gillian-triggs>

5. Legal challenge for offshore detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru

Sydney Morning Herald
March 1, 2015 - 12:15AM
Chris Vedelago

The Abbott government's offshore refugee policy is facing a new legal challenge that seeks to hold the Commonwealth legally responsible for conditions in its overseas detention camps because the decisions to open and operate them were made in Australia.

The Sunday Age understands the claim is an attempt to refute the government's long-standing position that what happens in the camps is the sole responsibility of the governments of Nauru and Papua New Guinea and the private operators that run them.

Law firm Maurice Blackburn is making the argument on behalf of a 36-year-old detainee who is suing the Commonwealth and contractor G4S after losing an eye during the 2014 Manus Island riots.

The Abbott government is currently fighting dozens of individual lawsuits brought by current and former detainees over allegations of mistreatment and unlawful incarceration in Australia's extensive camp network. Two class actions – brought against the federal government and the centre operators – are also underway on behalf of more than 1500 detainees on Manus and Christmas Islands.

A spokesperson for Maurice Blackburn declined to comment because the matter involving the unnamed detainee – known as “RN” – is currently before the Supreme Court of Victoria.

But a new statement of claim filed in the proceeding argues that RN was at all time "under the sole and total control of the Commonwealth" regardless of his physical location in PNG.

The Sunday Age understands that Maurice Blackburn will seek access to an extensive list of government documents in a bid to demonstrate the establishment, financing, subcontracting, management and oversight of the Manus camp was directed from within Australia.

"The place where in substance the duty owed by the [Commonwealth] to [RN] arose and the breaches of duty took place or occurred was Australia," court documents allege.

"The law of Australia is the appropriate law to be applied in determining [RN's] claim against the [Commonwealth]."

The claim also notes the contracts with G4S, Salvation Army and others to set up and run the camp at Manus were all signed in Australia.

Although the government has conceded it owes a "duty of care" to those in the camps, its solicitors argue that any physical or psychological injuries sustained by detainees is due to negligence on the part of camp operators or the host country.

But Dr Andrew Morrison, SC, spokesman for the Australian Lawyers Alliance, said that argument was contradicted by the widespread presence of Australian government personnel in the camps.

"To say that they have fully delegated the running of camps to others is simply false," he said.

"Whether the Commonwealth uses G4S or the government of PNG to provide security, if it's done negligently, then the Commonwealth is as liable as if it were one of its own employees that did it because it has a non-delegable duty of care as a matter of law."

The Department of Immigration declined to comment on the lawsuit because the matter is before the court.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/legal-challenge-for-offshore-detention-centres-on-manus-island-and-nauru-20150228-13rfzn.html>

6. Nauru detention centre 'calm' says Transfield, despite self-harm and unrest

Last week one asylum seeker tried to hang himself and another drank a bottle of insect repellent

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and agencies
Monday 2 March 2015 12.25 AEDT

One asylum seeker tried to hang himself inside his tent on Nauru last week, while another drank a bottle of insect repellent and several hundred people protested in Nauru's largest city.

Despite the acts of self-harm and unrest, Transfield Services security personnel described the mood inside the Australian-run immigration detention centre on Nauru as "calm, and the threat level low".

Transfield Services situation reports, known as "sitreps", dated between 25 and 27 February, detail that two asylum seekers committed acts of self-harm over three days last week.

On 25 February, an asylum seeker was found "with a rope around his neck that was tied off to a support beam on the roof of the tent". The man was being held up by another asylum seeker who had found him hanging and had intervened.

On 27 February, an asylum seeker was found in his tent lying on the ground. A fellow detainee had reported he had drunk a bottle of insect repellent.

"There was a strong smell of insect repellent coming from [the man]," according to the situation report, adding that the man appeared to have planned further acts of self-harm. "A subsequent search of [his] living area uncovered a further two bottles of RID insect repellent," the report continued, describing the incident as "superficial self-harm".

The documents are marked "Sensitive For Official Use Only" and Guardian Australia has chosen not to reproduce them or publish the names of the asylum seekers and staff involved.

But the reports are an insight into the continuing instability on the island, even as the detention camp moves to an "open centre" plan.

Asylum seekers are being closely monitored by Transfield's "intelligence unit" within the detention centre, known as the "Whiskey team".

"The atmospherics within the Nauru Regional Processing Centre have remained calm ... individual occurrences of an aggressive or antisocial nature may continue to occur; however it is probable these will be attributed to personal issues and agenda, and unlikely to be linked to any collective concerns," the report states.

But in the same document, the intelligence unit also reported that large-scale protests were rumoured and possible.

"The intelligence unit will continue to monitor this internally and will report further as matters develop."

Throughout the week, refugees and asylum seekers refused to comply with detention centre staff. People boycotted classes, and refused to speak with case workers. Others, who have found work on the island, have gone on strike or quit their jobs.

The week culminated in protests by refugees on Saturday and Sunday. The largely peaceful protests involved men, women and children, and were closely watched by police, some dressed in riot gear. Some protestors carried crucifixes fashioned from cardboard, others held signs saying "Stop using refugees for nasty political goals" and "End the silence, stop the violence".

"Refugees on Nauru island protested again, to condemn the harsh policy of Australian government," one refugee said.

"About 400 refugees, hand-in-hand, showing the unity, strength, and enthusiasm to stand firmly. Till [this] day they are not getting any positive response from the authorities about their future and getting out of the situation they have been in for the last two years."

Another said there would be further protests and resistance to the resettlement process.

"There is a very tense environment in Nauru. Because now we are treated as farm cattle not humans. And we refugees have just become an income source for Nauruan community and corrupt Nauru government."

Several protestors claimed they were attacked by police and other security personnel. One reported being punched in the face.

Photographs show refugees being physically restrained, pushed and manhandled by police, but no violence. Other photos show men with scratched faces and torn shirts.

The Transfield situation report said: "it is probable that the claims of heavy-handed tactics being employed against a 'peaceful' demonstration are inaccurate, and have been purposely skewed by the authors in order to propagate discontent throughout the wider Nauruan community, and the broader perception of offshore processing".

The Department of Immigration spokesman said the protests were "dealt with by the Nauruan police force, which is responsible for the safety and good order of Nauruan society".

"The Australian government remains committed to the processing and resettlement arrangements in place on Nauru."

The government of Nauru did not return calls asking for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/mar/02/nauru-detention-centre-calm-says-transfield-despite-self-harm-and-unrest>

7. Hundreds of Nauru refugees protest against 'slave-like living conditions'

ABC News Online

By Pacific affairs reporter Liam Fox and Sam Bolitho

Posted Mon 2 Mar 2015, 5:25pm

Hundreds of refugees on Nauru say they will continue to protest against what they say are slave-like living conditions on the remote Pacific island.

Around 400 people have been released from the Australian-run detention centre to live in the community after being given refugee visas by the Nauruan government.

Refugees have staged demonstrations in recent days to protest against conditions on Nauru and their treatment at the hands of locals.

On Sunday, large crowds gathered outside the office of Connect Settlement Services, the Federal Government's service provider for refugees on Nauru.

Around 100 people - including women and children - took part in the protest, chanting "we want freedom".

One protester, who wanted to remain anonymous, told the ABC that locals do not want them on the island.

"Some of them are very friendly and they understand us, but most of them they don't like us to stay in their country," he said.

"Most of them hate us. They are just looking for refugees around the island to fight with them.

"We are refugees we are not slaves. The way that we're living here and the way the Nauru government is behaving with us is just like slaves."

Campaign of non-cooperation with governments

The protest followed an even larger demonstration on Friday involving around 300 refugees.

Photos showed protesters carrying banners with slogans "we are refugees not slaves" and "end the discrimination".

A young girl was photographed holding a cardboard cross with "Freedom or die" written on it.

Over the last six months there have been several reports of refugees being assaulted by locals.

In October, four unaccompanied teenagers claimed they were bashed by a group of apparently drunk men while walking home at night.

The recent protests were initially sparked by a visit to Nauru by Australia's Immigration Minister Peter Dutton last month.

Refugees demonstrated outside the restaurant where Mr Dutton dined with Nauru's president Baron Waqa and other government officials.

They have now launched a campaign of non-cooperation with the Nauru and Australian governments.

Refugees with employment have quit their jobs, children are boycotting school and there have been promises of more protests.

The ABC has contacted the Nauruan government for comment but there has been no response.

Australia's Immigration Department has said the protests are a matter for the Nauruan police force.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-02/nauru-refugees-protest-against-slave-like-conditions/6275236>

8. Refugees injured in protest over resettlement on Nauru, advocates claim

Five refugees were hurt when Nauruan police blocked a 300-strong protest march on Friday, Refugee Action Coalition says

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Sunday 1 March 2015 12.46 AEDT

A protest by refugees angry at their resettlement on Nauru turned violent when police got involved, advocates claim.

The Refugee Action Coalition says five refugees were slightly injured when Nauruan police blocked a 300-strong protest march on Friday.

It follows a week of non-cooperation on the tiny Pacific island, with some refugees boycotting classes and refusing to work, the group said.

The Department of Immigration confirmed there had been a protest, but an official did not comment on the injury claims.

"The matter was dealt with by the Nauruan police force, which is responsible for the safety and good order of Nauruan society," the official said.

"The Australian government remains committed to the processing and resettlement arrangements in place on Nauru."

The island's regional processing centre "remained calm at all times".

Tension is mounting between locals and refugees, Nauru photographer Clint Deidenang said this week.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/01/refugees-injured-in-protest-over-resettlement-on-nauru-advocates-claim>

9. Number of children in Nauru detention centre set increase by 50%

Brisbane Times
February 23, 2015 - 1:54PM
Sarah Whyte

There were 44 reported cases of sexual assault of children in Australian detention centres in the 18 months to July 2014, Senate estimates heard on Monday.

The hearing in Canberra also heard that while the government has acted swiftly to reduce the number of the children in detention, the number of children being detained on Nauru is expected to increase by about 50 per cent.

According to the Department of Immigration, all known instances of sexual assault were reported to local police in Australian centres and to the Australian Federal Police for the Christmas Island detention centre.

The 44 cases of sexual assault of children between January 1 2013 to July 10, 2014 do not include any cases of sexual assault on Nauru, Senate estimates heard on Monday.

There were 19 reported cases of sexual assault - including five involving minors - in Nauru's detention centre between July 1, 2014 to 31 January 2015.

The new figure for sexual assaults, which covers a period spanning both the former Labor and the current Coalition governments, comes just weeks after the Australia Human Rights Commission released its report on children in immigration detention. The Forgotten Children report detailed 233 instances of assault involving children and 33 instances of sexual assault from January 2013 to March last year.

Senate estimates heard there are currently 126 children being held in Australian detention centres.

However, the hearing was told the number of children being detained on Nauru was expected to increase by about 50 per cent once children who were initially transferred from Nauru to Australia for medical reasons are returned back to the island's detention centre.

There are currently 116 children on the small Pacific Island, with another 68 children waiting to return to the centre following their medical treatment in Australia.

On Tuesday, Gillian Triggs, the president of the Human Rights Commission, will face Senate estimates.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/number-of-children-in-nauru-detention-centre-set-increase-by-50-20150223-13m6ib.html>

10. MEDIA RELEASE: Refugees 'Stay-Away & Boycott' campaign rocks Nauru

Thursday Febr 26, 1015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Hundreds of refugees on Nauru have begun a campaign of non-cooperation with the Nauruan government, and the Immigration Department and with all authorities and organizations like Connect that supposedly responsible for their existence on Nauru.

Already, refugee children are boycotting every level of school. Nobody is attending the English classes held by Connect (see empty adult English class photo, attached). Refugees are refusing to talk to Connect case-managers.

More than 150 refugees who had jobs, including in the Nauruan public service, have quit their jobs or are effectively on stay-away strike.

"We are withdrawing our cooperation," one Nauruan refugee told the Refugee Action Coalition (RAC), "We will no longer contribute to the Nauruan economy. We will not be treated like slaves."

A major protest is planned for Friday, 27 February.

As the momentum of the campaign has gathered pace, the Nauru government has begun distributing flyers (copy attached) warning darkly about 'public safety and public order' and that unauthorised persons are prohibited from designated areas.

Last night (Wednesday 25 February) caseworkers visited refugee housing areas warning that refugees found in certain areas will be arrested by Nauruan police. Police are conspicuously hanging around the refugee camps.

The refugees were angered by the visit of Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton, on 21 February. Dutton avoided the refugees; "Nobody saw him or spoke to him," RAC was told.

Dutton used the visit to re-commit to a five-year agreement with the Nauruan government to warehouse refugees on the island. For its part, the Nauruan government welcomed the agreement as some bizarre development proposal to boost to Nauruan economy.

There was no consideration of the refugees who have been found to be in need of international protection. Yet there is no security and no resettlement arrangement for them. They face five years on Nauru, with nowhere to go at the end of that time.

The refugees' anger is also stirred by the knowledge that asylum seekers who arrived in Australia on the same boats as they did over 18 months ago, are now being released into the Australian community and will be eligible for protection visas in Australia.

Refugees from all the camps on Nauru, including Fly Camp, the more remote camp of single men, will be involved in Friday's protest.

"The asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru have been the victims of blatant discrimination," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"They were arbitrarily selected for offshore processing on Christmas Island. They endured the appalling conditions in the Nauru detention camps. Now, as refugees, find they are still imprisoned on Nauru with no future.

"One reason the government is busily attacking Gillian Triggs is because the Human Rights report exposes the shocking conditions on Nauru.

"As long as Nauru is open, the government's hypocrisy is exposed for all to see."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713

11. MEDIA RELEASE: Nauru refugees issue local leaflet

Thursday Febr 26, 1015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

In the run up to Friday's protest, the Nauruan refugees are distributing a leaflet (attached, and text below) appealing for the help of local Nauruans to oppose the Nauruan government's collaboration with Australia's cruel policy of offshore processing.

For more information, contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

From: Nauru refugees

To: People of Nauru

At 2013 the Australian parliament approved a new policy for those [who] seek asylum to Australia but come by boat and decided to send all of them to offshore processing centres at Nauru and PNG. Although it's a cruel policy but the way Abbott Government enforced the law is even more cruel ! They split the people in the same boats and in many cases they split families in two different groups, [and] sent a group to Australia and extrude (sic) the others to offshore (s) !! The Abbott government accompanied and supported by the government of Nauru has planned to keep the refugees in offshore as hostages to reach their nasty, political goals.

The refugees are the most vulnerable class of people in Nauru community and due to widespread cultural differences, big climate diversity and being tortured for a long time in detention centres most of them are suffering from mental disorders.

Helping Australia in torturing refugees and asylum seekers has brought Nauru international blames and caused lots of tensions and social anomalies in Nauru society.

The refugees demand [that] the locals ask their government to stop the cruelty against the refugees and say no [to] unfair, cruel refugee deals.

The refugees have decided to start a series of peaceful protests in order to show their disgust and abhorrence of being treated like slaves between the governments. They would like to assure the locals that the protesters have no intention of committing any sort of violence or causing any damage to the island or the islanders. The Protest will remain peaceful and the protesters will remain committed to respect the inhabitants and the country rules.

The refugees need to emphasise that they know the locals as their brothers and sisters and have a huge amount of respect and appreciation for them. We don't want to be your enemy, we just ask you for help, please.

God bless us all.

Nauru refugees.

12. MEDIA RELEASE: Hundreds of refugees protest on Nauru

Saturday February 28, 2015

Refugee Action Coalition

Ian Rintoul

mobile 0417 275 713

Around 300 refugees on Nauru staged a protest, Friday afternoon, 27 February.

The peaceful protest assembled at Beach House, the accommodation for many of the Australian personnell employed in the detention centre.

However, when the rally attempted to march around the island, Nauruan police (supported by Transfield riot squad) blocked the road and attacked a number of the protesters to prevent the march proceeding.

Five people were treated after being punched in the face or pushed to the ground by police - but no-one was hospitalised. A Pakstani man recording the protest was also viciously punched.

The rally come at the end of the first week of a campaign of non-cooperation that has seen boycotts of schools, and English classes, and refugees quitting their jobs.

The protsters carried banners and placards highlighting the discrimination that has seen around 1300 asylum seekers dumped on Nauru with no avenue for secure resettlement.

"The Nauru detention centre is untenable and unsustainable. It is a social disaster," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition. "The Australian government has created a permanent underclass on Nauru. The longer people are held on Nauru, the greater will be the discontent."

The campaign of non-cooperation will continue.

After the protest, one Nauruan refugee said, "We have nothing against the Nauruan people. We are the victims of Australian political games. My friend in Australia is living in Australia and will get a visa. What is the difference. Why are we on Nauru."

Photos and videos available on request. There are Nauruan refugees also willing to be interviewed.

Contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713 for more information

13. Australia secured SL asylum deal by staying 'silent' on rights

Australia secured asylum deal by staying 'silent' on rights abuses: Sri Lanka PM

Prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe says former president agreed to help stop boats carrying asylum seekers if Australian government kept quiet

The Guardian

Agence France-Presse

Monday 23 February 2015 15.26 AEDT

Australia stayed silent on alleged human rights abuses in Sri Lanka in exchange for cooperation in cracking down on people-smuggling, Colombo's new prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said on Monday.

Wickremesinghe said former president Mahinda Rajapaksa had agreed to help stop boats carrying asylum seekers leaving for Australia if Canberra kept quiet about alleged abuses committed by the previous regime.

In an interview with the Australian newspaper, Wickremesinghe said Australian prime minister Tony Abbott's close relationship with Rajapaksa, who was voted out of power last month, was "a mystery" to Sri Lankans.

Colombo's new premier also said that "people connected to the previous government" had taken part in people-smuggling operations.

"It was being done by people with Rajapaksa connections, but once this deal was done between Australia and the Rajapaksa government, where you looked the other way [on human rights abuses], then the secretary of defence got the navy to patrol," he told the broadsheet.

"You could not have got anyone out of this country without someone in the security system looking the other way, the police or the navy."

The arrival of asylum seekers by boat is a sensitive political issue in Australia, which in 2013 started sending those picked up on boats to offshore camps on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island and Nauru.

Most asylum-seeker boats that have made the precarious journey to Australia came from Indonesia, but 120 left from Sri Lanka in 2012 for what can be a voyage of up to three weeks.

Wickremesinghe said he was not against the Australian government, but urged them to learn from their experiences.

"Some other countries must also, that fully backed the Rajapaksa regime," he told the newspaper. "When human rights were being trampled, and democracy was at bay, these countries were silent. That is an issue for Sri Lanka."

Sri Lanka's new government has promised a domestic probe into alleged war crimes under Rajapaksa.

The previous regime had resisted a UN inquiry into claims that up to 40,000 ethnic Tamil civilians were killed under Rajapaksa's command in the final months of a war that ended in May 2009.

Ahead of travelling to Sri Lanka in 2013 for a Commonwealth summit, Abbott said he said he was "not inclined to go overseas and give other countries lectures".

His office had no immediate comment to Wickremesinghe's comments in the Australian.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/23/australia-secured-asylum-deal-by-staying-silent-on-rights-abuses-sri-lanka-pm>

14. Inquiry to probe claims of excessive force at Maribyrnong detention centre

Brisbane Times
February 24, 2015
Nick Toscano and Beau Donnelly

Guards suspected of attacking detainees at Victoria's main immigration detention centre will come under fresh scrutiny as part of an inquiry launched by the federal government.

The Immigration Department has begun probing claims that government-contracted security staff have used excessive force on inmates at the Maribyrnong detention centre in Melbourne's west after allegations of a recent wave of violence.

It follows a Fairfax Media investigation that revealed three reported attacks on detainees housed at the centre in December and January alone, and internal concerns among the workforce about a growing culture of brutality.

Confidential documents from within private security firm Serco, which runs the centre on behalf of the Australian government, detail incidents including a middle-aged Chinese woman allegedly being kicked in the stomach by a guard and a Sri Lankan man being punched in the face.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman has launched an inquiry into a third case in which several officers allegedly harmed a detainee who was handcuffed behind his back and held down on his stomach for 45 minutes. The Turkish national said he struggled to breathe and was denied repeated requests for water.

Fairfax Media this month revealed Serco sacked two of its guards after internal reviews into violent clashes at Maribyrnong.

Serco officers said the spate of attacks reflected a disturbing "prison camp" culture coming from hard-line managers, who were sanctioning the use of brutal force.

On Tuesday, the Australian Immigration Department confirmed new allegations raised against Serco guards were being "taken seriously and escalated through appropriate channels".

A spokeswoman said department officials were told of the reports of guards' excessive force while on a recent visit as part of a review into drug paraphernalia found at the premises.

She said the allegations of abuse may be referred to police for criminal investigation.

"The department takes seriously any allegation of misconduct by [department] officers and service provider staff," she said. "These are investigated thoroughly and an appropriate course of action is taken."

Dozens of complaints have been lodged by inmates at the Maribyrnong centre in recent years, mostly about staff harassment and bullying. But insiders say physical assaults have become regular occurrences since Serco transferred a number of ex-corrections managers out of the prison system into the detention centre late last year.

One said detainees were being "literally bashed" and "viciously assaulted", while another described how senior staff were condoning the use of excessive force on volatile detainees.

"Managers are quite happy to use handcuffs behind people's backs and push them down on their stomachs," the source said.

A Serco statement at the time said its officers were rigorously trained to "de-escalate" incidents where detainees became aggressive, and were only permitted to use approved control and restraint techniques as a last resort.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/victoria/inquiry-to-probe-claims-of-excessive-force-at-maribyrnong-detention-centre-20150224-13n98j.html>

15. Immigration Department investigates bill for official's trip

Immigration Department investigates claims escorts, first-class flights on bill for official's trip

ABC News Online

Posted Mon 23 Feb 2015, 9:07am

Updated Mon 23 Feb 2015, 9:18am

The Immigration Department says it is investigating a report one of its officials spent tens of thousands of taxpayer dollars on a trip to China which included female escorts.

Earlier this month it was reported the official and three Government contractors spent almost \$44,000 on the four-day trip, including on first-class airfares and expensive scotch whiskey.

Today, Immigration Department secretary Mike Pezzullo told a Senate committee the report was being investigated.

"If any of my officers have engaged in the sorts of behaviours that were described in the article, they will be appropriately disciplined," he said.

"I'm willing to give you that assurance, but there's no more detail that I can provide."

The report by Fairfax Media said the trip to Beijing and Shanghai in June last year was to inspect a factory supplying housing materials for staff at the Manus Island detention centre.

But the factory's manager said the delegation came to the facility just once for less than an hour.

The report, citing itinerary documents and receipts, said the group spent \$5,000 at a Shanghai karaoke bar including four bottles of Glenmorangie scotch and tips for escorts.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-23/factfinding/6218684>

16. Immigration Department investigates child sex abuse allegations

Immigration Department investigating 44 allegations of sex abuse in detention centres, cannot say how many involve children

ABC News Online

By political reporters Susan McDonald and Eliza Borrello

Posted Mon 23 Feb 2015, 8:56am

Updated Mon 23 Feb 2015, 7:23pm

The Immigration Department says it is aware of 44 reported cases of sexual assault in detention centres in Australia, but cannot say how many involve children.

Answering questions from Labor senator Kim Carr about the number of minors alleged to have been assaulted, Ken Douglas from the Immigration Department said the claims cover the period of January 1, 2013 to July 10, 2014.

"They represent sexual assaults involving a minor, to a minor or in a detention facility in which a minor was accommodated," he told the senator.

"It is not possible to determine at this point in time whether or not all reports relate to incidents involving minors."

Mr Douglas has clarified the figures after he earlier said they dated back to 2011.

On Nauru, there were 19 reported cases of sexual assault, including five involving children, between July 1, 2013 and January 31, 2015.

The Senate Estimates hearing was told all those cases had been referred to Nauruan Police.

The Department figures come almost a fortnight after the Human Rights Commission released its report, *The Forgotten Children*, which detailed 233 assaults involving children and 33 incidents of reported sexual assault, with the majority involving children.

Immigration Department Secretary Mike Pezzullo ordered his department do an audit of all incidents involving the alleged abuse of children dating back to 2008.

"Should that audit reveal any matters that have not been appropriately referred, are not the subject of appropriate treatment by the police or child protection authorities, I certainly intend to make that information available to any competent authority, including indeed the Royal Commission," Mr Pezzullo told the hearing.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-23/allegations-of-child-sexual-abuse-in-detention/6219014>

17. Teenage girl seeking asylum jumps off detention centre balcony

Teenage girl seeking asylum jumps off detention centre balcony after sexual assault claims

ABC Radio CAF - AM

First posted Tue 24 Feb 2015, 4:52am

Updated Tue 24 Feb 2015, 7:49am

A teenage asylum seeker is being treated for undisclosed injuries in a Darwin hospital after jumping off a first-floor balcony at an unnamed detention facility last week.

The Immigration Department said the 16-year-old girl was now in a stable condition and had her mother with her.

The teenager had raised sexual assault allegations during her time in detention on Nauru, and those claims are now the subject of a departmental inquiry.

Immigration Department secretary Mike Pezzullo said he would show a personal interest in following up the case, which was considered "attempted self-harm".

"I can give you an absolute assurance, we'll be particularly interested in the follow-up action once the girl's medical condition stabilises ... specialists [will] speak to her about her motivations, her feelings," Mr Pezzullo said.

"It's a pretty serious step to throw yourself from a height."

The girl had been transferred to Australia in January from detention in Nauru and could be transferred back there.

"You can be assured we won't be sending anyone on a long journey, such as to Nauru, if they're suffering any kind of consequences of falling from a great height," Mr Pezzullo said.

"I certainly as secretary will be taking a close interest in the follow-up to this matter."

The incident involving the teenager was discussed at a Senate estimates hearing in Canberra last night.

Immigration official Ken Douglas told the hearing the Immigration Department had received 44 reports of alleged sexual assaults which involved children or took place in detention facilities that housed children.

He said there had been 19 cases of reported sexual assault in detention on Nauru between July 1, 2013, and January 31, 2015, five of them involving children.

And he confirmed the teenage girl recovering in hospital had made allegations of sexual assault.

"I have seen a late report this afternoon to that effect, but I think ... the department is properly going to undertake further investigations into those claims," he said.

The author of the *Forgotten Children* Human Rights Commission report, Gillian Triggs, will appear before the Senate estimates inquiry again this morning.

Incident 'unsurprising', says advocacy group

An asylum seeker advocacy group repeated its call for all children to be removed from detention.

Peter Robson from the Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network said the incident was not surprising.

"Unfortunately it's not the first time I've heard about this sort of self harm," Mr Robson said.

"The kind of conditions that young people are facing in detention centres at the moment leads to these things that are more common than not, unfortunately.

"So when I heard about it, I thought it was unsurprising."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-24/asylum-seeker-jumps-off-balcony/6241554>

18. VIDEOS: Reza Barati one year on: Voices from Manus

• A voice from Manus Island Detention Centre to commemorate the anniversary of the murder of Reza Barati under the watch of the Australian Government, asylum seekers on Manus Island have recorded a letter addressed to their friend.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vxqpVLFXGPO>

•• A message from Reza Barati's Father - One year on, Reza Barati's father, Torab Barati calls for Justice for his son and speaks on what this loss means to his family. Australian Refugee Rights Activists call for an end to mandatory detention and the closure of Manus and Nauru offshore processing centres.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIsW0n4IzKc>

••• A message from whistleblower, Steve Kilburn. Former G4S officer speaks out about the horror that unfolded the night Reza Barati was murdered on Manus. A compelling account of what he witnessed.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CFODVCYmd4>

19. Reza Barati murder trial to begin soon on Manus Island, say reports

The trial of two local men, charged with the murder of the Iranian asylum seeker during a riot last year, will begin within the next month in Lorengau

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thursday 26 February 2015 12.14 AEDT

The trial of the two men accused of murdering asylum seeker Reza Barati on Manus Island will reportedly begin soon.

Asylum seekers who were witnesses to Barati's murder last year have said security officers inside the detention centre have asked them if they would be willing to attend the trial to give evidence.

According to Papua New Guinea sources, the trial will begin within the next month in Lorengau, the largest town on Manus Island.

"Today, one officer came and he had a list of who is witness of killing [of] Reza Barati. He said ... in Lorengau there is court about Reza Barati and he asked all that list 'are you willing to come to court?'," one asylum seeker said.

Some of the asylum seekers say they fear they will not be safe attending court, particularly if they give evidence against local men.

"I asked from that officer 'are you look[ing] after me when I am in court?' and he said 'I can't guarantee because I don't know that environment around the court'. I am too scared about that, maybe it's not safe," one asylum seeker wrote.

Twenty-three-year-old Reza Barati, an Iranian Kurd, was killed on 17 February last year during three days of rioting and attacks on asylum seekers in the detention centre.

A government report found Papua New Guinea police entered the detention centre and G4S guards ran riot, attacking asylum seekers. Some asylum seekers had a "belligerent attitude" and had been insulting local staff, the report found.

Barati, who was not involved in the rioting or protests, was fatally injured when he was allegedly attacked by detention centre staff with a wooden pole and then had a large rock dropped on his head.

He died that night on a concrete wharf near the detention centre, "bleeding from the back of his skull onto the ground", according to the doctor who treated him.

In August last year, two local men, G4S guard Louie Efi, and Salvation Army employee Joseph Kaluvia, were arrested and charged with Barati's murder. Their trial was delayed last November when a judge discovered they had not had lawyers appointed.

On another Australian offshore detention island, Nauru, asylum seekers have been given a list of places they are forbidden from going as the centre transitions to an "open" detention regime.

The open centre model will allow asylum seekers to leave the detention centre and move around the island before their refugee status determinations are made. But signs posted at camps have restricted the places they can go. The list of 12 locations mandates that all government buildings are off-limits, including the parliament, courthouse, hospital and all schools.

Asylum seekers cannot go to any harbours or ports, or to the airport. They have been told they face fines of between \$200 and \$1,000 for breaching the restrictions, or one year in jail. Guardian Australia understands the restrictions also apply to refugees who have been given visas to live in the country.

The immigration minister Peter Dutton visited Nauru last week, and said the open centre model would be finalised "very soon".

"An open centre will give transferees more opportunities to engage with the Nauruan community before their refugee processing has been completed, allowing genuine refugees to ultimately integrate seamlessly into the community," Dutton said.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/feb/26/reza-barati-trial-to-begin-soon-on-manus-island-say-reports>

20. Trial of two men accused of killing Reza Barati to start next week

Reza Barati: Trial of two men accused of killing asylum seeker on Manus Island to start next week

ABC News Online
By PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane
Posted Thu 26 Feb 2015, 12:19pm

The murder trial in Papua New Guinea for two men accused of beating an asylum seeker to death on Manus Island is due to start next week.

Reza Barati, a 23-year-old Iranian, died during a riot at the Australian-run detention centre on February 17 last year.

In July, police arrested security guard Louie Efi and soon afterwards arrested Salvation Army worker Joshua Kaluvia.

The Papua New Guinean men were both charged with murder.

The case has been listed in the Manus Island court for Monday.

Refugee advocates said asylum seekers have been asked to give evidence over the next three weeks.

Some asylum seekers are reportedly nervous about their safety while testifying, others have already confirmed they will take the stand.

Last year, PNG police said they were looking for three more suspects, one Papua New Guinean and two expatriates, in relation to Mr Barati's death.

More than 1,000 asylum seekers are being detained on Manus Island as part of the Federal Government's offshore processing policy.

The violence at the detention centre in Papua New Guinea was "eminently foreseeable", according to a Senate committee report into the incident.

About 70 asylum seekers were injured, some seriously, in what the Government described as a "disturbance" on Manus Island.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-26/two-men-to-stand-trial-over-reza-barati-death-on-manus-island/6265212>

21. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus Island hygiene a health hazard - still torture

Wednesday February 25, 2015

Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

A filthy toilet block (three toilets and three showers) in Delta Compound on Manus Island has been demolished.

The disgusting facilities (photos attached) were a health hazard and should have been demolished months ago.

But, little has changed. The demolition means that there are only 12 toilets and showers for 300 people.

The stench is strong as ever. The sewage pipes just run into the sea off Delta Compound anyway, and the sewage washes back in with a high tide. But the pipes are clogged creating a constant unhygienic mess in the compound.

The mosquitoes remain in plague proportions. The queue to use the toilets and showers is often has 25 or 30 people, waiting an hour or longer.

Not surprisingly, many people in the compound have skin rashes and fungal infections that medical services provider, IHMS, seems incapable of properly treating. Everyone worries about rashes and skin problems since the death of Hamid Khazaie in September, last year.

Since the end of the hunger strike in late January, asylum seekers are issued with tiny amounts of washing powder, which is not enough to properly clean their clothes. There are four washing machines (and two driers) for 300 people, so most people have to hand wash to keep their clothes clean.

Nor can the asylum seekers have shampoo.

In 2013, a Amnesty International report found that the conditions on Manus Island and in Delta Compound "...violate the Convention against Torture."

Nothing's changed.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

22. MEDIA RELEASE: Don't deport to Afghanistan - Hazaras at risk

DONT DEPORT TO AFGHANISTAN -- FOURTH HAZARA ASYLUM SEEKER AT RISK

Monday February 23, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Last minute legal efforts are being made in Perth to seek an injunction to prevent the Immigration department from forcibly removing a 23 year-old Hazara Afghan asylum seeker, from Yongah Hill detention centre. The removal is presently scheduled for tomorrow, 24 February and, if it goes ahead, would be the fourth forced removal to Afghanistan since August last year.

But the removal comes at a time when the Afghan government has issued a letter to European governments, at least, requesting them to desist from forcibly returning Afghan asylum seekers. It is unclear whether the Australian embassy or the Australian government has received a similar letter.

Besides the letter, the new Afghan refugee Minister has also made a verbal appeal for governments not to forcibly return asylum seekers to Afghanistan:

<https://kabulblogs.wordpress.com/2015/02/21/afghan-minister-for-refugees-and-repatriation-stop-deportation-to-afghanistan/>

The Afghan government has gone as far as refusing to accept asylum seekers, being forcibly sent there by Norway. To make it their concerns very clear, Afghanistan has actually sent asylum seekers back to Norway. There is a real risk that if this Hazara man is deported, that he will not be accepted in Kabul.

"We are calling on Peter Dutton to halt the removal," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition. "The security situation in Kabul is deteriorating badly. And now, there is a direct appeal to world governments, from the Afghan Minister for Refugees. The Afghan has referred explicitly to the fact that people from dangerous provinces should not be returned.

"The Afghan government is saying that the country is not safe and the government cannot look after those being returned. On top of that, the Afghan government is about to enter talks with the Taliban -- the historic persecutors of the Hazara people."

The Western Australian wrestling peak body Wrestling WA has also intervened on behalf of the asylum seeker. The committee has written to the Minister saying that the man "is an extremely talented young wrestler, with successes at the highest levels of Australian competition."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

23. MEDIA ALERT: Court grants injunction to prevent Afghan removal

Monday February 23, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

A Perth court has granted an interim injunction to halt the scheduled removal of the Hazara man from Yongah Hill on 24 February. The case was adjourned for full hearing on 23 March.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

24. MEDIA RELEASE: Another protester joins Villawood rooftop protest

Monday February 23, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

A second detainee has joined the roof-top protest at the Villawood Detention Centre (photo attached).

The protest which began before 9.00am this morning (Monday 23 February) is over the move by the Immigration Department to forcibly transfer a Chinese couple from Villawood to Darwin, yesterday (Sunday 22 February).

The couple have been in detention around 14 months and the woman is now eight months pregnant.

The couple had refused to be transferred, but after separating the couple and hand-cuffing her husband, the woman was tricked into going to the Villawood property section, where she too was seized. The couple was then taken to the domestic airport.

Detainees at Villawood were told that the woman had collapsed at the airport and had been taken to hospital late yesterday. They were told that the couple would be brought to Villawood, but the couple has not been returned to Villawood.

The protesters have offered to come down if Serco or Immigration will make a call to the couple to determine their whereabouts.

So far Serco negotiators have refused to make the call, or to bring Immigration representatives to the protesters.

It seems almost certain, that Immigration has reneged on its undertaking that the couple would be brought to Villawood and has gone ahead and transferred the couple to Darwin.

The forced transfer seems to be part of the Immigration department attempt to consolidate detention in the Wickham Point detention centre.

The forced transfers have also been an element of the on-going hunger strikes in the Darwin detention centre. Asylum seekers have been re-detained and transferred from various parts of Australia to Darwin, separating them from partners, community and legal support.

"The welfare of the asylum seekers is the very last consideration of the Immigration Department," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"It makes no sense to arbitrarily transfer asylum seekers to more remote detention centres. But it is particularly cruel to transfer a woman so close to giving birth from friends and community support in Sydney. As far as the Immigration department is concerned asylum seekers are nothing but numbers to shifted between detention centres at their convenience."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713