

# Project SafeCom News and Updates

Wednesday, 30 March 2016

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## 1. The Saturday Paper: Love Makes a Way members sit down and speak up

A group of multi-denominational Christians are undergoing training in nonviolent direct action as they pray for changes to asylum-seeker policy.

Samantha Trenoweth  
The Saturday Paper  
Mar 26, 2016

Matt Anslow looks a little like Jesus. A historically inaccurate European Jesus, that is. Impossibly shiny waves of treacle-tone hair tumble across his shoulders. His jeans are rolled at the ankle. His beard is a little bit Creedence Clearwater Revival. He wears no shoes. Anslow calls himself a “mongrel Christian”: a generous shot of Anabaptist rebel stirred in with Uniting Church good deeds and Pentecostal enthusiasm. In his day jobs, he works at a Christian NGO, in a community garden and on his PhD in theology.

Anslow is pacing the floor of a Christian fellowship centre in Parramatta where roughly 35 of the faithful have gathered for a daylong introduction to nonviolent direct action. Since Christians began occupying government ministers’ offices in 2014, and since churches more recently offered sanctuary to people seeking asylum, increasing numbers of believers from a range of denominations have felt called to the barricades. Workshops such as this one ensure that, both theologically and in terms of occupational health, they’re thoroughly prepared.

The lights dim, the ceiling fan whirs and Anslow’s co-convenor, Justin Whelan, flicks on a film about the civil rights movement in 1960s America. The film looks at techniques used by Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr and Reverend James Lawson, who led a series of rolling civil disobedience actions that began the desegregation of Nashville.

King wrote from prison in Birmingham, Alabama, that, “nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and establish such creative tension ... so to dramatise an issue that it can no longer be ignored.”

Whelan and Anslow have taken these words on board. They are founding members of Love Makes a Way, the group that made headlines when members occupied then immigration minister Scott Morrison’s office. They sat in the reception area offering prayers of lamentation, and prayers for Morrison, and they refused to leave voluntarily unless the minister reconsidered his approach to people seeking asylum – particularly the detention of children. Morrison, of course, did not budge. Police were called and five of the demonstrators were charged with trespass.

Full story at <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2016/03/26/love-makes-way-members-sit-down-and-speak/14589108003048>

## 2. Guy Rundle: The end of Tony Abbott and the conservatives

Guy Rundle  
The Saturday Paper  
Mar 28, 2016

[...]

What’s happening? The short answer is that the conservative movement is cracking up across the world, a victim of the contradictions within. For nearly four decades, the right has sought to portray itself as the representative of the “masses”, protecting its values against an “elite” who favoured liberal and progressive positions that, it was claimed, were against the mainstream. The right bundled together global market-first politics with the protection of “traditional values”. That worked as two decades of prosperity were eked out of cheap debt and destructive tax cuts. When it collapsed in 2008, the long con was laid bare: it was global market-first politics that had destroyed the world in which traditional values were apparently grounded – the neighbourhoods, local industries, stable families, a positive popular culture.

[...]

Full story at <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/opinion/topic/2016/03/26/the-end-tony-abbott-and-the-conservatives/14589108003047>

## 3. Hugh de Kretser: NSW anti-protest laws are part of a corrosive national trend

Sydney Morning Herald  
March 22, 2016 - 1:08PM  
Hugh de Kretser

NSW’s harsh and unnecessary new anti-protest laws are the latest example of an alarming and unmistakable trend. Governments across Australia are eroding some of the vital foundations of our democracy, from protest rights to press freedom, to entrench their own power and that of vested business interests.

The NSW laws give police excessive new powers to stop, search and detain protesters and seize property as well as to shut down peaceful protests that obstruct traffic. They expand the offence of "interfering" with a mine, which carries a penalty of up to seven years' jail, to cover coal seam gas exploration and extraction sites.

They also create a tenfold increase in the penalty applying to unlawful entry to enclosed land (basically any public or private land surrounded by a fence) if the person "interferes" or "intends to interfere" with a business there. At the same time as ratcheting up this penalty for individuals who protest, recent changes made by the NSW government mean that resource companies that illegally mine can receive a \$5000 penalty notice instead of a potential \$1.1 million fine.

Disturbingly, these laws aren't isolated.

Tasmania last year targeted environmental protest with broad and vague new offences including "hindering" access to business premises or "obstructing" business operations, with penalties of up to \$10,000 and four years' imprisonment. In Western Australia, proposed legislation contains extremely broad new offences of "physically preventing a lawful activity" and "possessing a thing for the purpose of preventing a lawful activity" with proposed penalties of up to two years in prison and fines of up to \$24,000.

Common to these anti-protest laws are harsher penalties, excessive police powers and the prioritisation of business interests (particularly mining and forestry operations) over the rights of Australians to gather together and protest about issues they care deeply about.

Our democracy doesn't start and end on election day. Its enduring success rests on vital components like press freedom, the ability of NGOs to advocate freely, the rule of law, watchdog institutions like the Australian Human Rights Commission and the right to peacefully protest.

We can't take these foundations for granted. They are critical components of the democratic system that has helped to make Australia one of the safest, most stable and prosperous places on the planet.

But just as protest rights are being undermined, so too are many other vital democratic foundations.

Governments across Australia are deliberately using a range of funding levers to suppress advocacy by NGOs including gag clauses, targeted funding cuts and threats to the ability of environmental organisations to receive tax deductible donations from supporters – a tax status which is often critical to financial sustainability.

Secrecy laws and an increasingly aggressive attitude to whistleblowers mean that people who expose even the most serious human rights abuses face unprecedented risks of reprisals, including prosecution and jail. Press freedom is being eroded by new laws and policies jeopardising journalists' ability to maintain the confidentiality of sources and to report on matters of public interest. All the while, in critical areas governments are undermining or sidelining the courts and institutions that were created to keep them in check.

Last month, I was joined in Canberra by leaders from across Australian civil society to launch our Safeguarding Democracy report. The report documents this corrosive trend and outlines ways to reverse it.

Leaders who spoke out in support of issues raised in the report included representatives from the nation's peak community agency, peak Indigenous body, faith-based agencies, the media, unions, philanthropy, international development and the environment movement.

They share a common concern for the health of our democracy. It's a concern that should be shared by political leaders across the spectrum.

Encouragingly, the work to stop the damage has begun in some places. The Queensland government has removed gag clauses from NGO contracts imposed by its predecessor and is looking to protect fundamental human rights, including protest and assembly rights, in a Queensland Human Rights Charter. Victoria has repealed excessive move-on laws that threatened peaceful protest and is strengthening its charter. At the federal level, the government recently agreed to wind back certain aspects of ASIO laws that undermine press freedom and is looking to reset its relationship with the Australian Human Rights Commission after the extraordinary political attacks last year.

We need more.

We need to call out regression like the NSW anti-protest legislation for what it is. We need to recognise the cumulative democratic harm being inflicted by particular environment, counter-terrorism or refugee policies. Ultimately, if we truly care about protecting our democratic rights and freedoms, we need to guarantee them in an enforceable national Human Rights Charter.

Hugh de Kretser is executive director of the Human Rights Law Centre. Twitter: @hughdekretser

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/nsw-antiprotest-laws-are-part-of-a-corrosive-national-trend-20160321-gno10h.html>

## 4. Doctor protest in Greece boosts calls for Australian detention centre boycott

The Age  
March 28, 2016 - 12:20PM  
Nicole Hasham

A decision by international aid group Doctors Without Borders to pull medical care from a Greek refugee camp shows a doctor boycott of Australian detention centres would be ethically justified, a Queensland doctor says.

Doctors Without Borders, also known as Medecins Sans Frontieres, announced last week it has suspended work at the Moria refugee centre on the Greek island of Lesbos in protest over a European Union plan to force refugees who land in Greece to return to Turkey.

MSF spokeswoman Marie Elisabeth Ingres said it took the difficult decision because "continuing to work inside would make us complicit in a system we consider to be both unfair and inhumane".

Those advocating a doctor boycott of Australian detention centres also argue that doing otherwise lends credibility to an inhumane regime.

Queensland GP and refugee advocate John-Paul Sanggaran, who has worked at the Christmas Island detention centre, said MSF's decision showed "what it means to have integrity and act in accordance with medical ethics".

"MSF refuses to be complicit with a system that does not respect human rights and cynically prevents people from claiming asylum," he said.

"We should possess the integrity and fortitude to act in kind."

The issue of doctor boycotts of Australian detention centres was debated on the international stage last week, in an article in the prestigious British Medical Journal.

David Berger, district medical officer in emergency medicine at Broome Hospital, argued that Australia's treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, including mandatory detention of children on foreign islands, was "inhumane".

"Doctors cannot work ethically within the present system ... however compassionate their intentions, doctors who treat people who have been tortured and then acquiesce in the continuation of torture are supporting torture," he wrote.

Dr Berger said there was strong evidence that the immigration detention regime delivered "very substandard healthcare" and "no matter how well meaning, doctors risk being corrupted by an immoral system".

He said doctors and healthcare professionals should still offer to provide healthcare to immigration detainees, if conditions inside detention improved - including opening the facilities to scrutiny.

Immigration Department chief Michael Pezzullo has previously rejected suggestions of "torture" in detention centres as offensive and wrong. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton says medical care in detention centres is adequate and hospital facilities at Nauru are better than some found in regional Australia.

Also writing in the British Medical Journal, Steven H. Miles, Maas Family Foundation chair in bioethics at the University of Minnesota, said doctors should not walk away from Australia's detention centres despite being "rightfully shamed and angered by the flagrant abuses being committed by their government".

"Rather than standing down from their posts, Australian physicians should rise to their duties of station," he wrote, adding a boycott would deny adequate care to "desperately undeserved" detainees.

He said the Australian Medical Association should help frontline clinicians to "transmit reports, pictures, and data through encrypted and anonymous web channels to international human rights organisations".

It should also establish a legal fund to defend any doctor prosecuted under laws preventing detention centre workers from discussing the conditions inside, he said.

The government says the laws apply to many Commonwealth agencies and do not mean that doctors who speak out risk being jailed.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/doctor-protest-in-greece-boosts-calls-for-australian-detention-centre-boycott-20160324-gnqehi.html>

## 5. Seventy-year-old asylum seeker released from detention centre

Family who fled Iran removed from Darwin centre and placed into community detention in another Australian city

The Guardian  
Helen Davidson in Darwin  
Tuesday 29 March 2016 15.37 AEDT

A 70-year-old woman and her two children have been released into the Australian community after more than three years in immigration detention.

The family had fled Iran and sought asylum in Australia by boat, but arrived on Christmas Island just hours after the Rudd government signed a deal with Papua New Guinea decreeing no boat arrivals would settle in Australia.

The adult son was then separated from his mother and sister and sent to Manus Island as a single male. The family were not reunited for six months, despite pleas from caseworkers on their behalf, until they were all sent to Nauru.

Medical records and documents from International Health and Medical Services, seen by Guardian Australia, detail failing health and worsening mental illness, particularly in the mother, who suffered “detention fatigue” and chronic ailments, and the sister, who had severe depression related to an alleged assault.

The mother was thought to be the oldest person held in Australian immigration detention.

The family was flown to Darwin for the mother to receive medical treatment early last year, and had been detained inside the Wickham Point detention centre.

They received no response to their appeals for immigration minister, Peter Dutton, to use his discretionary powers and grant community detention.

But at the Easter weekend an asylum seeker advocate revealed the family had been removed from Wickham Point and transferred to another Australian city.

The family join a minority proportion of asylum seeker detainees to be granted community detention under a residence determination, supported by welfare and non-government agencies.

At the end of last month there were 576 people in community detention, according to the immigration department. A further 28,738 were living in the community on bridging visas.

The Iranian family are also among the 267 asylum seekers who still face transfer back to Nauru following the high court’s rejection of a challenge to the constitutionality of Australia’s offshore processing regime.

The group has been the subject of large protests across Australia and promises of civil disobedience by church groups. Also at the centre of protests was Baby Asha, whom doctors in Brisbane refused to discharge from hospital until Dutton agreed not to send her and her family to Nauru. They too were granted community detention.

More than 110 churches across Australia have pledged to offer the biblical concept of sanctuary to asylum seekers who face deportation back to Nauru. This month several “sanctuary-training” workshops were held in Australian cities. The workshops taught participants how to resist attempts by Border Force officers to detain asylum seekers seeking protection in a church.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/29/seventy-year-old-asylum-seeker-released-from-detention-centre>

## 6. MEDIA RELEASE: Immigration panics as Manus Court challenge looms

Tuesday March 29, 2016  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

Meetings in the Manus Island detention centre compounds this morning (Tuesday 29 March) have outlined a series of moves by Australian and PNG immigration attempting to resolve detention and resettlement issue before the Supreme Court challenge to the Manus Island detention centre, scheduled for the end of April.

Asylum seekers and refugees were told (i) that all refugee processed will end by 31 March; (ii) those with negative determinations will their appeal resolved by 31 June; (iii) from 6 April, those found to be refugees will be separated from those who have negative determinations. Those found to be refugees will be housed in Delta and Oscar, while found not to be refugee will be housed in Mike and Foxtrot compounds. People will be moved forcibly after the 6 April if necessary, but any

person who moved earlier will receive 50 points that can be used at the detention centre canteen. Anyone who refuses to move will have their points cut; meaning they will no longer have access to the canteen for supplies or phone cards.

It is rumoured that extra guards have been flown from Australia, but that cannot be confirmed.

Those who have been found to be refugees have also been threatened that they have to accept resettlement in PNG or they will be forcibly removed from PNG; something the government is not able to legally carry out.

It is unclear what the announcement means for the 60-odd people who have refused to accept processing in PNG in protest at being forcibly transported to Manus Island from Australia, where they did ask for asylum on arrival.

"There is every sign that the PNG Immigration and the Australian immigration are panicked at the possibility that they will lose the Supreme Court challenge to Manus Island detention that is scheduled to start in late April," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Immigration routinely makes threats and restricts rights in the effort to force people to leave the detention centre or return to their home countries. The cash offer to 'voluntarily' return home has recently been increased to \$10,000 but no-one has accepted it."

Of the hundreds who have been found to be refugees, only around 60 have been willing to move out of the centre to the so-called transit accommodation at East Lorengau on Manus Island.

One Manus refugee told the Refugee Action Coalition, "The message was clear for us -- whether you are a refugee or not, they want to clear the detention centre. But there is no safety in PNG."

"It is always disappointing to see the immigration department inflicting further punishment on asylum seekers and refugees rather than face up to the failure of the offshore detention regime," said Rintoul, "They are desperate to avoid the consequences of a successful court challenge which could find that the Manus detention centre has never been constitutional and that human rights of asylum seekers have been breached from day one."

The announcement has increased tensions at the detention centre. A majority have already decided they will not cooperate with any attempt to force them to move compounds.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

## **7. Manus detainees told they will be separated and resettled or repatriated**

Refugees and asylum seekers 'have decided to resist', one says after meeting with Papua New Guinea immigration

The Guardian  
Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson  
Tuesday 29 March 2016 15.37 AEDT

Refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island have been told they will be separated – forcibly if necessary – in detention, before being resettled elsewhere in Papua New Guinea or deported from the country.

At a meeting in the Manus Island detention centre on Tuesday morning, the 900 men held there were told they would be moved within a week. Extra security has reportedly been flown to the island to assist.

Those in detention who have been given "positive" refugee status determinations would be moved into Delta and Oscar compounds, those who have been given "negative" assessments would go to Mike and Foxtrot.

According to one source in the centre, the men were told the processing of refugee claims would end on 31 March, and active reviews on 1 June.

Guardian Australia understands at least 60 men have refused to present their refugee claims to PNG authorities – asking instead to be handed over to the UN: they will be housed with the "negative" assessed.

A PNG immigration official told those detained that the camp population would begin to be separated on 6 April and officials would "take action" if anyone resisted.

Those with positive assessments who moved willingly would later be given additional "credit points", redeemable for extra food or cigarettes, while those who refused would be deducted points, and forcibly moved.

Refugees and asylum seekers in detention have told the Guardian they fear being moved, either to new compounds or into the PNG community. "The people are discussing this in detention," said an Iranian asylum seeker, Behrouz Bouchani.

“Those people with ‘negative’ are in a really scary situation, especially Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi people because they can deport them more easily. I saw a young Sri Lankan guy, he was shaking violently. He is about 21 or 22.”

Bouchani said many in the detention were saying they would refuse to move: “They have decided to resist.”

He added: “The people here think that the Australian government put them under torture for three years, processed them over a long time and finally will deport them. It is unacceptable that Australia makes an advertisement with people here ... Australia has violated people’s rights and used their bodies to send a message of inhumanity and cruelty around the world.”

Another asylum seeker in Manus told Guardian Australia all the detainees had been told if they did not accept either resettlement in PNG or voluntary repatriation they would be forcibly deported. “The message was clear enough to all of us, refugees or not – they want to put more pressure on us to leave the centre although there is no safety in PNG and this resettlement seems forcible not optional,” he said.

“Also they brought extra security from Australia to do the moving. We don’t know how many of them but according to the rumours hundreds of them are already here on Manus.”

Guardian Australia has sought comment from the PNG immigration department.

After more than three years of the second iteration of offshore processing on Manus, fewer than 20 refugees have been resettled in PNG and those initial resettlements have been intensely problematic.

One Iranian refugee, now 20 but who was erroneously sent to the men-only Manus detention centre as a 17-year-old child, was left homeless and sleeping on the streets of Lae after a disagreement at his shared accommodation.

Loghman Sawari told authorities he wanted to go back to detention on Manus but was refused. He told the Guardian: “Here, I am more frightened. Lae is very dangerous. How can I live here? It is a very bad life. I worry about my future. I cannot go back. I cannot stay here. What will happen?”

Sawari has since been rehoused elsewhere in Lae by the immigration department.

In Canberra this month PNG’s prime minister, Peter O’Neill, said his country could not resettle all of the men on Manus Island. “Who is going to pay for it?,” he asked at the National Press Club. “Certainly the PNG government does not have the resources to resettle the refugees. We are also reassessing the numbers who are supposed to be resettled.”

He said the detention centre was a “problem” that had “done a lot more damage than probably anything else”.

Data released this month found enormous discrepancies in refugee assessments between Manus Island and Australia’s other offshore processing centre on Nauru.

About 58% of determinations made by PNG authorities granted refugee status, compared with 85% by the Nauruans, which human rights advocates said suggested PNG was neither fair nor accurate.

Efforts to deport asylum seekers have also been beset. Two Iranian asylum seekers who agreed to be returned home after years in detention have been stuck in Port Moresby for seven months because Tehran is refusing to accept them.

But beyond the difficulties of resettling even small numbers of refugees, the entire offshore processing regime in PNG faces serious legal challenge, with two challenges afoot in the supreme court.

The former PNG opposition leader Belden Namah launched a supreme court challenge in 2014 but that case has stalled inside PNG’s at-times byzantine court system. Australia is funding PNG’s defence.

The Port Moresby lawyer Ben Lomai is leading the other case, which is moving more swiftly towards a conclusion.

Lomai argues the Australian-run detention regime is in breach of the PNG constitution, which guarantees “liberty of the person”, “right to freedom of movement” and “freedom from inhuman treatment”, as well as the right to access PNG courts and a lawyer.

He argues that asylum seekers have been denied these fundamental rights and that the state is required to release the men back to their first port of entry, Australia. He will argue that PNG is also liable to pay compensation to them.

Those court challenges could see the entire offshore processing regime in PNG ruled unconstitutional and ordered shut down. Detainees suspected Tuesday’s announcement was in anticipation of a possible successful challenge.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/29/manus-detainees-told-they-will-be-separated-and-resettled-or-repatriated>

## 8. Manus Island detainees say PNG authorities preparing to clear out detention centre

ABC News Online

By Papua New Guinea correspondent Eric Tlozek

Posted Tue 29 Mar 2016, 4:20pm

Asylum seekers at Manus Island detention centre have said Papua New Guinea authorities appear to be preparing to clear the centre in the coming months.

Detainees in the centre said PNG immigration staff held meetings this morning to announce people with negative refugee determinations would be housed in a different part of the complex.

The detainees said they have until April 6 to move, or they will be forced.

The men said they were also told refugee processing would stop at the end of March, and the appeals process by the end of June.

"The message was clear enough to all of us refugees, [that] they want to put more pressure on us to leave the centre although there is no safety in PNG and this resettlement seems forcible not optional," one detainee said.

Men with negative refugee status determinations are being threatened with deportation unless they accept cash incentives to return to their country of origin.

The Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection's figures showed there were 850 men in detention on Manus Island, 389 of whom had been found to be refugees.

### ***Refugees fear crime and persecution in PNG after release***

A further 59 refugees are being housed at a "transit centre" on the island, which is meant to prepare them for life in Papua New Guinea.

Many of the refugees in detention are refusing to move to the transit centre because they do not believe they will be safe from crime and persecution when they are resettled.

Refugees said they were told in the meetings they could no longer remain at the centre and would have to move to the transit centre "as soon as possible".

A small number of men have left Manus Island for resettlement, taking up jobs in Lae and Port Moresby.

Some appear to be successfully settling into life in the PNG community, but at least two have already quit their jobs.

One was sleeping on the streets of Lae before being taken in by a church.

The Department of Immigration would not comment on the meetings on Manus Island, saying the centre was run by PNG authorities.

The PNG Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority is yet to respond to questions from the ABC.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-29/png-authorities-preparing-to-clear-out-manus-island/7282710>

## 9. Abbott's Sri Lanka comments 'excuse war crimes', Tamil refugee advocates say

Abbott describes former Sri Lankan government's handling of country's conflict as 'unavoidable actions taken to end one of the world's most vicious civil wars'

The Guardian

Paul Karp

Tuesday 29 March 2016 09:28 AEDT

The former prime minister Tony Abbott has excused war crimes in comments that the Sri Lankan government's actions in its civil war were "probably unavoidable", Tamil refugee advocates have said.

In an article in Quadrant magazine Abbott defended his national security record as prime minister: "I'm sure that the Sri Lankan president was pleased that Australia didn't join the human rights lobby against the tough but probably unavoidable actions taken to end one of the world's most vicious civil wars".



The foreign minister, Julie Bishop, has rebuked one aspect of his comment, telling Guardian Australia that the government had “consistently raised human rights issues with the former Sri Lankan government”.

Abbott did not indicate what actions or lobby groups he was referring to.

The United Nations has said it found evidence “strongly indicating” war crimes, including torture, executions, forced disappearances and sexual abuse committed by the Sri Lankan security forces against the country’s Tamil ethnic minority, who were fighting a separatist war.

Asked about allegations of torture in 2013 at a commonwealth heads of government meeting in Sri Lanka, Abbott said: “the Australian Government deplores any use of torture ... wherever it might take place”. He added: “but we accept that sometimes in difficult circumstances, difficult things happen”.

Tamil Refugee Council convenor Trevor Grant told Guardian Australia “he excused torture then, now he’s excusing war crimes”.

Grant said Abbott’s comments were “predictable but despicable” as Abbott had “a history of aligning himself with the brutal [Rajapaksa] regime”, referring to their cooperation on stopping boats of asylum seekers from Sri Lanka reaching Australia.

“For Abbott to say that sort of thing flies in the face of all known facts, put out there not just by Tamil groups but also by independent investigators of the UN.”

Grant said UN reports in 2015 and 2012 had concluded that the Sri Lankan military bombed hospitals and no-fire zones.

The 2012 report also found the Tamil Tigers were responsible for human rights abuses, including forced conscription of teenagers for their military service and as suicide bombers.

Grant called on Bishop to reject the claim the Sri Lankan government’s actions were unavoidable, which he said was “wrong and dishonest”.

Australian Tamil Congress national spokesperson Sam Pari said “it is disappointing that rather than upholding human rights, Abbott chose instead to please the Sri Lankan President who failed to protect and promote international human rights law and international humanitarian law”.

Human Rights Watch Australia director, Elaine Pearson, said Abbott’s comments were unacceptable and offensive.

“The UN has described the final stages of the war as a bloodbath – tens of thousands of people were slaughtered in indiscriminate shelling. To suggest that war crimes are ‘tough but probably unavoidable’ is giving a green light to abusive leaders and armies everywhere,” she said.

“It is a slap in the face to the tens of thousands of victims of wartime atrocities and their families.”

Abbott said Australia and Sri Lanka “became even stronger partners in the Abbott government’s most urgent initial task: to end the people-smuggling trade that had resulted in more than 1,200 deaths at sea, more than 50,000 illegal arrivals by boat and more than \$10bn in border protection budget blow-outs”.

Labor’s foreign affairs spokeswoman, Tanya Plibersek, said, “I think it would be a good thing for the foreign affairs minister to have a few words to Abbott about some of these comments”.

“One of the reasons Australia is so well regarded internationally over the course of our history is because we are a responsible international citizen and part of that means standing up against human rights abuses, whenever they happen.

“That’s not lecturing our neighbours, that’s just being a good international citizen that says that we value democracy and we value human rights and we value them not just for Australians but for all people.”

Julie Bishop says Australia has welcomed Sri Lanka’s recent commitments to establish independent and credible criminal and transitional justice mechanisms. “If effectively implemented, these proposals will provide Sri Lanka with a platform to achieve genuine reconciliation,” she said.

“For that reason, and as a long-standing friend, Australia stands ready to assist Sri Lanka as it implements these proposals for dealing with the past.”

Abbott has been contacted for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/29/abbotts-sri-lanka-comments-excuse-war-crimes-tamil-refugee-advocates-say>

## 10. New Film soon to be screened: Chasing Asylum

Channel 10's The Project interviews filmmaker Eva Orner (Chasing Asylum):  
<https://www.facebook.com/ChasingAsylum/videos/1759484224270359/>

Website:  
<http://www.chasingasylum.com.au/>

## 11. Taxpayers charged \$6 million for Immigration Department telemovie

Sydney Morning Herald  
March 26, 2016 - 12:44PM  
Adam Gartrell

The Immigration Department has made a \$6 million telemovie to deter asylum seekers from coming to Australia – eclipsing the budgets of Priscilla Queen of the Desert, The Castle and Wolf Creek combined.

The taxpayer-funded drama called The Journey made its debut on Afghanistan television on Friday.

Government tender documents reveal the Department of Immigration and Border protection paid the Sydney-based Put It Out There Pictures \$4.34 million to produce the movie. It paid a company called Lapis Communications a further \$1.63 million for to promote and advertise it, bringing the total to \$5.97 million.

By contrast, Priscilla cost less than \$2 million, Wolf Creek about \$1 million and The Castle just \$750,000. Even adjusted for inflation, the total budget of all three films works out at about \$5.8 million in today's terms.

Filmed across three countries, the ninety-minute drama tells the story of a small group of Afghan asylum seekers trying to get to Australia by boat. A trailer available on YouTube – which has about 1000 views – shows scenes of asylum seekers talking, arguing and crying in Afghanistan, Malaysia and Indonesia.

The film involved cast and crew from 13 countries and has already been screened in Pakistan, Iraq and Iran. It will be available in a variety of Middle Eastern languages, including Dari, Pashto, Urdu, Arabic and Farsi.

It will not be available in English.

On its website, Put It Out There makes no secret of the film's intention.

"The film aims to educate and inform audiences in source countries about the futility of investing in people smugglers, the perils of the trip, and the hardline policies that await them if they do reach Australian waters," it says.

The department said the movie was a "key part" of its anti-people smuggling strategy and had a potential audience of 50 million people.

It said market research had shown that telemovies are a proven way to reach and influence the target audience.

"Independent research in these countries has revealed misunderstandings and false rumours about Australia's policy, and a perception that Australia remains a preferred destination country for those seeking to travel illegally by boat," a spokesman said. "Initial feedback from viewers has been positive."

It's not the first time the department has strayed into drama. Under Labor, it commissioned a radio drama, but that was much less expensive.

Put It Out There company director Trudi-Ann Tierney declined to be interviewed. However she has in the past had some interesting things to say about her own work, describing her films as "propaganda".

The former Australian TV executive and actress moved to Kabul to manage a bar but fell into the local TV industry and found herself producing a highly popular soapie, which she wrote about in her book Making Soapies in Kabul.

In the book she said she was ostensibly head of drama "but in truth I was nothing more than a propagandist merchant". She also says her work was part of the "psychological operations" NATO and its allies used to influence the values and behaviour of its Afghan audience in a way that supported the war effort.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/taxpayers-charged-6-million-for-immigration-department-telemovie-20160325-gnqyr4.html>

## 12. 'Hard to watch': Afghans react to \$6m Australian film aimed at asylum seekers

The Journey, which cost Australian taxpayers \$6m, depicts the harsh measures that face Afghans who pay to be transported across the Indian Ocean

The Guardian

Sune Engel Rasmussen in Kabul, and Ben Doherty in Sydney

Monday 28 March 2016 11.58 AEDT

A movie commissioned by Australia's immigration department to deter Afghan asylum seekers has had its premiere on local TV, seeking to reinforce a widely held view that unauthorised travel to Australia is not worth the risk.

The Journey is a lush production depicting hopeful asylum seekers who meet tragic fates crossing the Indian Ocean.

Underwritten by \$6m in Australian taxpayers' money and filmed in three countries, it was shown on Friday on two channels in Afghanistan, the world's second-largest source of refugees and migrants in 2015, after Syria.

"It was hard to watch. It made me very upset," Ali Reza, an 18-year-old tailor said about the film. "I know they were actors, but these things really happen to Afghans."

Put It Out There Pictures, which produced the film for \$4.34m, says on its website the movie aims to inform audiences "about the futility of investing in people smugglers, the perils of the trip, and the hardline policies that await them if they do reach Australian waters".

Judging from the responses of scores of young men who spoke to the Guardian, that goal was largely achieved.

"It was a good movie," said Mostafa Ebadi, 23. "It showed the lies smugglers tell passengers before leaving."

Mohammad Tawab, 23, said he had been particularly moved by scenes of refugees languishing in an Indonesian prison. For Yama Taheri, who was playing football in a downtown Kabul park, the most disturbing sequence was one in which three brothers drown. "It made me think that if I try to go with friends, this will be our destiny," he said.

Before the current Syrian conflict forced millions to flee that country, Afghanistan was by far the largest producer of refugees in the world for more than three decades. Neighbouring countries Pakistan and Iran hosted most of the displaced Afghans, but Afghans were also the largest national group who sought to reach Australia by boat.

Almost all Afghans who have reached Australia by boat have been found to be refugees legally requiring protection. Each year since 2009, between 96% and 100% of Afghan asylum seekers have had their claims for refugee status upheld.

But in recent years fewer and fewer Afghans have set their sights on Australia. Harsher asylum policies and warning campaigns have deterred many. The vast majority of Afghan asylum seekers in 2015 went to Europe, with more than 150,000 to Germany alone.

For three years Daud Hossaini, 42, planned to join his brother in Australia. As asylum policies tightened, he hesitated, but retained hope that the forthcoming federal election might bring change. But on Friday, after seeing the movie, he finally buried his hopes of moving to Australia.

"If I die on the way, what's the point of going?" he said.

Lapis Communications, who promoted and adapted the movie to Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan, denied they were producing government propaganda.

"The backers of the film are credited, that is neither hidden or denied," said Sarah-Jean Cunningham, director of operations and business development. "More importantly, the ideas and values around the film are grounded in addressing a very serious and tragic issue – with the ultimate objective of saving lives."

Cunningham denied the fee earned by Lapis – \$1.63m – was excessive. "The cost is reflective of the extent of that significant scope of work," she said.

However, not everyone bought the message. As security worsens and employment becomes scarcer, Afghans will continue to leave. Humayoon, 29, who saw part of the movie before rushing off to a wedding, said he was only staying in Afghanistan as long as he had a job.

"If I can't feed my family, what am I supposed to do?"

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/28/hard-to-watch-afghans-react-to-6m-australian-film-aimed-at-asylum-seekers>

## 13. Powerful Nauru families benefiting from Australian-funded refugee processing centre

ABC Pacific Beat

By Michael Walsh

Posted Tue 29 Mar 2016, 5:29am

Some of Nauru's most powerful families are benefiting financially from the island's multi-million-dollar Australian-funded refugee processing centres.

When Australia and Nauru reopened detention centres on the tiny island nation four years ago, it was pledged that the tens of millions of dollars to be poured into Nauru would offer "a broader benefit" to the community.

While household incomes have improved across the board on Nauru, some locals appear to be benefiting more from the policy than others.

Documents obtained by the ABC show that some Nauruan politicians have family members who own shares in the land on which Regional Processing Centre 3 (RPC3) is located, while relatives of Nauru's Minister of Justice and Border Protection, David Adeang, have secured contracts and high-level jobs at the centre.

Processing centre service provider Broadspectrum stands by its tender assessments, and while the Australian Government is spending tens of millions of dollars redeveloping the site, the Immigration Department said land leases were the responsibility of the Government of Nauru.

Lease agreements for Nauru's main refugee processing centre obtained by the ABC show that some Nauruan politicians have family members with interests in the 5.6 hectare site, which earns at least \$480,000 in rent each year.

The land is a mined-out phosphate site in the island's interior, left largely barren after decades of mining.

The mother of Nauru's Environment Minister, Aaron Cook, earns rent worth \$30,000 a year from the lease, making her the second largest beneficiary of all 256 landowners listed.

Several other Nauruan politicians, including opposition MPs, also have family members listed in the lease agreement.

It includes Mr Adeang, who in a leaked email sent days before the Australian resettlement deal was struck in 2013, told his cabinet colleagues:

"The proposed site for RPC3 is a site largely owned by the Daimon clan, of which I am a member. I clearly have an interest — albeit tiny because I'm fourth generation in a huge family ... But it's important our caucus know that I played no part in the selection of the site."

Mr Adeang signed off on the lease agreement, on behalf of the government of Nauru, in June 2014.

### ***Land purchased by Government never used***

Pacific political analyst Tess Newton Cain said a lack of public land in Nauru was one possible explanation.

"The land was going to belong to somebody, the land is owned by customary owners, so from what I understand there is little or no government owned land," she said.

"So somebody was going to get the benefit of the rent."

Former president Sprent Dabwido, banned from sitting in parliament for nearly two years for speaking to the foreign media — including the ABC — said his administration had already bought land for the third camp, RPC3, before losing office earlier in 2013.

However, this site was never used.

"I was hoping that RPC could build, the Australians could build on the land that is owned by the Government of Nauru. So every single Nauruan will have a benefit of that, instead of just landowners. But that's all changed," he said.

Nauru's former resident magistrate Peter Law said he remembered the land purchase.

"I knew about that because it was very controversial, it hadn't been done before, the Government owns very little land," he said.

"But it seemed to me from everything I knew about it to be a very worthwhile process, and one with integrity and highly appropriate.

"It certainly would have been one that would have benefited all of Nauru and Nauruans generally, rather than a select few, which appears to be the case with the current lease."

While Mr Adeang's family does have only a small interest in the land selected for the third processing centre, Mr Dabwido said the Justice Minister had links to the larger landowners.

"All the camps are built on his land. He'll have some share in all of these camps. But where he has [a] small share, the bigger share there will belong to his campaign managers or his supporters," Mr Dabwido said.

### ***Gifted facilities to benefit landowners***

As well as the rent, centre landowners will also benefit from the \$10.5 million redevelopment of the site, paid for by the Australian Government.

The three-phase project includes the new air-conditioned housing that refugees are currently residing in, built on the same land as the processing centre.

The second phase of the project will cost a further \$11.4 million, and according to the agreement, the buildings will become the landowners' property at the end of the lease.

Mr Dabwido said the additional Australian investment in the site goes against the principles of the resettlement agreement.

"They build on these people's lands, and as soon as RPC leaves Nauru — in, let's say, five or whatever years — these people have \$20 million worth of assets," he said.

"Not the Nauruan people, not the Nauruan Government. To me that's almost a crime, in my view. Because we're here to develop Nauru, not to develop individual families."

Mr Adeang's family members have also secured high-level jobs and contracts at the detention centre.

One of his cousins, Bervena Adeang, is the operations manager at the camp, the top government-appointed position.

Jovick Adeang, another cousin of the Justice Minister, previously held the local security contract at the site, awarded by the Australian company Wilson Security, which are in turn sub-contracted by primary service provider Broadspectrum.

Suspended opposition MP Mathew Batsiua said perceived interference in detention centre contracts has been a complaint on the island for some time.

"There was a lot of comments around Nauru — Nauru is a small community — that the contracts were not being awarded fairly. There were accusations of nepotism in the selection process," he said.

"The ultimate aim is for David Adeang as Minister for Justice to be able to have a big say or influence what the companies do."

Service provider Broadspectrum responded to allegations of political interference by defending its tender process, which it said involves comprehensive assessments.

Tess Newton Cain said concerns over perceived nepotism were not helped by the lack of transparency in how processing centre contracts were awarded.

"Nauru is a very small place and the connections between people are very complex. The reality is that you are going to be doing business with people that you know, and possibly with people that you're related to," she said.

"I think it does highlight what we've known for a long time, which is that there is a degree of opacity about how those Australian contracts are awarded."

Australia's Department of Immigration and Border Protection referred questions on lease arrangements to the Government of Nauru, while the Government of Nauru said it would not be responding to any questions regarding contracts or leases.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-29/nauru-families-directly-benefiting-from-australian-funded-centre/7278120>

## 14. Turnbull government accused of ineptitude as refugee visa scheme stumbles

The Age  
March 28, 2016 - 6:39PM  
Nicole Hasham

One of the few paths to a life in Australia for asylum seekers appears to have been blocked amid claims the federal government has approved just a handful of temporary visas for which 2000 people have applied.

Labor has slammed the government's failure to process onshore asylum seekers as inept, and the Greens say the government never intended to follow through on the policy.

It has been 18 months since then immigration minister Scott Morrison said so-called "illegal" boat arrivals would not be granted permanent protection, as he sought to reintroduce temporary protection visas – a controversial Howard-era measure that Labor abolished in 2008.

The policy included temporary Safe Haven Enterprise Visas, or SHEVs, which would last five years and require refugees to work or study in regional areas. Mr Morrison said the move would fill regional job vacancies.

Some 2000 people have applied for SHEVs, but the office of Immigration Minister Peter Dutton refused to say how many had been issued.

The Refugee Council of Australia estimates around 20 visas have been granted, and Mr Dutton's office did not dispute this figure.

His office would also not say how many temporary protection visas had been granted, and the Refugee Council says this figure is also low - despite 1400 applications being lodged.

The SHEV was integral to Palmer United Party leader Clive Palmer supporting sweeping new migration and maritime laws, including new powers to detain asylum seekers at sea and fast-track processing that Amnesty International said returned refugees "to the hands of their torturers". Mr Palmer, whose senators voted for the changes, did not respond to request for comment.

If neither permanent nor temporary protection visas are being issued to asylum seekers, it leaves them languishing indefinitely in detention, facing an uncertain fate.

As Fairfax Media reported in January, the time asylum seekers spend in Australian detention centres has reached a record high under the Turnbull government as detainee processing times blow out.

A spokesman for Mr Dutton said processing of Safe Haven Enterprise Visas began in July "after NSW opted-in to the process".

He said Victoria and South Australia only opted-in last month and Queensland confirmed last week it would also take part, "clearing the way for numbers of SHEVs to be considered and granted", adding that the "assessment and checking process will take considerable time".

Labor immigration spokesman Richard Marles said the government's failure to process onshore asylum seekers was "a disgrace. It is leaving people in perpetual limbo".

"It is now the untold story of the Coalition government's ineptitude in handling those seeking asylum," he said.

Greens immigration spokeswoman Senator Sarah Hanson-Young said the government was "never serious" about issuing the visas, and crossbench senators had been "duped" into supporting the government's legislation.

"We should treat others in the way we would want to be treated and that means we should be offering proper, permanent protection to those in need," she said.

Refugee Council chief executive Paul Power said his organisation does not support temporary protection visas, and SHEV-holders would be moving to regional communities with few settlement services such as English language support.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/turnbull-government-accused-of-ineptitude-as-refugee-visa-scheme-stumbles-20160328-gns6z8.html>

## 15. Malcolm Turnbull linking refugee crisis to bombings 'dangerous', Belgian ambassador says

ABC News Online

By political reporters Francis Keany and Anna Henderson

First posted Thu 24 Mar 2016, 5:33am

Updated Thu 24 Mar 2016, 12:05pm

Belgium's Ambassador to Australia says it is "dangerous" for Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to link the European refugee crisis with this week's deadly attacks in Brussels.

Mr Turnbull used a speech at the Lowy Institute last night to warn the Islamic State terrorist group is using the Syrian refugee situation to get extremists into Europe.

"The attacks in Brussels are an unfortunate reminder of how Islamist extremism appears to have reached a crisis point in Europe," he said.

"Governments are confronted by a perfect storm of failed or neglected integration, foreign fighters returning from Iraq and Syria, porous borders and intelligence and security apparatus, struggling to keep pace with the scope and breadth of the threat.

"For all intents and purposes there are no internal borders in Europe ... and the external borders are difficult to manage.

"Recent intelligence indicates ISIL is using the refugee crisis to send operatives into Europe."

But Belgium's Ambassador to Australia Jean-Luc Bodson has cautioned against linking the issue with the deadly attacks in his homeland this week.

"It's dangerous because it's precisely what ISIS wants — that we would make a confusion between terrorism and migrants and between terrorism and Islam," Mr Bodson told ABC News Breakfast.

"My view is that the terrorists who committed the latest attacks and in Paris and in Belgium are European-raised and born. Maybe from foreign origins, but they are Europeans.

"So it has nothing to do with the refugee crisis and I think that is the main danger to assimilate that."

Mr Bodson described reports some sections of Brussels were hotbeds for Islamic State as "widely exaggerated".

"Of course you have pockets of poverty, you have unskilled workers," he said.

"But basically it's not very different than what you have in most major western cities — in the French banlieue (outskirts), or in the east end of London or the western suburbs of Sydney when you have a lot of unemployment, people who don't feel that they are part of the society.

"And it makes them vulnerable for the propaganda of ISIS which is very clever and can affect all the youth when they are in a fragile situation.

He also rejected that Belgium's counter-terrorism intelligence had failed, but conceded things could have been done better.

Belgium's federal prosecutor has confirmed brothers Ibrahim El Bakraoui and Khalid El Bakraoui were behind the Brussels attacks.

Ibrahim was deported from Turkey last year after being detained near the Syrian-Turkey border, with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan claiming Belgium ignored a warning that he was a militant.

### ***'It's a bit early ... to start diagnosing everything that's happened'***

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten reiterated comments he made yesterday, about whether the Prime Minister is passing judgement prematurely. "It's a bit early, in my opinion, to start diagnosing everything that's happened in Brussels," he said.

Mr Shorten said he was supportive of the Prime Minister's view about the strong border control measures in Australia.

Meanwhile, the Australian Federal Police said it had stepped up patrols at nine of the nation's biggest airports, following the Belgian bomb blasts.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-24/turnbull-comments-of-refugee-crisis-dangerous-says-ambassador/7272916>

## 16. Julie Bishop faces criticism over refugees

news.com.au

March 21, 2016

By Lauren Farrow, AAP Southeast Asia Correspondent

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop says Australia will propose a strategy for dealing with human trafficking in Southeast Asia as she rejected claims Canberra had not done enough to help refugees in the region.

Ms Bishop kicked off her three-day visit to Indonesia at a primary school in Central Jakarta where she was keen to stress the educational ties between the two countries.

She then joined her counterpart Retno Marsudi at a press conference on Monday in which they focused on co-operation in counter-terrorism and again promoted their countries' education links.

During the afternoon, she headed to the new Australian embassy in the capital, the largest constructed by Australia and said to reflect the depth of the countries' relationship.

But throughout the day, Ms Bishop was constantly asked about calls for Australia to increase its refugee intake in the region and end asylum-seeker boat turn-backs.

Her visit to Indonesia will culminate on Wednesday in the Bali Process, which brings together more than 40 countries and agencies to discuss ways to combat people smuggling, trafficking and other related transnational crime.

But on Monday, Ms Bishop dismissed criticism Australia was not doing enough.

"It's my understanding Indonesia will be asking all countries to do more to solve what is a regional problem and not isolating Australia," she told reporters.

"In Australia's case, we already take 13,750 people each year under humanitarian and refugee visas. We have added an additional 12,000 people from the Syrian conflict.

"Australia is sharing the burden and will be looking to other countries in our region to do similar," she added.

Ms Bishop said Australia planned to launch a strategy relating to human trafficking and slavery at the Bali Process, which she will co-chair with Ms Marsudi.

However, she wouldn't give any details ahead of the summit.

International security and disarmament director for the Indonesian foreign ministry, Andy Rachmianto, has previously criticised Australia's turn-back strategy, saying it could damage bilateral ties and only shifts the burden to other countries.

Meanwhile United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Asia Pacific spokesperson Vivian Tan told AAP: "The boats have not stopped. They have only been prevented from going to Australia. People are still fleeing conflict and persecution but they now have fewer options in the region."

There are more than 13,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with the UNHCR in the archipelago.

<http://www.news.com.au/national/breaking-news/foreign-minister-in-jakarta-for-talks/news-story/fe040ffc40952937d726e94b2b92f8eb>

## 17. Bali Process regional refugee summit overshadowed by Brussels terror attacks

ABC Radio CAF - The World Today

Samantha Hawley

Wednesday, March 23, 2016 12:42:38

ELEANOR HALL: Australia's Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has arrived in Bali for the regional summit on people smuggling known as the Bali process.

The United Nations high commissioner for refugees says its wants the focus this year to be firmly on the resettlement of Syrian refugees.

But the Brussels attacks will also shift attention to the terrorist threat in the region.

Our Indonesia correspondent Samantha Hawley is in Bali and she joins us now.



Sam, have the foreign ministers responded to the Brussels attacks today?

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: She has Eleanor. Just a short time ago the Foreign Minister stood up, she condemned of course the horrific terrorist attacks in Brussels and she offered or said that Australia had offered to help Belgium track down those responsible.

She also said that Australians are now being urged to reconsider their travel to Belgium and that those who are there should stay calm, they should follow the advice of the local authorities.

The Immigration Minister evidently, Peter Dutton, is also here. He spoke to the press as well and welcomed a decision he said by the CPSU (Community and Public Sector Union) today to cancel airport strikes.

Certainly Julie Bishop says every time an attack like this happens it is a lesson for everyone that terrorism can strike anywhere at any time and that vigilance is needed.

ELEANOR HALL: And have the leaders of other countries there or the foreign ministers raised the threat of terrorism in the region?

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: Look this is actually a people-smuggling conference if you like. They're discussing people smuggling, slavery. Julie Bishop has brought to this conference a funding commitment of \$50 million over five years to tackle slavery and human trafficking for instance.

But of course, with this many ministers and delegates in one room, the threat of terrorism has been discussed. And as we know, Indonesia really has a problem in this area at the moment.

We saw the terrorist attack in January and just a few weeks ago the Australian Government issued an alert for Indonesia, for Bali, saying that a terrorist attack was in the advanced stages of planning. So there is a real concern about the threat of terrorism in Indonesia, including Bali.

The problem that they have here Eleanor when it comes to terrorism is that they don't have yet strong laws against Islamic State or ISIS. So at the moment the Indonesian parliament is trying to push through new laws.

But for now it is not illegal, if you like, to support ISIS. It is not illegal to travel to Syria to train there and then return home to Indonesia.

So the real threat here according to security authorities that I've spoken to is those people coming back from Syria. So there is a real, I guess, heightened alert here in Indonesia as well.

ELEANOR HALL: And on the migration issue, the Indonesian Government has made it very clear that it wants Australia to take more refugees. How is Julie Bishop responding to that?

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: Well she was asked about that again today actually and she responded quite tersely. She said, in fact, Indonesia isn't just asking Australia, it's asking other nations as well.

But certainly Indonesia has asked Australia to take some of these refugees who are basically transiting through Indonesia to get to Australia but have obviously become stranded in Indonesia. The Indonesians say that their detention centres are overflowing, that they need third countries to take these genuine refugees.

But basically, the Foreign Minister Julie Bishop says Australia is doing its bit. Australia is one of the leaders when it comes to the resettlement of genuine refugees. And she says if other countries did as Australia is doing a lot of these problems would be solved.

And here at this meeting though the UNHCR has been very clear that, although people in Indonesia of course need resettlement, they think the focus here really needs to be on Syria and resettling the thousands and thousands of Syrian refugees.

ELEANOR HALL: Samantha Hawley, our Indonesia correspondent in Bali, thank you.

<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2016/s4430293.htm>

## 18. Bali Process concludes successfully with new ministerial declaration on refugees

ABC Radio CAF - AM  
Samantha Hawley  
Thursday, March 24, 2016 08:28:00

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN: Six years after the very first meeting, the Bali process ended with an agreement even the United Nations human rights commissioner was happy with.

The summit is the brain child of the former prime minister Kevin Rudd and for the first time this year it delivered a ministerial declaration on people smuggling.

Agreement was also reached on an emergency measure to ensure migrants aren't stranded as they were on the Andaman Sea last year.

Indonesia correspondent Samantha Hawley reports.

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: It's non-binding but not bad, according to the UNHCR.

Its director of international protection is Volker Turk.

VOLKER TURK: From a UNHCR perspective, we are very excited.

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: A ministerial declaration on people smuggling and a new emergency mechanism he says show a region willing to cooperate and it would never have happened in the past.

VOLKER TURK: The fact that there is collaboration in the region is a very positive message of solidarity.

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: In May last year, thousands of Rohingya and Bangladeshi nationals were stranded and starving at sea. Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Australia all refused to take them.

Indonesia finally allowed them to dock.

The Indonesian Foreign Minister is Retno Marsudi.

RETNO MARSUDI: When the emergency situation in Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal happened, it seems that we could not do more in the context of Bali Process to respond.

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: The more than 40 Bali Process nations have agreed to a new mechanism, which will include emergency meetings if a similar crisis arises again.

The Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop.

JULIE BISHOP: There will be close consultation; officials will be given the authority to consult and to convene meetings. This was missing from the processes in 2015 and we were concerned that as the events of the Andaman Sea unfolded, there was no mechanism for the Bali Process to bring members together in a timely fashion.

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: Volker Turk wants more.

He says South East Asian nations need to now consider settling refugees rather than constantly trying to find third nations to take them.

VOLKER TURK: I think there has been recognition by many speakers throughout the conference that they do acknowledge that the challenges are enormous worldwide. And I don't think I've heard it quite in the same way before.

I think that has sunk in.

SAMANTHA HAWLEY: He says the UNHCR is searching for more nations to resettle some of the millions of Syrian refugees, with only 170,000 places found so far.

This is Samantha Hawley in Bali reporting for AM.

<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2016/s4430974.htm>

## 19. Iraqi Christians say relatives lives are at risk due to Australia's slow resettlement process

ABC Radio CAF - The World Today  
Mohamed Taha  
Wednesday, March 23, 2016 12:45:01

ELEANOR HALL: While the UNHCR does want the refugee settlement process speeded up, Iraqi and Syrian Christians living here say the Australian Government is moving far too slowly.

The Federal Government pledged last year to take 12,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq. But according to official figures, only 26 people have arrived so far.

Mohamed Taha has this report.

MOHAMED TAHA: Fairfield in south-west Sydney is the hub of Australia's Iraqi-Christian community.

People here have fled oppression, and while many have lost their homes, they haven't lost their traditions.

Older Iraqi men play dominoes on the street, just like they would in Baghdad. They miss Iraq, but they're grateful to be in Australia.

IRAQI MAN (translated): He said the Australian Government, they're very grateful for them bringing them here.

MOHAMED TAHA: Life under Islamic State has become unbearable for Iraq's Christians.

Mosul is the country's second-largest city and home to a large Christian community.

Islamic State militants have carried out massacres and destroyed churches, forcing terrified Christians to flee.

SABAH HODI: There is no future for the Christians in Iraq. All the Christians is under threat. It is big dangerous for Iraqi Christians, not even in Mosul, in all Iraqi Christians. To kill, persecuted, and they take their homes and everything. There is no future for me. There is no future for the Christians in Iraq.

MOHAMED TAHA: Sabah Hodi fled Iraq in 2012. He's now trying to get his mother-in-law, sister-in-law and their family to Australia.

Australia agreed to help, pledging to take in 12,000 Iraqis and Syrians affected by the fighting. Nine-thousand are expected to end up in New South Wales, many in the Fairfield area.

Sabah Hodi says his relatives are struggling in Jordan.

SABAH HODI: They are suffering from everything. How to get food? Because you know she's a woman, she's a widow. With her mum, and her mum now she has a problem in mentality now. There are four kids, you know, it's not easy. They are child, they need to go to the school, they need to learn, they need - they don't feel safe there.

MOHAMED TAHA: Australian Syrian and Iraqi Christian groups say they've lodged thousands of visa applications for members of their community stuck in Jordan and Turkey.

When the former prime minister Tony Abbott announced the intake, he said the government would "move quickly" to resettle the refugees.

Dr Intesar Naoum is from the Iraqi Christian Association.

INTESAR NAOUM: With the occupation of Mosul by ISIS, we had a lot of Christians evacuated from or fled Mosul. Most of them are living in Kurdistan of Iraq and thousands of them fled to Jordan for safe haven there. They are seeking refugee to other countries, Australia is one of these countries and we are hoping to bring them as soon as possible.

MOHAMED TAHA: His association has lodged more than 300 refugee claims, some dating back from two years ago.

He says he's heard little from immigration authorities other than the cases are being processed.

INTESAR NAOUM: We had around 300 applications and till now I think one or two people of that list has arrived to Australia. We have been asked by our community what's happening. It's two years since then and still we haven't received many of our families. We had many, many meetings with the Department of Immigration, and we had follow-up emails to them seeking more feedback about these applications and unfortunately we don't have any feedback.

MOHAMED TAHA: An Immigration Department spokesperson has told AM it's not possible to put a time frame on how long it will take to process the full cohort of refugees, as the processing time varies according to the circumstances of each applicant.

Sabah Hodi's family lives with the stress of their relatives being stuck in a dangerous place.

SABAH HODI: We are suffering because they suffer there, okay? And the people there are in danger, they're not safe. We hope that the Government help and I hope that the Government will accelerate the process.

ELEANOR HALL: That was Fairfield resident Sabah Hodi ending that report by Mohamed Taha.

<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2016/s4430292.htm>

## **20. Fed Govt flags some refugees as security risks, while Iraqi and Syrian families wait for relatives**

ABC Radio CAF - PM  
Mohamed Taha  
Wednesday, March 23, 2016 18:25:00

MARK COLVIN: The Federal Government says some people wanting to come to Australia under its expanded refugee program have been flagged as security risks.

The Abbott Government last year pledged to take 12,000 extra refugees from Iraq and Syria.

The UNHCR has called for the refugee resettlement process to speed up, and many Iraqi and Syrian Christians living here say the delay is putting the lives of their relatives at risk.

Mohamed Taha has this report.

MOHAMED TAHA: Official figures show that only 26 Syrian and Iraqi refugees have arrived in Australia so far, and only a further 124 people have been approved.

The Federal Social Services Minister Christian Porter admits it's a slow process.

CHRISTIAN PORTER: The level of rigour that we undertake with respect to security checks, health checks, background checks, which in many instances in the Australian system involve things as complicated as biometrics, is a slow process but it is a particularly awkward process given the on-the-ground conditions, the real world conditions, that we're experiencing.

So, look, this policy is first and foremost about compassion, but part of the process is about caution and the two are running simultaneously together.

MOHAMED TAHA: It emerged today that those strict security checks had identified some people as security risks.

The Federal Justice Minister Michael Keenan.

MICHAEL KEENAN: I understand that there's been a couple of people that have been flagged within that process and again the Australian people should be reassured that that 12,000, when they do arrive in Australia, has been rigorously vetted and they will not pose any security risk.

MOHAMED TAHA: The biggest intake will go to New South Wales, with 9,000 people expected, many in the Fairfield area of Sydney's western suburbs.

The New South Wales coordinator-general for refugee resettlement is the former top federal public servant Professor Peter Shergold.

PETER SHERGOLD: Well the slow process is because of the processing that refugees are going through overseas, which is obviously run by the Commonwealth Government.

We've used the last five months in planning for refugee arrivals. We now see that the families are starting to arrive. In New South Wales, I don't know, we're planning probably for an extra 4,000 to 6,000 refugees arriving, and I imagine it will be over the next 12 or 18 months.

The key assurance I can give is that the standard of services that we will provide for refugees to help them integrate in society will be second to none.

MOHAMED TAHA: But for Iraqi Christian Iman Mansour, the wait is unbearable. She fled Iraq two years ago with her son and daughter, but her husband Rahif remained in Jordan. She applied for him to come and Rahif underwent medical tests, but they've heard nothing back.

IMAN MANSOUR: Yes it's very frustrating to us, yes, because more than two years we are waiting. We are waiting, and we contacted different, we want to call someone to give us their reply. There is no reply from anyone. We are waiting for him, we are so, so frustrating. We are depressed.

MOHAMED TAHA: Dr Ramzi Barnouti is the president of the Iraqi Australian Christian Association.

He says his association has lodged more than 300 refugee claims, some of them years ago, but immigration authorities have told them little.

RAMZI BARNOUTI: All our families support their relatives, and we wrote to the Immigration that we are ready to pay for the transport, teach them everything here.

Usually they are university graduates, most of them. We have people, engineers, we have doctors, we have dentists, we don't have any bad reputation, we don't have killers, we don't have theft. We don't, I mean, we are a safe people.

MOHAMED TAHA: The manager of the Assyrian Resource Centre, Carmen Lazar, says they submitted 5,600 applications last September, but only a few families have arrived.

She says she is lost for words when her community asks what's going on.

CARMEN LAZAR: We were told that hopefully last December we would have seen some intake, but can I say? Nothing. We were then told in February. Now we are in March, and still nothing. And here I am going back to my community and unfortunately they are very distressed, very saddened. I don't know what else I can do.

MOHAMED TAHA: The Social Services Minister Christian Porter told me that the Government was accelerating the process and hoped that things would start speeding up by May.

MARK COLVIN: Mohamed Taha.

<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2016/s4430569.htm>

## **21. MEDIA RELEASE: Kurdish refugee restarts hunger strike in detention**

KURDISH REFUGEE IN INDEFINITE DETENTION RE-STARTS HUNGER STRIKE AFTER IMMIGRATION BREAKS PROMISE OF COMMUNITY DETENTION

Thursday March 24, 2016  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

Refugee advocates have grave fears for the welfare of 36 year-old Kurdish refugee, Sardar Zahiri, who has re-started a hunger strike in Melbourne after being moved from Perth.

Sardar, was hospitalised in Perth after twenty days of a hunger strike in the Perth detention centre in February, this year

After continuing his hunger strike at the Royal Perth Hospital, he was told by the treating psychiatrist at that he had discussed Zahiri's case with Immigration and that Immigration had agreed, if Zahiri began eating, he would be transferred to a Melbourne clinic and then placed in community detention. Other hospital staff and IHMS are believed to be witnesses to the commitment given to Sardar.

Zahiri was transferred to The Melbourne Clinic, a private psychiatric hospital, but instead of being released in to community detention, Sardar, has now been placed in the high security, Maribynong Immigration Detention Centre (MIDC).

He waited five days to see if the promise of community detention was going to be kept. Then, Sardar began a hunger strike in protest at the broken promise four days ago, Monday, 21 March. His physical condition has deteriorated rapidly.

"We are seriously concerned for Sardar's welfare," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "He has lost all hope, and any trust, which wasn't much, that he had in the immigration officers and doctors, who promised he would get community detention is gone.

"Why immigration would live up to the first part of its undertaking to Sardar, to transfer him to Melbourne, but has reneged on the issue of community detention is both cruel and inexplicable, unless they want to inflict yet more mental torture."

Sardar's case is eerily reminiscent of that of Fezal Chegini, the Kurdish man who was found dead on Christmas Island in November, last year.

In spite of being found to be a refugee in 2012, Sardar has been held in indefinite detention as a result of being given a good behaviour bond in 2013 following some property being damaged in an incident in the Darwin detention centre.

His detention nightmare has led Sardar to attempt suicide on 12 occasions. He has damaged neck vertebrae, giving him constant pain, from a hanging attempt in Darwin early this year.

Immigration officers at MIDC told Sardar this morning, that the Minister has not made a decision for him to be moved into community detention, and in relation to his hunger strike, that "It was not important whether you live or die, that is up to you."

"Sardar's detention is inexcusable. He should not be in detention at all," said Rintoul, "The last skerrick of hope have been snatched away from him. Immigration needs to urgently make good on the commitment that made to Sardar."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

## **22. MEDIA RELEASE: Iranian asylum seeker medivacced from Manus after heart attack**

Wednesday March 23, 2016  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

A 38 year-old Iranian asylum seeker has been medivacced from Manus Island to a Brisbane hospital this morning (Wednesday 23 March) after suffering a heart attack yesterday afternoon.

The man suffered the heart attack, around 4pm, on a soccer field near the detention centre. He was given CPR by a Wilson's guard whose action saved the man's life, say other asylum seekers at the scene.

The Iranian man was one of those who were injured in the attack on the detention centre in February 2014, which resulted in the killing of Reza Berati.

Like others sent to Manus, he has been infected with malaria since he was sent there in August 2013. In June 2015, he suffered a bad malaria attack that required him to be transferred to Port Moresby hospital for treatment.

He is the second asylum seeker in four weeks to be transferred from Manus Island because of heart problems.

The medical evacuation comes just a few weeks before the start of the coronial inquiry into the death of Hamid Khazaie, who died in Brisbane from septicaemia after being medivacced from Manus Island in September 2014.

"The sooner Manus Island is closed, the better," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition. "The emergency only highlights the appalling injustice inflicted on asylum seekers sent to Manus Island who have held in shocking conditions for more than two and half years."

For more information, contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

## **23. Federal government defends slow pace on Syrian refugees as NSW rolls out welcome**

The Age  
March 21, 2016 - 5:02PM  
James Robertson

The federal government says it makes no apologies for having so far accepted only a tiny fraction of a promised 12,000 refugees from the Syria and Iraq region.

Federal Social Services Minister Christian Porter said on Monday that only about 125 people had arrived, or would in the next few days, as part of the one-off increase in Australia's humanitarian refugee intake.

NSW Premier Mike Baird made a show of welcoming on Monday a family of four, the Kakys, who were among the first to arrive.

The Catholic family fled Iraq in June 2014, a time when Islamic State was seizing control of key cities in the country.

They arrived in Sydney last week, after two difficult years in Lebanon.

"We are looking forward to leaving our past behind and opening a blank page in a new country," said father, Ayad, a former art teacher, standing alongside wife Iptesam and children Mark, 8, and Rita, 2.

"Australia has a very good culture and we want to learn about it and participate."

About 90 have come to NSW so far; the state will accept the lion's share of the national refugee intake from the region. The state government is planning to take up to 7000 refugees.

"They're a beautiful family with a story not many of us can relate to," Mr Baird said. "We look forward to their life evolving here in NSW."

Refugee advocates have criticised Australia for moving too slowly with its humanitarian commitments.

Canada has taken about 25,000 refugees from the region. That figure is expected to top 50,000 by year's end.

But Mr Porter said the federal government was maintaining a level of "rigour" in screening potential asylum seekers for health and security checks.

"The processes are stringent, cautious and necessarily, by virtue of that, somewhat slower than we expected," he said. "We don't make apologies for that."

About 9000 refugees globally were under "active assessment" for processing as part of Australia's planned intake, Mr Porter said.

"This will take a year and, indeed, a number of years to see through," he said. "The pipeline of arrivals is slower than we estimated."

The one-off special intake of 12,000 refugees, focusing on persecuted religious minorities, was announced in September last year by former prime minister Tony Abbott.

It was reported earlier this year that the policy is expected to cost tax payers a little less than \$1 billion in associated resettlement costs.

The federal government is working with the United Nations' refugee agency to select and screen potential refugees from regional camps in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon.

<http://www.theage.com.au/nsw/federal-government-defends-slow-pace-on-syrian-refugees-as-nsw-rolls-out-welcome-20160321-gnnhju.html>

## **24. Nauru asylum seekers risk arrest with first in series of rolling protests**

'Emotional and upset' group, apparently provoked by restrictions on their Iranian new year celebrations, occupy entrance to Australian-funded centre

The Guardian  
Joshua Robertson  
Monday 21 March 2016 14.18 AEDT

Asylum seekers in Nauru have risked a crackdown under the Pacific nation's chilling public speech laws with the first of a series of rolling protests about conditions there.

The protest on Sunday saw the group, apparently provoked by restrictions on their ability to celebrate the Iranian new year, occupy the entrance to the Australian-funded facility, waving banners and chanting "justice" and "freedom".

They plan to continue the hour-long demonstrations daily, potentially inviting arrest under laws introduced last year that allowed some protests to be criminalised.

It came on the same day thousands of people across Australia attended rallies calling for an end to offshore detention.

One sign read: "4 baby 45 child 53 women 46 men in Nauru detention." Another read: "We have been in detention since 995 days."

An asylum seeker advocate, Jeanie Marie Walker, said there were suggestions the protest had been provoked by a refusal by detention centre management to allow detainees to celebrate Nowruz, or the Persian new year, at a location outside the centre.

"They're all really distraught because this is another new year for them on Nauru," she said.

"This is their most culturally significant day in Iran and Afghanistan and they're being denied the opportunity to celebrate, they have no access to the special food they use to celebrate.

"They're taking a lot of risk but that's why they're emotional and upset. They're planning on continuing to [protest] every day at the same time."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/21/nauru-asylum-seekers-risk-arrest-with-first-in-series-of-rolling-protests>

## **25. MEDIA RELEASE: Asylum seekers hold second day of protest on Nauru**

Monday March 21, 2016  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

Asylum seekers on Nauru held a protest at the gates of the family compound, RPC 3 , for the second day in a row, beginning at 5.00pm Nauru time.

Many of the asylum seekers are still waiting for answers to their refugee claims for more than two-and half years.

The Nauru protest began on Palm Sunday co-inciding with the Palm Sunday "Welcome Refugee" rallies calling for the closure of Manus Island and Nauru. The start of the protests also co-incided with the start of the Iranian new year - symbolically marking the beginning of yet another year in offshore detention.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

## **26. MEDIA RELEASE: Third day of protest on Nauru**

Tuesday March 22, 2016  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

Asylum seekers of the family compound, RPC 3, on Nauru have staged their third protest in three days. (Photos attached)

In October last year the Nauruan government announced that 'all remaining asylum seekers" will be processed.

According to February statistics issued by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, there were 470 asylum seeker still waiting for their refugee determination.

In October, the Turnbull Government was reported as 'welcoming the news'. Five months later, 470 people are still waiting.

But there is silence from the Turnbull government.

For some of the asylum seekers protesting, "Good Friday" will mark 1000 days in detention on Nauru.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

## **27. Asylum Seekers On Nauru Protest For Fourth Day, After 1000 Days In Detention**

Josh Butler  
The Huffington Post  
Posted: 24/03/2016 16:22 AEST  
Updated: 24/03/2016 16:22 AEST

Asylum seekers on Nauru have been protesting for four days, as some of them prepare to mark 1000 days detained in Australian immigration detention on the island nation.

Good Friday will be the 1000th day in detention for some asylum seekers. That's more than two years and nine months.

While a number of asylum seekers have been determined to be genuine refugees and been officially resettled on Nauru -- with freedom of movement around the island, an ability to get jobs and start a proper life -- many are in limbo, awaiting processing and the determination of their refugee status, and mostly confined to the detention centre on the island. That's what Ian Rintoul, of advocacy group Refugee Action Coalition, told The Huffington Post Australia.



He said "hundreds" of asylum seekers -- men, women and children -- who haven't had their refugee status determined have been protesting at the gates of the facility for four days, since March 20. Chanting, brandishing hand-painted signs and partially blocking the main gate into their camp, the asylum seekers are calling for faster processing of their refugee applications.

"They're protesting the long term detention without the processing, as well as the general situation on Nauru. So far the protests have been peaceful, occupying the gate. They're chanting about freedom and justice. They usually go for a few hours a day," Rintoul said.

He claims asylum seekers, refugees and others on the island who have photographed or filmed the protests have been threatened with arrest by local authorities and staff at the centre.

Nauru has recently been reclassified as an "open centre," meaning asylum seekers are not technically imprisoned in the detention centre and are allowed some freedoms not necessarily associated with a detention facility. Signs at the protest claim 144 asylum seekers remain in detention, but the Department of Immigration and Border Protection would not confirm exact numbers when contacted by HuffPost Australia.

While those who have been deemed to be "genuine" refugees are permitted to travel, live and work among the wider Nauruan community, Rintoul said asylum seekers who are still awaiting a determination have significantly fewer freedoms.

"They aren't allowed to bring things in, they don't have money. Even under the open centre, they're effectively confined to [the camp]. They can't work, they can't move freely. A lot of restrictions remain," he said.

"The ones housed outside the camp do get a small allowance, do work, are allowed to move around the island outside the area... the people protesting are only the asylum seekers, not the ones deemed to be refugees."

A young man on Nauru claimed conditions among asylum seekers in the centre were deteriorating.

"There is some people who have got ear infection, eyes, nose, throat, because of the air. Some of the people, their legs and backs hurt because of the rocks on the ground," he told HuffPost Australia.

"Despite promises made at the end of last year, that everybody would be processed soon, that just hasn't been fulfilled. The fact people can be 1000 days on Nauru and not have a refugee determination, it exposes the very stark realities of the lack of processing and lack of any resettlement arrangements."

HuffPost Australia sent a list of questions to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection about the protests, the claims made by asylum seekers that they had been waiting 1000 days for a refugee determination, how many asylum seekers had been processed and how many were still awaiting a determination.

Here is their reply, in full:

"Hi Josh,

This is a matter for the Government of Nauru

Kind Regards,"

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2016/03/23/nauru-protest-asylum-seeker\\_n\\_9537394.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2016/03/23/nauru-protest-asylum-seeker_n_9537394.html)

## **28. MEDIA RELEASE: Nauru police block roads to thwart protest**

Good Friday, March 25, 2016  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

Nauruan police blocked all roads leading to the RPC3 gates in an attempt to prevent support for the protest and prevent photos of the protest reaching the outside world. (Photo of police blockade attached.)

In one incident a woman with a baby was pushed as police tried to prevent photos being taken.

The Good Friday protest marked 1000 days in detention for many of the asylum seekers and was the sixth day of protest since they began on 20 March to coincide with Palm Sunday "Welcome Refugees" protests in Australia.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

## **29. MEDIA RELEASE: Nauru asylum seeker protest - Day Eight**

Sunday March 27, 2016  
Refugee Action Coalition  
Ian Rintoul  
mobile 0417 275 713

So much for the 'open camp' -- despite asylum seekers supposedly being able to come and go from the Nauru detention centre as they like, it seems the 'open camp' is not all that open.

For the last two days, Immigration and Broadpectrum have erected a fence across the road to prevent protests reaching and blocking the main gate to the Nauru family camp, RPC3.

Keeping the protests back from the main gate also hampers photographs and videos of the protests reaching the outside world.

But asylum seekers protesters have marched to the fence chanting, "Three years in detention; Shame on You, Shame on you." Photos attaches; videos available on request.

For more a contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

## **30. Locked gates and erected fences contain Nauru asylum seeker protests**

Justice minister defends refugee determination system as 'world class' after eight days of protests by people held in camp

The Guardian  
Helen Davidson  
Monday 28 March 2016 13.59 AEDT

Protests by asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru have continued for eight days, with reports authorities locked gates and erected fences to prevent others joining.

In an open letter the protesters have called for an end to their detention, which for some reached 1,000 days on Friday. The Nauruan justice minister has defended his country's system in an address to foreign leaders in Indonesia, suggesting it could be expanded.

The rolling protests began last Sunday, apparently sparked by restrictions on celebrations of the Iranian new year. They coincided with demonstrations across Australia.

The crowd of a few dozen men, women, and children, held signs and chanted "freedom" and "kids in detention, shame on you".

According to refugee advocates, employees of the processing centre erected fences across the road to a camp entrance and locked the gates each afternoon for the duration of each protest. It was believed the action was taken to stop refugees who live in the Nauruan community from joining the protests by those still living in the centre. The refugee advocates provided photos to support their claims.

Broadpectrum, which operates the centre, has been contacted for comment.

An open letter from some detainees, released over the weekend, begged for an end to the offshore immigration processing policy: "What's the difference between us and others who came with us on the same boat, most of whom are enjoying their pure oxygen; that is, their freedom. Why are we only punished like this by this inhuman government and this nation?"

"No, we have spent 1,000 days here that we can't get back. One thousand days passing with emptiness and uselessness. We have all experienced such great suffering back home. We left it all and reached your country but now we have been losing our lives slowly in this human dumping ground; your great spider web of unfair policies that kills us slowly."

The treatment and living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru have long been criticised, particularly in relation to children.

The Moss report into the treatment of asylum seekers on Nauru detailed extensive and unaddressed instances of abuse, and more recently several allegations of physical and sexual violence against refugees and asylum seekers, including children, have gone unpunished. After the high court decision in February that the detention of asylum seekers on Nauru was constitutional, advocates, doctors, churches, and state government leaders lobbied the federal government to stop the return of 267 people – including a large number of children – back to Nauru from Australia where they were receiving medical treatment.

Leaked documents continue to paint a bleak picture of the mental health and subsequent care of people in offshore detention.

The Nauruan government, which is approaching a contentious election, due to be held by the middle of the year, has responded by pointing to its improved medical services, including a new hospital and accusing media of being agenda-driven.

In October the Nauruan government announced the gates of the centre would be permanently opened, allowing all detainees – including those still awaiting refugee assessment – to move freely between the camp and the community on the island. The move was just days before the Australian high court heard a challenge to the legality of offshore processing and detention.

In a statement to the Bali Process ministerial meeting last week, Nauru's justice minister, David Adeang, defended the detention and processing system in place: "We consider [the refugee determination system] to be world-class, incorporating all the elements which are recommended by UNHCR, including a sound legislative base, legal advice for asylum seekers, and merits and judicial review steps."

Adeang noted Nauru's creation of a refugee determination system – nonexistent prior to the arrangement made with Australia to take people who sought asylum by boat – and the review tribunal process which started hearings this month.

He said people found to be refugees were now living in the community, and many were employed.

"Settlement has changed the face of Nauru. It has been less than two years since the first refugee determination, but we now have a vibrant multicultural community," Adeang said.

The Nauruan government was now working to removal people whose refugee claims had been rejected and who were currently housed in the "open" processing centre, he added. He added that within the centre, there was an "extensive" range of health and welfare services and activities.

Adeang also suggested it could be expanded beyond the Australian arrangement, and used as a "regional solution" for asylum seeker processing and temporary resettlement of refugees.

"Nauru is well-placed to provide surge capacity for large-scale migration flows, as we saw last year in the Andaman Sea," he said, referring to the Rohingya refugee crisis which saw thousands of asylum seekers left adrift after multiple countries refused to allow their boats to dock.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/mar/28/locked-gates-and-erected-fences-contain-nauru-asylum-seeker-protests>