

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Monday, 18 January 2016

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1. Denmark to force refugees to give up valuables under proposed asylum law

UN warns bill requiring refugees to pay for accommodation while applying for asylum will fuel fear and xenophobia

The Guardian

Patrick Kingsley Migration correspondent

Wednesday 13 January 2016 08.29 AEDT

Denmark will force refugees to hand over their valuables in order to pay for their accommodation while applying for asylum, in a move the UN has warned may fuel fear and xenophobia.

The Danish government has secured a parliamentary majority in favour of legislation that will severely curb the rights of refugees, and is expected to pass the legislation in parliament on Wednesday.

The bill states that asylum seekers who arrive with more than 10,000 kronas in cash “will have to [use] the surplus above 10,000 kronas to pay for their stay”, Danish government spokesman Marcus Knuth told the Guardian.

After criticism of an earlier draft of the law, refugees will no longer have to give up items of sentimental value, such as wedding rings or items deemed as essential, such as watches. Gold bullion could still be seized, but Knuth said in the case of any dispute of sentimental value the asylum seeker would have the final say.

Responding to comparisons between the new law and treatment of Jews during the Holocaust, Knuth said the claim was “ludicrous” because similar laws apply to Danish citizens on welfare benefits. “We’re simply applying the same rules we apply to Danish citizens who wish to take money from the Danish government,” he said.

The move is the latest attempt by Denmark’s centre-right government to roll back its obligations to refugees. Last month, Danish prime minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen called for an end to the UN 1951 refugee convention, a landmark law that was created in the aftermath of the Holocaust – a suggestion the UN said would “renounce millennia” of human progress.

Local refugee advocates also warn that there are even worse aspects to the new law than the articles concerning refugees’ belongings. If passed on Wednesday, the law will prevent most Syrian refugees from being granted more than one year’s sanctuary, unless they can prove that they are individually under threat in Syria. Parents who arrive without their children will have to wait at least three years before they can apply to be reunited with their family, a clause campaigners have described as particularly cruel.

Michala Clante Bendixen, chair of Refugees Welcome in Denmark, said: “It means that most of these families will be separated for up to five years. First they’ll have to wait for the asylum application to go through, then there will be 3 years of waiting, then they’ll have to apply for reunification. Separating families for five years is completely crazy.”

While Denmark only accepted about 20,000 asylum seekers in 2015 – just 2% of the total to arrive in Europe last year – its government is keen to deter more from coming, Bendixen said. “They have two goals – one is to scare people away, and the other is to make life as hard as possible for those who are already here; to make them leave.”

Denmark also recently introduced more stringent border controls, forcing more potential asylum seekers back to Germany, which has welcomed about 1.1 million last year. Germany has also begun to turn back more migrants from its own southern borders, with deportees to Austria rising to 200 a day in January, up from 60 in December, the Austrian government said this week.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/12/denmark-to-force-refugees-to-give-up-valuables-under-proposed-asylum-law>

2. Man who tried to bring Afghan child into UK cleared on migration charges

Reuters UK

Thu Jan 14, 2016 4:38pm GMT

BOULOGNE-SUR-MER, France

By Ingrid Melander and Pauline Mevel

A former British soldier who tried to smuggle a four-year-old Afghan girl into Britain at her father's request was on Thursday cleared of all charges related to aiding illegal immigration.

A French court gave 49-year-old Rob Lawrie only a suspended 1,000-euro fine on a charge of putting the child's life in danger - by transporting her in a storage compartment of his van rather than on a child seat with a seatbelt.

Lawrie, an unemployed father of four, had befriended the girl and her father in a squalid migrant camp in northern France.

"Compassion was in the dock today and France sent out a message that compassion will win," he told reporters after the trial.

Lawrie could have faced up to five years in jail and a 30,000-euro (\$32,500) fine for aiding illegal immigration, in a case that went to the heart of Europe's dilemma over how to deal with its worst refugee crisis since World War Two.

But the judge said that considering the circumstances of the case it was enough to give Lawrie a warning with the suspended sentence. He will not have to pay the fine unless he commits another offence in France.

A tearful Lawrie told the court he had acted on the spur of the moment, finally relenting after repeatedly refusing her father's requests that he take Bahar Ahmadi, known as Bru, to relatives just a few miles from his own home in northern England.

"It was very cold ... the little girl, she fell asleep on my knees, and I couldn't leave her. I'm sorry," he said, adding that he knew it was wrong and regretted doing it.

Lawrie had been a volunteer helper in the makeshift migrants' camp in Calais known as "the jungle" where Bru and her father lived.

There are around 4,000 migrants at the unofficial camp, which rain often turns into a quagmire. Most want to get to Britain, trying night after night to jump onto trucks or trains or even walk the 31-mile (50-km) undersea tunnel to Britain. At least 16 have died in the attempt.

Britain and France have jointly tightened security around the harbour and railway lines over the past months, but the camp remains.

On Oct. 24, Lawrie had set off in his van with Bru hidden in a compartment over the driver's seat, but French police caught him and returned Bahar to her father in the camp.

Police also found two Eritrean men in the back of the vehicle. Lawrie said he had been unaware of their presence and authorities did not press charges.

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-britain-france-ruling-idUKKCN0US21Q20160114>

3. Turkish police find factory making fake lifejackets in Izmir

Officers seize 1,200 lifejackets filled with non-buoyant materials from workshop in city often used by refugees to reach Greece

The Guardian
Patrick Kingsley and agencies
Thursday 7 January 2016 01.53 AEDT

Turkish police have uncovered a factory producing fake lifejackets, shining a light on a booming cottage industry that has emerged as a byproduct of the refugee crisis and heightened the risks for those hoping to reach Europe by sea.

Police allegedly seized 1,263 lifejackets filled with non-buoyant materials from an illegal workshop in Izmir that employed two Syrian children, according to Agence France-Presse and Dogan news agencies.

The raid came in the same week that the bodies of more than 30 people washed up on Turkish beaches, having drowned in their attempt to reach Greece. Some of the dead were pictured wearing lifejackets, leading to suspicions that they may have been fake.

In two visits last year to Izmir, a major smuggling hub on the Turkish coast, the Guardian was repeatedly offered counterfeit lifejackets by salespeople openly touting their wares on a prominent shopping street close to two police stations.

In an attempt to convince buyers, shops sell jackets branded with the word "Yamaxa", a misspelling of the Yamaha brand, whose products cost about twice as much as a fake. Trade is so high that some shoe and clothes shops sell lifejackets as their primary products.

"We only sell two or three pairs of shoes a day," one shop assistant told the Guardian in November. "But we're still selling between 100 and 300 lifejackets. In the summer sometimes it was a thousand – the factories couldn't keep up."

After the agreement of a multibillion-euro deal between the EU and Turkey, Turkish police have slightly increased their operations against people involved in the wider smuggling business. But the flow of refugees between Turkish and Greek shores remains at record levels, with about 2,000 braving the journey every day this month, roughly an elevenfold increase on last January's levels.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/06/refugee-crisis-turkish-police-find-factory-making-fake-lifejackets-izmir>

4. Action! Masked Activists Remove Slovenian Wire Fence on Croatian Border

Activist activity on the Croatian border with Slovenia against the hated wire fence.

Total Croatia News

By Vedran Pavlic

31 Dec 2015, 16:04 PM

They look like your neighbours, ordinary people and students who in no way seem different. But, only during the day. When night comes, they dress in black, pull balaclavas over their heads with slits for the eyes and put gloves on their hands. They take scissors for wires and go into the night, towards the Slovenian border. With a bit of luck, they return with a thick roll of razor-wire fence and publish the photos of their trophies on the Facebook page of a group which brings together anonymous wire cutters. The initiative started in Croatia, in Istria, and soon spread throughout the whole Croatian border area. After one of the raids in Hrvatsko Zagorje, the idea crossed the border, reports Jutarnji List on December 31, 2015.

Protesters on both sides of the border started peacefully, decorating the razor fence with Christmas ornaments, playing volleyball over it, hanging banners with various messages. Slovenian composer Matija Krečić even performed a "Christmas Morning" concert next to the fence in Bela Krajina region with three violins and a cello, but all these ideas had little effect. However, then a guerrilla initiative was started. As soon as the fence appeared near Matulji, local residents started cutting it and posting photos of souvenirs.

A team which recently started doing similar raids near Zagreb includes a member of the Workers' Front, a radical left-wing organization which campaigns against the "dictatorship of capitalism and party oligarchies". He recommends that anyone who wishes to participate in the raids should find a field with stretched wire fence, and go there at night in a group of three people, "with two cutting and one driving".

"After fifteen minutes, the driver picks up those who were doing the cutting. The wire is very dangerous, so you have to use those thick heavy-duty gloves. But, at least the wire will not be able to hurt anyone else or prevent somebody's movements", says the anonymous razor-wire cutter on the Facebook page which brings together supporters with a slogan: "Let's cut the wire! The initiative for the self-organized removal of wires on the borders which divide people, kill animals and take us back to the Dark Ages of European history."

In an interview with a Slovenian newspaper, one Croatian activist, who during just one night removed 30 metres of razor fence, said that the material must not be left behind because it is still dangerous. They plan to recycle it and pay the money back into the Slovenian budget. His motives are simple: he recalls how as a boy he played and swam in the river Sutla, how people socialized together on the border. Now it seems like they all live in a kind of a concentration camp.

Slovenian activists wrote an ironic manifesto titled "Croats – Brothers During a Day, Thieves at Night". They "complained" that the wire paid by all Slovenian citizens is being stolen by their southern neighbours. "We invite all of you to go to the border, where we will say 'no' to Croats who steal our fence. Instead, we should cut it ourselves", the message reads.

<http://www.total-croatia-news.com/politics/1956-action-masked-activists-remove-slovenian-wire-fence-on-croatian-border>

5. Child detainee mental trauma will last, immigration healthcare provider warns

Exclusive: International Health and Medical Services says government services are inadequate and children's mental health deteriorates the longer they're held

The Guardian

Ben Doherty and Nick Evershed

Monday 18 January 2016 06.53 AEDT

Children in detention suffer more serious mental health crises than adults and their mental health deteriorates the longer they are detained, the government's detention healthcare provider has warned the immigration department. It also says the detention of children will cause them long-term mental health damage that will persist long after they are released, in advice seen by Guardian Australia.

International Health and Medical Services, the company contracted to run health services in detention, has also told the government that detention health services are already inadequate, and that more cuts to mental health services will further harm people in detention.

IHMS health data, confidentially provided to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection but obtained by Guardian Australia under freedom of information laws, paints a bleak picture of deteriorating mental health in detention, particularly among children.

Depression is the most common specific chronic illness among children in detention, the IHMS data shows, and those under 18 have, by far, the highest rates of mental health presentations in detention of any age group.

“The minors are seen due to a variety of triggers, including previous trauma and torture, enuresis [bed-wetting], nightmare, family conflict and situational crises,” the IHMS reports say, highlighting violence in detention harming children’s mental health.

In offshore detention, the percentage of children’s presentations to a doctor that have resulted in a mental health diagnosis has nearly doubled over the past year. Adult diagnoses have remained static.

In the last quarter of available data – from April to June 2015 – 21.8% of children aged 5 to 17 in offshore detention who presented to a doctor were diagnosed with a mental health condition.

Infants and toddlers were also significantly affected; 15.6% of children aged up to four were taken to a doctor because they were suffering from a mental health condition in the same three months.

The rate among the adult population in offshore detention was 11.6%.

But IHMS argues that the GP diagnosis figures are likely an under-representation of the true extent of mental illness, which is almost certainly far more widespread, with people accessing counselling, psychology and psychiatry directly without a doctor’s referral.

It says the figure is particularly understated for children, who, if they are enrolled in school, are often absent for doctor’s appointments.

“There has been an overall reduction in the actual numbers of children and adolescents presenting to GPs with mental health diagnoses in this quarter,” IHMS wrote in April 2015. “Contributing factors include the overall reduction in number of children in the [offshore processing centre] due to resettlements, the centre becoming ‘open’ and the large majority of children attending schools ... reducing their availability for appointments.

“Of those remaining in detention, data from this quarter appears to indicate a marked increase in the percentage of children and adolescents presenting to GPs with mental health diagnoses, with the rise being most marked in the age 11-14 group [41.3%].”

The IHMS figures do not record the number of instances of child self-harm and suicide attempts but cases have been consistently reported in detention. The Australian Human Rights Commission report, *The Forgotten Children*, found, over a 15-month period, more than 300 children committed or threatened self-harm in immigration detention, 30 reported sexual assault, nearly 30 went on hunger strike, and more than 200 were victims of assaults.

IHMS has cautioned the government that people held for long periods in detention will require continuing mental health treatment after they are released.

“With a large number of transferees now in detention over 18 months, this is indicative of increased need for mental health services in this population and will need to be considered in planning for mental health services following release from detention,” the latest report says.

Full story at <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/18/child-detainee-mental-trauma-will-last-immigration-healthcare-provider-warns>

6. Julie Macken: The Long Journey To Nauru

30 years ago, it would have been unthinkable to Australians that they would lock up men, women and children without charge, in conditions likened to a concentration camp. And yet, here we are. In this special feature, Julie Macken charts the course that made Australia an international pariah for its treatment of the world’s most vulnerable people – those seeking asylum.

New Matilda
By Julie Macken
January 12, 2016

He heard their muffled footsteps as they moved across the tiled entrance of his grandmother’s house. The stillness of mid-morning briefly disturbed as light and dust swirled through the front door in their wake.

His grandmother, Nadira, had just left for the market, “to get out and get back before the sun makes it too hard for an old woman”. She had laughed saying this, just as she had smiled and grinned about everything since his return to Lahore two weeks ago.

The scene from his homecoming could have been source footage for an airline commercial – not a dry eye to be seen. And why would there be? Her grandson who was lost had returned after two years on the run. Watching his slight figure as he emerged from behind the security doors of the airport she promised herself that she would keep him safe. She would feed him and find him a wife and he would remind her of her son, her beautiful dead son. “My husband has been taken and my

only son, but Allah is great and my grandson returns to me in my old age,” she told him as she held his face in her tired, dry hands.

The assassins moved quickly, surefooted and focused as they homed in on their target.

Here in the top room he had two choices. He could make a run for it across the rooftops or try to take them by surprise and barge past them down the stairs.

But even as his plan formed it dispersed. They were militia, professionals in an army that tolerated nothing less than perfection. There would be no running away like a cat across the tiles for him. As he turned to face the entrance they appeared, moving quickly to either side of the door.

The younger one glanced around and shut the door before dropping the heavy bolt into place. The older man grabbed a chair and, putting it in the centre of the room, pointed his gun at Ali and told him to sit.

Full story at <https://newmatilda.com/2016/01/12/the-long-journey-to-nauru/>

7. Save the Children workers unfairly fired on Nauru for political reasons – report

An independent report says the sacked workers are entitled to compensation after being dismissed on ‘no evidence or reliable information’

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson
Friday 15 January 2016 20.12 AEDT

Save the Children workers summarily sacked on Nauru must be compensated by the Australian government, which dismissed them on “no evidence or reliable information” an independent report has found.

The damaging report by the former chief executive of the high court Christopher Doogan, found Save the Children workers were fired under political pressure from Canberra as a “circuit breaker” to quell protests on the island.

On 3 October 2014, as asylum seekers on Nauru continued to protest against their detention and the Australian government’s asylum policies, a Daily Telegraph story quoted a leaked internal intelligence briefing that reportedly claimed Save the Children staff had fabricated stories of abuse of asylum seekers and encouraged self-harm to “achieve evacuations to Australia”. The story quoted the then immigration minister, Scott Morrison, saying police were investigating Save the Children workers who had misused privileged information.

Morrison also told a press conference that same morning the workers were being removed because they were alleged to have organised protests.

The story, and the allegations, were found to be untrue: the subsequent Moss Review found “no conclusive evidence” that Save the Children staff encouraged protests or self-harm. Morrison refused to apologise.

The Doogan report found that the intelligence report raised concerns about some Save the Children staff and counselled further investigation, but warned there was no firm evidence. However, this was manipulated by senior executives under pressure from Canberra into a directive to remove the staff from the island immediately.

“It seems reasonably clear that the information provided in relation to the 10 Save the Children staff members was not intended to be acted upon in the way it was acted upon. Rather, it seems that the intention was that further investigation would be undertaken before any action was taken.”

There was no further investigation and the targeted staff were not given any opportunity to respond to the allegations. The sackings were politically motivated, Doogan found.

It was, Doogan found, “apparent that contractor staff on Nauru were being pushed to provide names and information to support what was perceived in Canberra to be Save the Children staff providing inappropriate support or assistance to transferees in various way. As will become clear from the following outline, there was in fact no evidence nor reliable information on which to specifically name nine of the 10 Save the Children staff.”

(One named Save the Children staff member resigned before the removal directive was made.)

Tash Blucher, one of the sacked Save the Children workers, said there was little new in the heavily redacted report, beyond a very clear acknowledgement that there was no basis for the decision to sack her and her coworkers.

“It’s so redacted we can’t even work out who the decision makers were or how the decision making occurred,” she told Guardian Australia.

Blucher said the report was vindicating, but “at the same time all the major negative impacts remain”.

“Our reputations were publicly slurred. There still hasn’t been an apology and the other really distressing thing was having to leave our clients behind, and being really concerned about their wellbeing and what happened to them,” she said.

“That concern remains because – more than one year later – they are still in detention, they’re still on Nauru. Now there’s no not-for-profit organisation there to represent them or seek to improve wellbeing outcomes for them.”

Blucher said she and her sacked co-workers were victims of mismanaged decision making, but said while staff suffered, the consequences of the mismanagement on Nauru was far more harmful for those held in detention.

Lawyers for Blucher and her former co-workers continue to talk with the department.

“I’m happy that our lawyers will continue to work with the department for an outcome, but for us it’s really hard to talk about the issue of compensation because we’re all really keenly aware that the harm being done to us is tiny compared to people who have been detained there.”

The chief executive of Save the Children, Paul Ronalds, welcomed the Doogan report, said he was proud of the work Save the Children staff had performed on Nauru, working “with some of the most vulnerable children in the toughest of circumstances”.

“The idea that they would fabricate cases of abuse or encourage children to hurt themselves was always absurd. We have said this right from the very beginning. These were some of our most talented and hardest working colleagues, and children and their families on Nauru were the poorer for their absence.”

He said negotiations with the government should see appropriate compensation awarded to the sacked staff.

Ronalds again called for the Australian government to end the practice of mandatory and prolonged detention of children.

“We know from two years working on Nauru about the shocking impact that prolonged incarceration has on people seeking asylum. It is unquestionably harmful to their mental and physical wellbeing and must end.”

The immigration minister did not respond to requests for comments.

Doogan’s report followed a familiar pattern of damning reports being quietly released at awkward times to avoid media and public scrutiny. The Doogan report was released late on Friday evening.

The earlier Moss review was also released on a Friday, a couple of hours after former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser died, having been in the government’s possession for several months.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/15/save-the-children-workers-unfairly-fired-on-nauru-for-political-reasons-report>

8. Expulsion of Save the Children staff from Nauru not justified, says report

Sydney Morning Herald
January 15, 2016 - 8:28PM
Nicole Hasham

Former immigration minister Scott Morrison's department was "not justified" when it banished nine charity workers from Nauru and claimed they told asylum seekers to fabricate abuse accounts to embarrass the Abbott government, an official report has found.

Mr Morrison claimed the staff had allegedly coached detainees to invent stories to discredit the government's border policies. But a review commissioned by the federal government from lawyer and immigration expert Christopher Doogan has found there was insufficient evidence to name the nine Save the Children staff.

Mr Doogan found staff from other contractors at Nauru "were being pushed to provide names and information to support what was perceived in Canberra to be [Save the Children] staff providing inappropriate support or assistance to transferees ... there was in fact no evidence nor reliable information on which to specifically name nine of the ten ... staff."

It is understood that the removal order applied only to nine staff because one worker had already left the island.

Repeated allegations of abuse against detainees at Nauru, including children, has fuelled opposition to the government's offshore detention regime and triggered international condemnation.

Mr Morrison said in October 2014 the government had been given an intelligence report that said it was "probable" that staff were coaching asylum seekers to manufacture situations where evidence could be obtained to pursue a political agenda in Australia. He also claimed the staff organised protests on the island against the government's policies.

He said 10 Save the Children staff members, whose organisation protects child rights, would be taken off Nauru. The staff were given no details, and were accompanied by armed Nauruan police to the airport.

"I have been provided with reports indicating that staff of service providers at the Nauru centre have been allegedly engaged in a broader campaign with external advocates to seek to cast doubt on the government's border protection policies," Mr Morrison said.

Save the Children strongly denied the allegations and said it had not been given the chance to address them.

The workers were cleared by both the federal police and an inquiry by former integrity commissioner Philip Moss. However, the government has not issued an apology to the staff or paid compensation.

Save the Children's contract to provide welfare services to minors at Nauru was not renewed. Broadspectrum, previously known as Transfield Services, has taken over the welfare functions.

Some staff suffered mental illness and spent long periods out of work after being deported and publicly accused (but not named) of committing a crime while doing their job.

The government received the Doogan report in July but released it late on Friday. Large parts of the report had been redacted.

The report said "no consideration was given to seeking legal advice on the consequences" of ordering the staff to leave Nauru.

It found if senior departmental officers formed the view that any of the claims made against Save the Children constituted a breach of contract "then a reasonable course of action would have been to notify [the charity] of the claims and request [it] to investigate whether there was any substance to them".

A removal letter issued on October 2, 2014 "was not justified", the report said.

It recommended that negotiations be entered into to identify losses experienced by Save the Children and affected workers.

The claims relied on for the removal letter should also be put to staff, so "each has an opportunity to answer them", it said.

Save the Children welcomed the report.

The organisation "now looks forward to entering into negotiations with the Australian government which should see appropriate compensation awarded to its former employees, whom were not allowed to return to their important work for vulnerable children and families on Nauru", it said.

Chief executive Paul Ronalds said the charity was proud of its dedicated staff who worked on Nauru with "some of the most vulnerable children in the toughest of circumstances".

"The idea that they would fabricate cases of abuse or encourage children to hurt themselves was always absurd," he said.

"We have said this right from the very beginning. These were some of our most talented and hardest working colleagues, and children and their families on Nauru were the poorer for their absence."

He called on the government to immediately end the practice of "mandatory and prolonged detention of children".

"We know from two years working on Nauru about the shocking impact that prolonged incarceration has on people seeking asylum. It is unquestionably harmful to their mental and physical wellbeing and must end," he said.

In a statement the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said it accepted the report's recommendations "and will implement them subject to acting in accordance with other relevant legal obligations".

"The department recognises [Save the Children] staff were providing services to the government of Nauru in difficult and challenging circumstances," it said. "It also recognises departmental staff were seeking to act in the best interests of transferees."

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said the government's behaviour "has been a disgrace" and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection runs Nauru through "secrecy and intimidation".

"After accusing hard working employees of coaching self-harm and dragging their names through the mud, we now find out that they'd done nothing wrong," she said.

"These employees deserve to be compensated and I call on [Immigration Minister] Peter Dutton to explain exactly how he's going to sort this mess out."

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/no-justification-for-save-the-children-staff-to-be-banished-from-nauru-says-report-20160115-gm73s2.html>

9. Save the Children staff demand Government apology after report finds compensation deserved for Nauru removal

ABC News Online

By political reporter Tom Iggulden

First posted Fri 15 Jan 2016, 10:01pm Updated Sat 16 Jan 2016, 3:12am

Nine welfare workers deported from Nauru are demanding an apology from the Government following another official report finding there was no basis for their removal from the island.

The Save the Children workers were abruptly sent home in 2014 after raising asylum seekers' concerns about sexual harassment from guards.

Then immigration minister Scott Morrison suggested the group had orchestrated a campaign to undermine the Government's offshore detention policy.

Now an internal Immigration Department report, released late yesterday, says they should be offered compensation after finding no evidence they acted outside their duties at the Nauru detention centre.

But one of the workers, Natasha Blucher, told Saturday AM the group was more concerned about the fate of detainees who remain on Nauru.

"It's difficult for us to talk about monetary compensation in relation to ourselves and the harm perpetrated against us when the harm perpetrated against them is so much worse," she said.

The group has, however, appointed a lawyer to work through compensation with the Immigration Department.

Ms Blucher said she was "disappointed" there had been no apology from the Government despite two reports finding it had acted wrongly.

She also called on the Immigration Department to work with Nauru to reverse deportation orders made against the group, which remain in force.

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said the Government should promptly offer compensation to the group.

"The last thing we want to see is a court case dragged out at a further cost to taxpayers," Senator Hanson-Young told Saturday AM.

'A full apology is appropriate'

On Friday, Save the Children chief executive Paul Ronalds said an apology was owed.

"The report's findings make it clear, I think, that the staff involved deserve compensation, as does Save the Children for the cost it incurred in relation to this," he said.

"But I think more importantly, a full apology to both the staff impacted and Save the Children by the former minister and the department is entirely appropriate."

He said it was no surprise there was no evidence or information to dismiss the staff. "We've said from the start that these were some of our most talented and hardest working staff and the idea that they would fabricate cases of abuse or encourage children to self harm was always absurd," Mr Ronalds said.

"Save the Children has spent many hundreds of thousands of dollars defending itself against allegations that the department's own report finds that there was never any evidence of reliable information on which to base the actions taken by the department. "In fact it went further and found that the decision maker did not act in good faith."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-16/save-the-children-staff-demand-government-apology/7092576>

10. Asylum seeker detention times blow out to record levels under Malcolm Turnbull

Sydney Morning Herald
January 12, 2016 - 5:03PM
Nicole Hasham

The time asylum seekers spend in Australian detention centres has blown out to a record high under the Turnbull government, leaving men, women and children languishing behind wire, facing an uncertain future.

The latest statistics from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection show that in December, people in onshore immigration detention had been there for an average 445 days. In November, the figure was 446 days.

The average detention period has increased steadily since May last year and is now the longest since the government took power. It is more than double the 200-day wait four years ago under the Labor government.

Of the 1792 people in immigration, 91 were children and most were from Iran, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, China, Vietnam and Afghanistan.

The longer periods in detention come at a massive cost to taxpayers. The government's mid-year economic and fiscal outlook last month budgeted an extra \$588 million over four years, largely to cover "slower than forecast processing" of asylum seekers in Australia and offshore, leading to higher-than-expected detention centre populations.

This cost comes on top of the existing immigration detention budget, which runs into the billions, and forms part of a \$1 billion budget blowout announced last month.

The government has copped domestic and international criticism for its tough regime of mandatory, indefinite detention, which it says deters the dangerous people-smuggling trade.

Australian Human Rights Commission president Gillian Triggs said it was "concerned" by the long time people spend detained in Australia and at Nauru and Manus Island.

"We know from consistent medical evidence that holding people in detention for prolonged periods can do serious mental harm," she said.

"The commission is concerned about the harsh conditions of detention in the offshore processing centres and safety concerns, particularly for women and children."

Of about 600 people in community detention, 58 per cent had been waiting more than two years for their cases to be resolved.

There has been rising concern over the safety of asylum seekers in detention since detainees with criminal histories flooded the system. Under recent laws, people can have their visas cancelled if they have been sentenced to 12 months or more in prison.

A spokesman for the department said the figures were partly attributable to delays in Parliament approving the Safe Haven Enterprise Visa, which gives asylum seekers a five-year option to live and work in regional areas.

He said the time taken to process onshore asylum seekers depends on factors including "the complexity of the individual case as well as the need to undertake health, identity, character and security checks".

He said the figures were affected by the number of people held in immigration detention, which had declined since early 2013 as people were released into the community.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/asylum-seeker-detention-times-blow-out-to-record-levels-under-malcolm-turnbull-20160112-gm41v7.html>

11. Labor labels Minister Peter Dutton a 'disgrace' over detention blowout

Sydney Morning Herald
January 13, 2016 - 5:40PM
Nicole Hasham

The federal opposition says Immigration Minister Peter Dutton is "a disgrace" after Fairfax Media revealed a dramatic blowout in the time people languish behind wire in immigration detention.

But Mr Dutton said he is dealing with Labor's legacy of asylum seekers, and many of those in detention pose security risks and should not be released.

The latest statistics from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection show that in December, men, women and children in onshore immigration detention had been there for an average 445 days. In November, the figure was 446 days.

The figures prompted concern from Human Rights Commission president Gillian Triggs, who said medical evidence consistently showed that prolonged detention "can do serious mental harm".

The average detention period is more than double the 200-day wait four years ago under the Labor government.

Labor's immigration spokesman Richard Marles said the figures were "alarming".

"Allowing men, women and children to languish indefinitely in detention is a disgrace and Peter Dutton needs to immediately start taking responsibility for the dysfunction he is overseeing," Mr Marles said.

"There is no excuse for the processing time of asylum seekers to be increasing."

Labor leader Bill Shorten said Mr Dutton, who was recently criticised for calling a female journalist a "mad witch", had shown himself to be gaffe-prone. He called on Mr Dutton to explain "why it's taking this long to process people".

Mr Dutton said 50,000 people arrived on 800 boats under Labor's watch and accused the Opposition of "amnesia".

"It will take years to clean up this mess and Labor wiping their hands of a problem they created demonstrates they are not fit for government," he said.

"There are some people held in immigration detention because they have committed criminal offences, whose identity has not been verified or who are subject to adverse ASIO assessments.

"Mr Marles should nominate which of these individuals he wants to release and then explain the consequences to the public."

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said the government's "repeated promises that it would process people's claims for asylum quickly have been exposed as a lie".

"Thousands of men, women and children are locked up, facing longer processing times than ever before," she said, adding the Greens wanted a legal time limit on detention periods.

"People come here, seeking safety and a better life, because we can offer them protection. It's time we stood up and did just that."

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/labor-labels-minister-peter-dutton-a-disgrace-over-detention-blowout-20160113-gm53qx.html>

12. Self-harm in detention centres at epidemic levels, internal documents show

Sydney Morning Herald
January 16, 2016 - 12:15AM
Michael Koziol, Nicole Hasham
With Inga Ting

Asylum seekers have swallowed insect repellent, bashed their heads on walls and doused their bodies with boiling water in a culture of self-harm in Australian detention centres that appears to have reached crisis point.

Incident logs from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection covering one year, obtained under freedom of information laws, paint a picture of depression, desperation and violence at Australia's domestic and overseas detention camps and in the community.

They raise fresh questions over the human rights implications of Australia's tough border protection regime, which has been condemned by the United Nations, and will fuel calls for children to be immediately released from detention.

The data shows that in the year to July 2015 there were 188 incidents of self-harm involving asylum seekers at Nauru, about one every two days. There were 55 such self-harm acts at Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.

They included detainees swallowing poisons, stuffing tea bags down their throats and hanging by bed sheets or other makeshift nooses.

In one incident on Manus Island a detainee "inflicted 12 lacerations to his stomach with a razor blade". In another, a man "swallowed a Christian cross pulled from his wallet".

Another man was found attempting to damage his wrist "with a small ring of metal" and was restrained. He tried to break free, saying, "I want to die, let me die."

At Nauru in October 2014 a detainee, apparently upset after meeting his lawyer, "wrapped himself in toilet paper and attempted to get hold of a lighter". In another incident, a woman "poured boiling water over [her] lower limbs".

Also at Nauru, a man "was seen to jump from a top bunk with [a] torn sheet around his neck", while, separately, a detainee who swallowed anti-dandruff shampoo "was on the floor of the tent vomiting and ... appeared to be unconscious".

In May last year a man had "sewn a heart shape design into his hand using [a] needle and thread".

The rate of self-harm is even higher in Australia's onshore detention network, where there were 706 acts in 12 months - almost two incidents a day. They included asylum seekers living in the community or in community detention.

At Villawood in June a detainee drank half a litre of disinfectant and took heart medication.

Other detainees have swallowed washing powder, shampoo, stones, insect repellent, detergent, toilet cleaner and head lice treatment.

An asylum seeker living in the community in Western Australia last July "took 250 tablets of different medications" in an attempt to commit suicide.

Others have tried to injure themselves by bashing their heads against walls, mirrors, wardrobes and steel poles, or by choking themselves with plastic bags or scarves.

A handful of log entries appear to be wrongly categorised or updates on previous incidents. But the figures are likely to be conservative because many acts of self-harm or violence appear to be included in other incident categories.

The freedom of information requests, made by the University of Melbourne's Law Students for Refugees in conjunction with Fairfax Media, did not include logs of threatened self-harm, minor assaults or voluntary starvation.

The documents suggest the rate of self-harm at Nauru - once every two days - is significantly higher than that reported to a Senate inquiry last year by Transfield Services, since renamed Broadspectrum.

The controversial company, which performs key functions at the offshore camps, reported 253 incidents of self-harm over 972 days between September 2012 and April 2015, or about one incident every four days.

As Fairfax Media revealed this week, the time asylum seekers spend in onshore detention has increased under the Turnbull government to a record high of 445 days, raising concern over the effect on detainees' mental health.

An Immigration Department spokesman said all incidents of self-harm, no matter how significant, were reported and "any detainee who threatens to self-harm, or self-harms, receives immediate and appropriate medical care and support".

He said the department supported the governments of Nauru and PNG through contractors who worked with detainees in welfare, health and medical roles. Detainees who threaten or commit self-harm "are immediately provided with both counselling and medical services".

"The services provided in both Nauru and Papua New Guinea are broadly comparable with health services available within the Australian community," he said.

A Broadspectrum spokesman said the company "stands behind its track record" at the offshore detention centres, where it has made "significant improvements".

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/asylum-seekers-selfharm-in-detention-centres-at-epidemic-levels-internal-documents-show-20160114-gm6gqp.html>

13. Sri Lankan crisis centre worker wants 'fair go' for Down Syndrome daughter

ABC News Online

By Sarah Taillier

Posted Wed 6 Jan 2016, 12:12pm

A Sri Lankan man who works in a Christian crisis centre in remote Western Australia is appealing to the Federal Government to give his daughter, who has Down Syndrome, a "fair go".

In 2014, the Immigration Department approved a temporary work visa for nine-year-old Eliza Fonseka's parents, but not for the girl, because of concerns her condition could incur significant health care costs.

Last year Eliza's father Angelo Fonseka moved to Shark Bay, 800 kilometres north of Perth, to use his visa to work at a Christian crisis centre.

His wife, Shanoline, stayed behind in Sri Lanka with their daughter.

Mr Fonseka has been separated from his partner and child for nine months and says it has been hard to concentrate without them.

"It's so sad when my daughter says 'Dad I miss you, come soon'," he said.

"Eliza is the only immediate family member left in Sri Lanka, all the immediate family members are Australian citizens."

Mr Fonseka said his daughter did not require medication and was not a burden.

"As parents, we've given everything from the day she was born and we don't rely even on the Sri Lankan government," he said.

"The same will be applicable if we move to Australia.

"All the immediate family members have given in writing that ... they're going to take the responsibility of Eliza; her grandparents, my sister, we as parents, even my sponsor."

Mr Fonseka said Eliza had a mild form of Down Syndrome.

"She goes to a normal school and she does her daily routine very well, she travelled alone in a school van," he said.

"She goes to a normal school studying with normal people.

"Eliza is not a burden, Eliza is not the problem here."

Case still under review, says Dutton's department

Initially the Fonseka family struggled to have Eliza's visa reviewed.

In February 2015, the Australian High Commission in Colombo apologised for an "unfortunate oversight" and re-issued Eliza's refusal notification letter to include information about the family's rights to access the Migration Review Tribunal.

The matter went to the Migration Review Tribunal, which upheld its original decision to refuse the application but referred the case to Immigration Minister Peter Dutton.

In October last year, the Migration Review Tribunal recommended the Minister intervene "on the basis of the compassionate circumstances of the case".

A spokesman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said the matter was still under consideration.

The spokesman did not provide a deadline for when a decision would be reached.

Mr Fonseka has attracted support for his cause from a wealth of influential individuals and organisations, including Cricket Australia, West Australian Premier Colin Barnett, and the National Peak Disability Alliance.

Now he is appealing to Mr Dutton to give his daughter a "fair go".

"Australia is a Christian country with a good heart," he said.

"They've helped 6,500 Syrians to come to Australia with all of the benefits.

"I would say to the Minister to kindly consider everything and give compassion to my family as well, to look into the whole process on compassionate basis, and don't separate my family."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-06/crisis-centre-worker-calls-for-fair-go-from-government/7071124>

14. Indian man on bridging visa risks being blocked from re-entering Australia if he escorts his father's body home

ABC Radio CAF - PM

Exclusive report by Francis Keany

First posted Thu 14 Jan 2016, 4:12pm

Updated Thu 14 Jan 2016, 4:57pm

An Indian man in Melbourne risks being blocked from coming back to Australia if he escorts his dead father's body back to India.

Jaspal Singh, who has a wife and child, is on a bridging visa which does not allow him to return if he leaves the country.

The 26-year-old, who arrived in Australia as a student, was waiting for the arrival of his father and mother at Melbourne Airport on Monday morning when tragedy struck.

Gurdyal Singh collapsed at the arrival gate following a suspected heart attack, and despite the efforts of paramedics he died at the scene.

The family is now making arrangements for the funeral, which will be held in India.

But there is no guarantee Mr Singh be allowed back into Australia if he escorts his father's body back home.

Mr Singh's wife Mandeep Kaur, who is pregnant with their second child, said the family was incredibly distressed.

"I am 12 weeks pregnant, I have an 11-month-old baby and my baby is suffering from kidney problems and I'm going to regular appointment with the doctor, and I can't stay overseas with the baby.

"We're all very upset, all the family, me, my mother-in-law, Jaspal."

Siran Nyabally, a migration lawyer with Carina Ford who is dealing with the case, said the family was "devastated".

"Jaspal is between a rock and a hard place," she said.

"On the one hand his family is telling him that he needs to go back to India, he's obliged as the only son in Australia to be with his mother.

"But on the other hand, if Jaspal leaves Australia, he's going to be leaving a pregnant wife, who has suffered a miscarriage recently, and a young son who has suffered from kidney complications and is being referred to the Royal Children's Hospital, indefinitely, with no guarantee that he will be allowed to come back to Australia."

Case complicated by visa status

For three weeks in 2013 Mr Singh's visa expired after he separated from his previous partner.

He applied for a new visa with his new wife but it can now only be approved by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton.

Ms Nyabally said Mr Dutton has the power to allow Mr Singh to return to Australia.

"What we're asking for is for Mr Dutton to apply his own policies and consider intervening in this very, very unusual matter, where an Australian family unit would be ripped apart, were he not to act."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said it was now looking into the problem.

Minister Dutton previously granted visas to the family of a Pakistani student in Melbourne who was terminally ill, following an appeal from the public.

Mr Singh's wife Ms Kaur issued a plea to the Minister to intervene in this case as well.

"I just want to impress on the Minister, please, as a human, please think about the matter."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-14/indian-man-on-bridging-visa-faces-difficult-choice/7089340>

15. Indian man Jaspal Singh granted visa to travel for father's funeral after intervention by Peter Dutton

By Francis Keany

First posted Fri 15 Jan 2016, 12:53pm

Updated Fri 15 Jan 2016, 1:11pm

An Indian man will be allowed to return to Australia after attending his father's funeral in India, following an intervention by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton.

Lawyers for Jaspal Singh said he was given a new visa on Friday afternoon, after an appeal from his family.

The visa will allow him to return to Australia after he escorts his father's body home to India.

His father died of a suspected heart attack at Melbourne Airport earlier this week.

Yesterday the ABC reported that Mr Singh risked being stranded in India, away from his pregnant wife and their 11-month-old son in Melbourne, under the conditions of his old bridging visa.

The 26-year-old, who arrived in Australia as a student, was waiting the arrival of his father and mother at Melbourne Airport on Monday morning when tragedy struck.

Gurdyal Singh collapsed at the arrival gate following a suspected heart attack, and despite the efforts of paramedics he died at the scene.

Plans are now underway for the father's funeral in India.

Mr Singh's case was complicated by the class of bridging visa he was subject to, which meant there was no guarantee he would have been allowed back into Australia.

For three weeks in 2013 Mr Singh's visa expired after he separated from his previous partner.

He applied for a new visa with his wife Mandeep Kaur but it could only be approved by the Immigration Minister.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-15/indian-man-jaspal-singh-allowed-visa-return-for-father-funeral/7091792>

16. New Zealand's offer to resettle 150 offshore refugees a year never taken up

Refugees on Nauru plead with the NZ prime minister, John Key, to be resettled but its immigration minister says the decision is up to Australia

The Guardian
Helen Davidson and Ben Doherty
Monday 11 January 2016 19.14 AEDT

A two-year-old offer from New Zealand to resettle 150 refugees a year from Australia's offshore detention centres remains untouched by a reluctant Australian government, despite a public plea from people on Nauru.

The New Zealand government has since reallocated this year's places to Syrian refugees but says the offer remains part of its official immigration policy and open to the Australian government.

Last week 28 refugees on Nauru wrote to the New Zealand prime minister, John Key, asking to be resettled in that country under the Australia-New Zealand agreement.

The refugees have been found to have a well-founded fear of persecution in their homelands but have been offered only temporary residence in Nauru.

"Australia will not accept us despite us asking them for safety," the handwritten letter, signed and affixed with the refugees' boat numbers, says.

"They gave us to the Nauru government and told us we were now their responsibility. Nauru has not given us, and does not have the means to give us, permanent protection and safety.

"After 30 months in mouldy tents and now in the community where we are not accepted, some of us now have travel papers which give us the freedom to leave."

In response to the letter, New Zealand's immigration minister, Michael Woodhouse, said it was up to Australia to resettle people from its offshore detention camps and that New Zealand remained willing to assist.

"It is for Australia to take up the offer to utilise the up to 150 places and to date they have not done so," he said. "As such, the places are reallocated to the annual quota and most recently the places were given to Syrian refugees."

In a deal brokered between prime ministers Key and Julia Gillard in 2013, New Zealand agreed to accept 150 refugees from Australia's offshore processing centres each year from 2014-15.

The quota remains in New Zealand's forward planning for humanitarian resettlement.

But when the former Australian prime minister, Tony Abbott, was elected he effectively scrapped the deal at the Australian end, saying it would be called upon only "if and when it becomes necessary".

"Our determination is to stop the boats and one of the ways that we stop the boats is by making it absolutely crystal clear that if you come to Australia illegally by boat you go not to New Zealand but to Nauru or Manus and you never ever come to Australia," he said.

The Coalition government is loath to have refugees resettled in New Zealand as it is seen as undermining a fundamental tenet of the policy: that boat-borne asylum seekers will never be settled in Australia.

Refugees resettled in New Zealand can apply to become citizens after five years. New Zealand citizenship would give those people the right to travel and work in Australia.

The prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, said he believed resettlement in New Zealand would be an incentive for asylum seekers to board boats.

"I think an outcome like that could ... result in creating incentives for people smugglers to get back into business," he said.

Some refugees on Nauru have recently been granted travel documents, which would allow them to travel to another country that was willing to admit them. The visa to live in Nauru expires in five years.

Nauruan officials maintain that all refugees must ultimately be resettled in another country.

So far, 815 people have been granted refugee status on the island, including, it is understood, about 80 children. They are living in the detention centre or in the Nauruan community.

A further 543 people, including 70 children, remain in the detention centre awaiting a refugee status determination.

After Nauru and Manus Island's first iterations as Australian immigration detention facilities – under the "Pacific Solution" between 2001 and 2008 – 705 people from those centres were resettled in Australia and 401 in New Zealand. Far smaller numbers were resettled in Sweden, Canada, Denmark and Norway.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/11/new-zealands-offer-to-take-150-offshore-refugees-a-year-never-taken-up>

17. New Zealand unable to accept refugees from Nauru after Australia backs away from deal

ABC News Online

By political reporter Stephanie Anderson

First posted Tue 12 Jan 2016, 6:14am

Updated Tue 12 Jan 2016, 6:18am

New Zealand has confirmed it is unable to accept refugees from Nauru and Manus Island this year, citing reluctance from the Australian Government.

New Zealand had offered to resettle 300 refugees from the processing centres as part of a two-year deal with Australia, signed in 2013 by former prime minister Julia Gillard.

The plan had been proposed to begin in 2014, with the annual resettlement of 150 refugees contributing to New Zealand's overall intake of 750 places each year.

But a spokesperson for the New Zealand immigration minister Michael Woodhouse said Australia has not taken up the offer and the resettlement places had instead been given to Syrian refugees.

At the time of the agreement's signing, then Opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison criticised the deal, describing it as a "bandaid solution".

Mr Morrison said talks between the two countries should have focussed on border protection instead of resettlement.

"What this arrangement has the risk of doing is putting a bit of Kiwi sugar on the table for people smugglers," he said.

"What we should have been talking about is how New Zealand and Australia can be working together, through the Bali process, to beef up natural deterrents."

New Zealand's shadow foreign affairs spokesman David Shearer said that the deal was never a good one.

"John Key agreed that Australia could resettle 150 of their refugees on condition that if any boat people were coming to New Zealand then Australia would intercede," he said.

Comment has been sought from Immigration Minister Peter Dutton.

'They say we will never be settled in Australia'

The news comes as refugees from Nauru plea with New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key to take them in.

In a letter, confirmed by the New Zealand government, 28 refugees said that Australia would not accept them "despite us asking them for safety".

"They say we will never be settled in Australia," it stated.

"They gave us to the Nauru Government and told us we were now their responsibility. Nauru has not given us and does not have the means to give us permanent protection or safety.

"After 30 months in mouldy tents and now in the community where we are not accepted, some of us now have travel papers which give us the freedom to leave."

The letter states that the 28 signatories have all had their claims processed and are considered refugees.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-12/nz-unable-to-accept-nauru-refugees/7082764>

18. Manus detention centre bosses accused of flying out employee who allegedly robbed bar

Exclusive: Man was flown back to Australia from Manus Island before PNG police could investigate, amid conflicting accounts of consent for his transfer

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Friday 8 January 2016 09.31 AEDT

Managers at the Manus Island detention centre have been accused of flying an employee out of Papua New Guinea to avoid the country's justice system after he allegedly robbed a local bar before driving off and crashing his car.

Last year there were accusations of a cover-up after three Australian men accused of raping a Papua New Guinean colleague were flown back to Australia before they could face police.

The latest incident occurred about four weeks ago at the Harbourside hotel in Lorengau about 2pm. Witnesses said the man, who had been at the hotel since that morning, jumped over the bar and stole beer and a carton of cigarettes.

He then drove off towards Lombrum, narrowly missing a police vehicle which had responded to reports of a reckless driver, before running off the road, they said. Witnesses told police he got out of the car and began walking back towards the Lorengau base, which houses the processing centre.

The man is employed by Wilson Security, the company subcontracted by Australian immigration department contractors Broadspectrum (formerly Transfield) to provide security at the detention centre.

Guardian Australia was told when police went to the Australian-run centre to question the man, they were informed by staff members – thought to be a manager and a medical practitioner – that the man was in hospital, but he would see police the following day. He was flown back to Australia before that could happen, it is alleged.

A spokesman for the Australian immigration department confirmed the flight but said it had been advised no charges were laid and no criminal investigation was under way.

"The Department and its service providers will cooperate with the [PNG police] on this matter into the future, if required," he said.

The man was returned from Manus to Australia in December, the spokesman confirmed, based on "medical advice and compassionate grounds".

He said it was done in consultation with the PNG police, who consented to the man leaving for medical treatment.

But Guardian Australia has been told police are investigating the car crash incident, and have been unable to find a Manus province police officer who was aware consent had been given.

Dominic Kakas, a spokesman for PNG police, said the incident was “concerning”.

“We are concerned at the fact that this would be the second time Australians have been taken out of the country to avoid PNG laws for crimes they allegedly committed here,” he said.

Broadspectrum did not respond to questions about the incident. Wilson Security referred questions to the immigration department, which could provide no information on who gave consent.

Allegations of criminal conduct against centre employees are supposed to be dealt with by the local police commander, but Manus commander Alex N'Drasal had been transferred out of the province before the incident, and it is unknown how quickly he was replaced. Commanders are regularly transferred between provinces by the police commissioner.

N'Drasal's acting replacement, David Yoba, said police were investigating numerous reports about the traffic incident, and he hoped to get further information on what happened at the hotel.

The issue of Australian employees avoiding police questioning over alleged criminal acts has caused tension between the two countries. Prime minister Peter O'Neill has previously promised to raise it with Australian government officials.

Last July three Australians allegedly raped a Papua New Guinean colleague, but were flown back to Australia before facing the justice system. At the time the Australian immigration department also claimed it was with “the full knowledge and concurrence” of PNG police. N'Drasal labelled the statement a lie.

In September the then prime minister Tony Abbott said Australia would cooperate with PNG in the investigation, but the three men have not returned to the country.

Local MP Ron Knight said the incident was another example of Australians escaping PNG justice.

“If this was done by a PNG citizen in Australia, just imagine the repercussions. The guy would be in jail and deported straight away,” he said. “It's just one thing after another and our laws are just being ignored.”

Knight called for Broadspectrum and Wilson Security to confine their employees to the base if behaviour could not be controlled.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/08/manus-detention-centre-bosses-accused-flying-out-employee-who-allegedly-robbed-bar>

19. Asylum seeker children on Nauru abused, sexually harassed at school: former teacher

Sydney Morning Herald
January 8, 2016 - 5:51PM
Nicole Hasham

A five-year-old asylum seeker was urinated on by a group of Nauruan boys and asylum seeker girls have been sexually harassed at school, a former teacher says, saying many parents are too scared to send their children to school in 2016.

The claims are backed by asylum seeker children who report that Nauruan students threaten them with knives and teachers routinely swear at them. One Iranian boy reported his female Nauruan classmates offered sex for money.

In one alarming allegation, outlined in an official incident report sighted by Fairfax Media, a group of children were hit with a wooden ruler for being late to an exam.

It has been six months since the Australian government closed the detention centre school and forced child asylum seekers into Nauruan schools, where classes are taught in the Nauruan language and teachers are frequently absent.

A former teacher contracted by the Australian government to teach at the detention centre said that since the change, bullying by students and teachers had become rife, teacher training was poor and the special education needs of asylum seeker and refugee children were not being met.

It meant school attendance among about 70 children languishing at Nauru was low, and not expected to improve this year.

"A lot of the Rohingya girls stopped going because they were constantly being sexually harassed. These are girls that wear hijabs," said the teacher, who remains in close contact with asylum seekers and refugees on the island.

"One little five-year-old boy was surrounded by Nauruan kids and they all urinated on him. There were no consequences, that kind of behaviour was tacitly condoned – that's why [parents] pulled their kids out. Because they felt their kids weren't protected or safe."

Iranian Mohammad Badawi, 14, who has been in detention for more than two years, said he wanted an education but did not attend school because it was "dangerous".

"I will not go to school because ... the education is really bad, the teachers swear at us and the students hate us," he said in a recording made this week, obtained by Fairfax Media.

In a separate recording made in October last year, Mohammad said he stopped going to school after female students offered him sex.

"One day the Nauruan girls come and told me bad things, like one-dollar-one-hour [for sex]. When I told [a teacher] the [teacher] say 'why didn't you go with them?'," he said.

Other students "bring knives ... and they scare us".

Mohammad said security guards at the detention centre had also threatened to hurt him outside the facility, and he was reluctant to leave to attend school.

A young asylum seeker from Iraq, Ahmed Altabarawi, said he did not feel safe outside the detention centre and did not attend school.

"Outside the camp is not good, people are not good guys, they fight ... and many dogs bite people," he said in a recording also made in October.

"I don't go to school – school is bad. All the guys fight the Arabic people."

An incident report dated April 2014, sighted by Fairfax Media, details how four asylum seeker children at Nauru College were attacked by a teacher for being late to a maths test.

The report was made to Transfield Services, the Australian government contractor that runs the detention centre that has since changed its name to Broadspectrum.

The students apologised for being late and said they had been getting water. A teacher "proceeded to hit them with a wooden ruler on the shoulders", the report said, adding two of the children began crying and the beating left red marks.

A spokesman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said school governance arrangements were a matter for the Nauruan government and it did not have enough information to comment on the alleged incidents.

The Nauruan government did not respond to request for comment.

A Broadspectrum spokesman said it was not responsible for education services in the Nauruan community.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/asylum-seeker-children-on-nauru-abused-sexually-harassed-at-school-former-teacher-20160107-gm1mdh.html>

20. Six-year-old refugee allegedly sexually assaulted on Nauru

Perpetrator, who was caught in the act by the girl's parents on 29 December, still yet to be arrested or charged

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Wednesday 6 January 2016 11.09 AEDT

A six-year-old refugee was allegedly sexually abused on Nauru and the perpetrator caught in the act by her parents, but the man is yet to be arrested or charged, the father has said.

A police investigation is underway, but the lack of any arrest or charges against the man, who is also a refugee, has angered the father and sparked concern among families in the community.

The girl's father, an Iranian refugee living in Nauru, hit out at the island nation's authorities over what he said was a lack of action, and questioned differing police approaches to crimes involving refugees and locals.

No one has ever been charged for an assault against a refugee or asylum seeker on Nauru, despite multiple allegations and documented incidents including abuse of children.

On the night of 29 December the girl's father was working at a cafe when he noticed she had gone missing and her bike was on the ground. He went searching and found his daughter alone with a man who was allegedly attempting to assault her.

In interviews with Nauru police the young girl said she had been riding her bike near the cafe before going and sitting in her father's car. The man then approached her, and told her to follow him. He then pulled his pants down and abused her, she described.

"Then he took me there he started pulling my trousers down first and then his trousers and I told him that is not the right thing to do to a child," read her statement to police.

The girl's father and mother got into an altercation with the man, he said. He called the landowner of the cafe, but the perpetrator fled on his motorbike.

Assisted by staff from the Connect Settlement Services (CSS), the organisation tasked to help refugees make a life in Nauru, the girl's family went to the police station with an interpreter and met with a child protection officer. Both he and his daughter gave statements that night, and again the next morning when police said they needed more information, he said.

In a detailed description of events obtained by Guardian Australia, the father claimed he and the accused – who worked nearby – had known each other for many months, and alleged the man had repeatedly sought to be alone with his daughter. Both parents had told the man to stay away from the girl.

The girl was taken to the hospital and later informed the man had been arrested, however the next day he was free and staying with the landlord of the cafe where the girl's father worked "for protection", her father said.

The father said he asked police why the man was not in custody and was told "the previous night's statements [were] not detailed enough for the court and the case would not succeed", adding the police officer then told him she was tasked with refugee cases. The father said he queried if this meant there were "different rules" for refugees, but said she did not answer.

He has since had a number of run-ins with the accused man on the tiny island. "Police didn't arrest him, not the first time, not any time, and now he is free," he said.

Guardian Australia was unable to reach the Nauruan police, but Vinci Clodumar, the president of the Nauru Law Society and who has been speaking with the girl's father, said he was not aware of a split in investigative duties.

A week on from the alleged assault, the father told Guardian Australia he was given conflicting reasons for why no charges had been laid, claiming he was alternately told there was not enough evidence, and the man would be arrested after the holiday period.

As a result of the incident, the girl's father said the landowner had refused to allow him to operate his restaurant, believing refugees were too dangerous.

The girl and her parents had previously spent two years in detention, with six months on Christmas Island and the final 18 months on Nauru, before being granted refugee status. About 800 people live in the Nauru community on temporary visas.

The girl's father said his daughter still suffered mental health issues after her time in detention, exacerbated by the alleged attack. "She's crying all the time. She gets up in the midnight," he said. "They didn't do anything – the child protection office."

The young girl is also blaming her herself for the closure of the family restaurant and has displayed feelings of shame, the family said.

The father said a number of the cafe customers worked for CSS, the organisation assisting refugee resettlement in the country.

No employees are believed to have witnessed the incident, but a spokesman for the organisation said CSS was assisting the family.

"There is a police investigation under way, but we're not privy to the details," the spokesman said.

"We have staff who are supporting the family and making sure the alleged victim is safe and well and getting any counselling or whatever she needs."

CSS is bound by Australian legislation preventing the disclosure of asylum seeker and detention-related information.

The Nauruan child protection services referred Guardian Australia to police, who could not be reached.

The government of Nauru, through its Australian-based public relations representatives, did not respond to questions.

A spokesman told Guardian Australia the Australian immigration minister, Peter Dutton, was aware of the allegation. "The matter is under investigation and is a matter for the Nauruan police force," the spokesman said.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/06/six-year-old-refugee-allegedly-sexually-assaulted-on-nauru>

21. Refugee girl, 6, allegedly sexually abused in immigration detention on Nauru

ABC News Online

By political reporter Stephanie Anderson

Posted Thu 7 Jan 2016, 9:30am

The Nauruan Government has confirmed its police force is investigating an alleged assault of a refugee child.

Reports emerged yesterday that a six-year-old girl was allegedly sexually abused and her father, an Iranian refugee, was among those who caught the perpetrator in the act.

The Guardian Australia further reported that the man allegedly involved was not in police custody.

In a statement issued by the Nauru police force today, officials stated that no Nauruan national was involved in the alleged incident.

"It would be inappropriate to provide details of an ongoing investigation," it read.

"However we can confirm that both the alleged victim and the person accused by the family of the alleged victim are from the refugee community on Nauru."

Police officials also criticised media outlets for their coverage of the alleged incident, stating that officers were acting "according to normal procedures".

The Nauruan Government also issued a statement on social media, asking journalists and "those making uninformed comments" to allow police to continue carrying out due process.

The alleged incident is the latest in a series of sexual assaults on Nauru, which have involved both asylum seekers and processed refugees.

Immigration spokeswoman Cheryl-Anne Moy told Senate estimates last year that there had been 10 reports of sexual assault involving children in immigration detention in the period between September 2013 and September 2015.

Ms Moy said five of those reported assaults related to a lone incident.

There were nine reported sexual assaults of adults in immigration detention on Nauru over the same period, as well as 82 allegations of physical abuse involving children.

Outside the centre, there have been 10 reports of sexual assault against processed refugees between May 2014 and September 2015.

Ms Moy said "a number" of the sexual assaults had been reported to Nauruan police.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-07/refugee-child-allegedly-sexually-abused-on-nauru/7073452>

22. MEDIA RELEASE: All Nauru sexual assault victims must be brought to Australia

NAZANIN'S FAMILY BROUGHT TO AUSTRALIA: NOW BRING ALL SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS OFF NAURU

Sunday January 17, 2016

Refugee Action Coalition

Ian Rintoul

mobile 0417 275 713

In May, 2015, Nazanin, a 23 year-old Iranian asylum seeker was raped on Nauru.

It took three months and a medical emergency for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to finally medivac her from Nauru to Australia in August 2015.

At the time, the Department said that Nazanin's mother and brother would also be brought to Australia to provide critical family support. But the Department reneged on that promise.

For six months, the Department has ignored advice from its own medical service provider, IHMS, on Nauru and the advice of Nazanin's treating doctors and psychiatrists in Australia that she be re-united with her mother and brother. Requests for the transfer of her mother and brother were over-ridden "by Border Force in Canberra".

Last Thursday, 14 January, with 30 minutes notice, Nazanin's brother and mother were told they were being sent to Australia.

Thankfully, the separation of Nazanin from her family, enforced by the Department, has finally ended, but it has taken a terrible toll on Nazanin and her family.

But the belated transfer of the family to Australia raises the wider question of the contempt exhibited by the Minister and the Immigration Department, the Nauru government and the Nauruan police for the victims of sexual assault on Nauru.

There were at least two other victims of sexual assault brought to Australia from Nauru on that flight last Thursday. But other victims have been left suffering on Nauru.

"The transfer of more victims of sexual assault from Nauru is a tacit admission that Nauru is unsafe. But the begrudging response reveals the official policy to cover-up the scale of the abuse on Nauru," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"As a matter of urgency, all the victims of rape and sexual assault on Nauru should be immediately brought to Australia; some victims have been unable to leave their accommodation for months for fear of more harassment. The government's offshore policy has left asylum seekers and refugees vulnerable to attack. Nauru must be closed.

"The department's contempt doesn't end on Nauru. Victims of sexual assault who have been brought to Australia have been left for months in detention, treated as criminals and isolated from the support that really. They should be released into the community."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

23. Immigration spends more than Defence on medals for its staff

Sydney Morning Herald
January 16, 2016 - 9:58PM
Adam Gartrell

The Department of Immigration is spending more than \$1.3 million on medals for its staff, outspending the Department of Defence and prompting new concerns about the militarisation of the portfolio.

Government tender documents show the department has signed a contract worth \$1,320,000 over three years with Melbourne-based company Cash's Awards and Promotion Solutions for medals.

The \$440,000 a year contract was signed after an open tender process but appears more expensive than many of the comparable contracts available on the AusTender website.

For example, the department's previous six-month medal contract – with the Royal Australian Mint – cost just \$48,000.

Immigration appears to be spending more than the Department of Defence, which spent about \$300,000 on medals, spread over eight contracts, in 2015.

However, the quasi-independent Defence Materiel Organisation also awarded two major contracts for medals – worth about half a million dollars – shortly before it was absorbed back into the department six months ago.

The Office of the Official Secretary to the Governor General is the government body that typically spends the most on medals and awards – about \$2.2 million in 2015 – but that is not surprising given it is responsible for the Australian Honours and Awards system.

The Australian Federal Police appears to have spent only \$23,000 in 2015, while the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science spent \$136,000.

Labor's waste watch spokesman Pat Conroy said immigration's bill was part of the "quest to militarise" the portfolio.

"The problem is that not only are these medals costly but they demonstrate the government's intention to create a military style and culture within the Australian Border Force," he said.

"When you put this in the context of the Operation Fortitude fiasco we start to see a picture emerge of the way this department is being led."

The cost of the medals comes on top of the millions of dollars spent on the rebranding related to the creation of Australian Border Force, the department's paramilitary frontline agency.

But the department said the medals did not relate to the rebranding.

It said its awards "framework" was established before the creation of ABF and is comparable to other Commonwealth agencies.

"It aims to build and recognise a robust culture of leadership, integrity, excellence, innovation, diversity and inclusiveness; and a culture that recognises commitment and achievement," a spokesperson said.

Internal departmental awards are awarded across eight categories: Bravery, Conspicuous Conduct, Leadership, Excellence, Innovation, Work Health and Safety, Diversity, and Operations.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/immigration-spends-more-than-defence-on-medals-for-its-staff-20160116-gm78gi.html>

24. Maurice Blackburn calls for Christmas Island witnesses to come forward

Sydney Morning Herald
January 16, 2016 - 4:04PM
Neelima Choahan

People who may have witnessed the treatment of asylum seekers at Christmas Island are being urged to contact a law firm mounting a legal challenge against the government.

The case was filed in 2014 on behalf of a girl who claimed to have developed a dental infection, stammer, separation anxiety and bed wetting while on Christmas Island.

Now the law firm Maurice Blackburn is asking people to assist with the class action.

Its class actions principal lawyer Jacob Varghese said it was "a significant opportunity" for witnesses to provide relevant information about the conditions of detention on Christmas Island without fear of criminal sanction.

"Maurice Blackburn is committed to taking all necessary legal steps to enable those witnesses to do so," Mr Varghese said.

"It is important that the court, and the Australian community, hear from people with first hand experience of how Australia has treated asylum seekers, including children and pregnant women, detained on Christmas Island."

In a statement released to Fairfax Media, Maurice Blackburn stated the lead plaintiff in the class action was a young girl who could only be identified as "AS".

"She brings her case against the Commonwealth of Australia and the Minister of Immigration and Border Protection," it stated.

"International Health and Medical Services and the detention centre's operators Serco Australia Pty Ltd are also parties to the action."

The statement said it was alleged that the Commonwealth and Minister failed to take reasonable care to prevent AS and other asylum seekers from sustaining injuries while in detention.

"The class action also claims that they failed to provide reasonable health care for AS and other asylum seekers after they were injured while in detention."

The firm is "particularly keen" to speak to former detention centre workers, medical and allied health professionals who provided care to detainees, interpreters and anyone else who had contact with those detained on Christmas Island between August 2011 and August 2014.

The names and addresses of potential witnesses, and information about their roles on Christmas Island, would be provided to the Victorian Supreme Court on February 1 when the case returns to court, ahead of a trial that is set to begin in September 2016.

"The court will inspect that list and, if satisfied, grant orders that will enable the social justice lawyers handling the class action to conduct more extensive interviews with the witnesses – without the witnesses facing criminal or other charges under the Australian Border Force Act 2015," the statement read.

"These controversial provisions of the Act, introduced into Parliament last February, make it a criminal offence punishable by two years' imprisonment for current and former "entrusted persons" to disclose, without authorisation, "protected information" acquired while working for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection at detention centres."

Anyone with information is urged to call Maurice Blackburn on 1800 286 052 by January 29.

More about the class action is available at:

<http://www.mauriceblackburn.com.au/currentclass-actions/peopledetainedonchristmasisland>

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/maurice-blackburn-calls-for-christmas-island-witnesses-to-come-forward-20160115-gm77ih>

25. Key witness in Reza Barati murder trial fears he will be killed on Manus Island

Benham Satah says he is being stalked by guards at the detention centre and has made repeated requests to be moved to a safer compound on Manus

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Saturday 16 January 2016 12.00 AEDT

The key witness in the Reza Barati murder trial has renewed calls to be transferred to a different compound saying he is being stalked by guards and fears he will be killed at the Manus Island detention centre.

Benham Satah's repeated requests to be moved to a safer compound in the centre have been rejected, but now, a public petition to bring him to Australia has attracted more than 15,000 signatures.

Calls to PNG Immigration about Satah's case have not been returned. Guardian Australia has submitted questions to detention centre manager Broadspectrum. The Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection has declined to comment.

Satah, a Kurdish Iranian asylum seeker who has been held in the Manus Island detention centre for more than two years, told Guardian Australia he was most fearful at night: "Every single moment I think that someone might kill me."

In October he was taken to court against his will, where he initially refused to testify, citing threats he would be killed. Taken a second time, and after being promised by Justice Nicholas Kirriwom and Manus Island detention centre operators he would be offered additional protection, Satah gave evidence against two local men accused of killing Reza Barati.

Barati, an Iranian asylum seeker, was beaten to death during a night of violence on 17 February 2014. He was hit with a nail-studded piece of wood and had a large rock dropped on his head.

More than 60 asylum seekers were injured in three days of rioting in the centre, including one man who was shot in the buttocks, one who lost an eye and one who had his throat slit.

Satah saw Barati die and provided a statement to police – matched by his evidence in court – saying he had seen more than a dozen people, including PNG nationals and expatriate guards, attack Barati as he lay prone at the top of a staircase.

Since being forced to testify publicly in court, Satah says he has been targeted by guards, and fears he will be killed for giving evidence in the trial of his friend's alleged killers.

He says he suffers from "excruciating" chest pain, and his left arm and leg have been weakened, so he has trouble walking. He says doctors have told him it is caused by stress.

"I can never leave my room, it is not safe," Satah said. "I only go out for meals and to bathroom. At night time I can go to the mess because there is a [security] camera there."

After being returned from court, Satah was returned to the SAA compound within the Manus Island detention centre, used for housing people suffering mental health issues, and where he was quarantined from local guards.

But after two weeks, Satah says, eight local guards came into the compound, "including one man who was involved in killing Reza Barati".

"It was not an accident, they came to intimidate me, to show they can get to me wherever I am."

Satah has since been moved to Foxtrot compound, but formal requests to be returned to Mike compound, where Satah says he feels safest, were rejected in December.

"After careful consideration and extensive discussion ... your request to move compounds has been denied," his first rejection read, without further explanation.

He says guards sit at the back of his accommodation block, watching him throughout the day.

“When I walk somewhere they humiliate me and say this is the consequences of your actions, you should not have testified,” he said.

“At night, I cannot sleep in here. Every single moment I think that someone might kill me. Every time I hear someone pass, I hear footsteps, I am alert, I think someone is coming to do something to me.”

In Australia, supporters and friends of Satah have begun a petition through change.org calling for him to be moved to Australia.

“Since [Satah’s] testimony he has been subject to death threats from the Manus Island guards. Additionally, every day guards spend several hours each morning watching him through the window of his room in an attempt to intimidate him. He has genuine fears for his safety and, in spite of promises from the PNG court, is not being protected,” the petition says.

“We ask that Benham Satah be brought immediately to Australia and settled in the community. We believe that justice can only exist where witnesses are protected and that Behnam cannot be protected in PNG.”

The petition has attracted more than 13,000 signatures. It is Australian government policy that no asylum seeker who comes to Australia by boat will ever be settled in Australia, though almost half of the people who arrived on the same boat as Satah are currently living in Australia.

External to Satah’s safety concerns, the trial of the two men alleged to have killed Barati has been mired in controversy, and has now been stalled for months.

Approaching the second anniversary of Barati’s death, only Joshua Kaluvia and Louie Efi, both 29, have ever been arrested or charged with his death, despite significant evidence up to 15 people were involved in killing him.

Kaluvia and Efi are alleged to have been ringleaders in the violence on 17 February.

But they have pleaded not guilty and told Guardian Australia from Lorengau prison they were not involved. “We don’t trust what is happening to us, we don’t trust we will get a fair trial ... we did not commit this crime,” Efi said.

The trial concluded on 29 September, but days later, Kirriwom took the extraordinary decision to re-open the trial, after receiving a letter from the two accused arguing their constitutional right to a fair trial had been breached because the state-appointed public solicitor running their defence called no witnesses other than them.

The trial will reportedly re-open early in 2016 to hear further evidence, though it is not known when it will restart, or who Kaluvia and Efi will call in their defence.

Beyond Kaluvia and Efi’s defence, the trial has been controversial because, despite substantial evidence up to 15 people were involved in killing Barati, including expatriate employees of the detention centre, only the two PNG men have been charged.

One witness statement provided to police says: “Reza Barati was bleeding very heavily from the injury on head. I saw Reza Barati was still alive at that time when he was lying on the wire floor. The G4S guards who were chasing him from behind reached him and kicked him [Barati] on his head with their boots. I saw about a total of 13 G4S local officers and two expatriate officers kicked Reza Barati in his head with their boots. He was putting up his hands trying to block the blows from the boots.”

At least two expatriate guards have been named in statements to police. They cannot be named for legal reasons, but their identities are known to police. They were taken from Manus Island following the riots.

“They want to convict us so that nobody else, no Australians or New Zealanders who are responsible, have to face justice,” Kaluvia said from Lorengau prison. “We have to take the blame for them because we are PNG. They think we don’t matter.”

Manus MP Ronnie Knight, says the limited prosecution highlights a legal double standard: “One law for the locals, and no laws for the expats. The locals don’t matter, and the expats get off, they can do what they like.”

Apparent impunity for expatriate workers on Manus Island has been the source of continuing and escalating tension on the island. Following an alleged drugging and gang rape of a local woman by Wilson Security employees in July, three suspects were quickly flown off the island and out of PNG police jurisdiction, despite calls for them to be returned, and reported promises from detention centre operator Broadspectrum, that they would be sent back.

In December, an Australian detention centre worker is alleged to have robbed a local bar of beer and cigarettes and then crashed a car in his attempt to flee. He, too, was flown off the island before police could speak with him.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/16/key-witness-in-reza-barati-trial-fears-he-will-be-killed-on-manus-island>

26. Pakistani man at centre of visa row with Australian Government dies from cancer

ABC News Online

By political reporter Stephanie Anderson

Posted Wed 6 Jan 2016, 10:03am

The Pakistani man at the centre of a visa row with the Australian Government has died from cancer.

Hassan Asif passed away in Melbourne today, one week after his family joined him.

The 25-year-old student made headlines last month after his family were initially denied visas to visit him as he received end-of-life care.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton later confirmed the family had gained approval for their second visa request on December 23.

Mr Asif's brother Rameez arrived in Australia with his mother on December 29.

Rameez Asif thanked the Australians who had supported his brother in his final days.

In a statement, he said it was "like a dream come true to be with Hassan".

"We literally lost hope when our visas got rejected but we still made it to Australia," he said.

"I have no words to describe how happy we were to be with Hassan. My brother got the best possible care. Thank you."

A funeral service will be held in Melbourne on Thursday.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-06/hassan-asif-at-centre-of-visa-row-dies-from-cancer/7070802>

27. Hassan Asif, whose family were initially refused visas to visit, dies in Melbourne

Mother and brother were at the side of the Pakistani student, who was diagnosed with terminal cancer while studying in Australia

The Guardian

Helen Davidson

Wednesday 6 January 2016 13.09 AEDT

Hassan Asif, the 25-year-old Pakistani student diagnosed with terminal cancer while studying in Australia, has died with his mother and brother by his side. Asif's brother, Rameez, said the young student had died at a Melbourne hospice on Wednesday morning. Rameez and his mother had initially been denied a visa to Australia to visit Asif, who was too sick to travel.

Rameez and his mother arrived on 29 December and had been "a constant and loving presence by [Asif's] side", the Melbourne City Mission said in a statement.

Rameez thanked the staff for their care and support of his brother. "It was like a dream come true to be with Hassan," he said.

"We literally lost hope when our visas got rejected but we still made it to Australia. I have no words to describe how happy we were to be with Hassan. My brother got the best possible care. Thank you." Asif was diagnosed with metastatic melanoma in April while he was studying architecture at Victoria University. He was cared for by the City Mission homeless charity.

Asif's mother and brother had applied to come to Australia to be with him for his last weeks, but immigration officials denied their visas. After a public outcry the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, initially defended the ruling, citing the risk of Rameez and his mother overstaying their visas or seeking asylum. But moments after his press conference the department reversed its decision and granted the visas.

The family invited members of the community to pay final respects to Asif at a funeral service on Thursday at noon at the Preston mosque.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jan/06/hassan-asif-whose-family-were-initially-refused-visas-to-visit-dies-in-melbourne>

28. Pakistani man Hassan Asif dies after being reunited with family in Australia

Canberra Times

January 6, 2016 - 3:21PM

Nicole Hasham

A Pakistani student suffering from cancer has died surrounded by his family, who said they "lost hope" after initially being refused entry to Australia.

Hassan Asif, 25, a student who had been receiving end-of-life care for skin cancer while studying in Australia, died on Wednesday morning at a Melbourne hospice.

He was reunited with his mother and brother just days earlier, after the Turnbull government backflipped on its decision to deny them visas, sparking a public outcry.

In a statement, Melbourne City Mission said Hassan's brother Rameez and his mother were with Hassan when he died, and "had been a constant and loving presence by his side since arriving in Australia" on December 29.

On behalf of his mother and family in the Pakistan city of Lahore, Rameez expressed thanks for the care and support Hassan received in Melbourne, and for the chance to be reunited with Hassan in his final days.

"It was like a dream come true to be with Hassan. We literally lost hope when our visas got rejected but we still made it to Australia," he said.

"I have no words to describe how happy we were to be with Hassan.

"My brother got the best possible care. Thank you."

Rameez said many Australians connected with Hassan's story, which helped raise awareness of his family's initial visa problems.

The family has invited members of the community who wish to pay respects to Hassan to his funeral service on Thursday, January 7 from midday at Preston Mosque. Attendees should wear modest clothing.

Mr Asif had been receiving outreach palliative care but recently moved to a specialist medical facility when his condition deteriorated.

He was too sick to fly home to Pakistan, where he had once hoped to return and begin work as an architect.

He wished to spend his final days with his family, but the Australian High Commission initially rejected their visa applications.

The Department of Immigration said based on the information provided in their application, the pair were considered at risk of overstaying their visa.

Labor's immigration spokesman Richard Marles last month described the decision as "disgraceful and heartless" and called on Immigration Minister Peter Dutton to intervene.

After a public outcry in Australia and overseas, the government asked Mr Asif's family to reapply for their visas, which included information about their finances and support from the local Pakistani community during their stay. The visas were then approved.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/pakistani-man-hassan-asif--dies-after-being-reunited-with-family-in-australia-20160106-gm08ce.html>

30. Christmas Island detention centre's conditions stoke tension, detainee says

ABC News Online

By Alyssa Betts

Posted Mon 11 Jan 2016, 9:48am

Extended lock-downs, broken security cameras and foul hygiene conditions are stoking tension at the Christmas Island detention centre, a detainee has said.

The centre erupted into violence in early November, causing an estimated \$10 million in damage, and while those suspected of being involved were transferred to prison, a remaining detainee said they are being punished.

"We feel like caged animals," the man, who asked not to be named, told the ABC.

"It is quite easy to slip into depression and have anxiety and your stress levels go up.

"We have been cleared by the [Australian Federal Police] for the disturbance, and they have still got us [like this]."

He said detainees were being kept on almost 24-hour lock down within their blocks, with one hour's access to the gym a day.

"Christmas Island [detention centre] is actually pretty much destroyed," he said.

"All the security cameras outside the blocks haven't been replaced, which makes everyone on edge because anything can happen.

"The other thing is the hygiene ... we're not allowed to have cleaning products to clean our rooms and we're not allowed toilet brushes.

"There's a build up of excrement, if you can imagine on a hot day the smell of excrement and that sort of stuff is pretty intense."

Services 'often better' than those available to many Australians

The Immigration Department disputed conditions described by the detainee.

A spokesperson said the centre's toilets and showers were cleaned once a day and cleaning products were available to detainees anytime on request.

The spokesperson confirmed repairs to security cameras and recreational facilities had yet to be completed but should be finished in the next few weeks.

In the meantime, extra security measures were in place.

"The broader security measures include additional security personnel who have been rostered at the detention centre to ensure safety and security while the repair work is being completed," the spokesperson said.

In general, the spokesperson said the detention centre had been calm over the Christmas and New Year period.

"Detainees continue to receive services at least equal to, and often above, those available to many Australians," the spokesperson said.

The November riot was sparked by the death of an Iranian Kurdish refugee Fazel Chegeni who had earlier escaped the centre.

His body was discovered at the base of a cliff.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-01-11/christmas-island-detainee-claims-foul-conditions-november-riot/7080566>