

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. 'Koala bears and kangaroos ... [and] torture islands': Australia is an icon of the far-right in Europe's refugee crisis

The Age
December 2 2016
Eryk Bagshaw

Andreas Tolke, a German architecture guru, offered up his Armani couch. The city of Hamburg opened its schools, and Berlin turned department stores into shelters for thousands of families.

That is how one society reacted when a million refugees came through its doors in one year. Inspired by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who told her citizens that the incoming refugees not only needed the country's humanitarian help but they would, in time, ignite the economy, Germans flocked to train stations to welcome carriages of asylum seekers with toys and flowers.

But now schools and cities are divided while ascendant populists fan the flames of anti-immigration sentiment. Merkel has been pushed to the edge of her political capital, the country's social foundations are on the brink. Australia's hardline immigration policy, popular with the far-right in Germany, has gone mainstream, with the Interior Ministry looking towards a similar policy to reverse its fortunes.

Caught in the middle are people like Renda Barakat, an 11-year-old Yazidi who left her home in northern Iraq more than a year ago. She packed her pencils but left her bike behind. Eighteen family members fled with her, running from Islamic State, the terrorist group that has raped, murdered and enslaved her people. As she stands outside a German shelter while the first autumn snow begins to fall, hundreds of families live inside the school's former gym, their privacy afforded by tarpaulins.

In November, conservative newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* reported the German Interior ministry was considering an Australian-style immigration solution, turning boatloads of refugees in the Mediterranean back to where they came from.

"Instead of accepting them in Australia they send them back," National Democratic Party Commissioner Jens Baur, a neo-Nazi, said earlier this year. "This is the one real solution."

FULL STORY AT <http://www.smh.com.au/world/koala-bears-and-kangaroos--and-torture-islands-australia-is-an-icon-of-the-farright-in-europes-refugee-crisis-20161127-gsyte2.html>

2. UN expert says Australians (and their leaders) have a big racism problem

The Age
December 5 2016 - 3:44PM
Stephanie Peatling

The United Nations' special rapporteur on racism has condemned Australian politicians from major and minor parties whose statements are contributing to an increase in "xenophobic hate speech" and negative views about migrants.

Mutuma Ruteere has also warned that political leaders who do not denounce such views are tacitly contributing to the normalisation of hard-right and racist opinions.

"If they do not speak out they lend legitimacy to them. It's very easy for darkness to drive out the light. It's very easy for the bad to demean the good. It's much harder to clear out the political space once it's infected by racists," Mr Ruteere said in Canberra on Wednesday.

Mr Ruteere was finishing a visit to Australia, the first by someone holding his position in 15 years. His comments will form the basis of a report he will deliver to the United Nations Human Rights Council next year.

Mr Ruteere said Australia was not unique among western democracies in grappling with popular support for parties with discriminatory policies and racist views.

He said the "danger" for Australia was the experience of other countries where "the fringe elements keep moving to the centre, to the mainstream [and] the fringe becomes the mainstream".

"That's a threat not just for Australia but all open multicultural societies. This is something open democratic states need to be aware about and to take pre-emptive action against," Mr Ruteere said.

Western democracies were "reckoning with history", he said, and "have to make the decision whether to confront the bigots and racists who purport to speak for the people but contradict" the values on which those societies were founded, such as equality of all people.

Mr Ruteere's visit to Australia coincided with the final two weeks of Parliament in which Immigration Minister Peter Dutton was criticised by Labor, the Greens, security experts and multicultural groups when he suggested Australia's immigration program in the 1970s had made "mistakes".

Challenged in Parliament to identify the groups he was referring to, Mr Dutton said "of the last 33 people who have been charged with terrorist-related offences in this country, 22 are from second and third-generation Lebanese Muslim backgrounds".

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull later praised the performance of Mr Dutton although he stopped short of endorsing his minister's comments.

The visit also coincided with a speech given by One Nation leader Pauline Hanson in which she said she was "fed up" with being called racist and backed the review of section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

Mr Ruteere said there was no need to change the law.

"Removing this provision would undermine the efforts taken by the various levels of government for an inclusive Australia and open the door to racist and xenophobic hate speech, which has been quite limited thanks to this provision," Mr Ruteere said.

He also praised the work of the Human Rights Commission and its president, Gillian Triggs.

During his visit, Mr Ruteere was briefed on the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory.

He recommended Australia re-examine its criminal justice system to "embrace alternatives to detention and avoid mandatory sentences" and urged Australia to grant constitutional recognition to Indigenous peoples as soon as possible.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/un-expert-says-australians-and-their-leaders-have-a-big-racism-problem-20161205-gt481p.html>

3. New York Times: Broken Men in Paradise

The world's refugee crisis knows no more sinister exercise in cruelty than Australia's island prisons.

New York Times
By Roger Cohen
December 9, 2016

MANUS, Papua New Guinea — The plane banks over the dense tropical forest of Manus Island, little touched, it seems, by human hand. South Pacific waters lap onto deserted beaches. The jungle glistens, impenetrable. At the unfenced airport, built by occupying Japanese forces during World War II, a sign "welcomes you to our very beautiful island paradise in the sun."

It could be that, a 60-mile-long slice of heaven. But for more than 900 asylum seekers from across the world banished by Australia to this remote corner of the Papua New Guinea archipelago, Manus has been hell; a three and a half year exercise in mental and physical cruelty conducted in near secrecy beneath the green canopy of the tropics.

A road, newly paved by Australia as part payment to its former colony for hosting this punitive experiment in refugee management, leads to Lorengau, a capital of romantic name and unromantic misery. Here I find Benham Satah, a Kurd who fled persecution in the western Iranian city of Kermanshah. Detained on Australia's Christmas Island after crossing in a smuggler's boat from Indonesia and later forced onto a Manus-bound plane, he has languished here since Aug. 27, 2013.

Endless limbo undoes the mind. But going home could mean facing death: Refugees do not flee out of choice but because they have no choice. Satah's light brown eyes are glassy. His legs tremble. A young man with a college degree in English, he is now nameless, a mere registration number — FRT009 — to Australian officials.

"Sometimes I cut myself," he says, "so that I can see my blood and remember, 'Oh, yes! I am alive.' "

Reza Barati, his former roommate at what the men's ID badges call the Offshore Processing Center (Orwell would be proud), is dead. A fellow Iranian Kurd, he was killed, aged 23, on Feb. 17, 2014. Satah witnessed the tall, quiet volleyball player being beaten to death after a local mob scaled the wall of the facility. Protests by asylum seekers had led to rising tensions with the Australian authorities and their Manus enforcers.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/09/opinion/sunday/australia-refugee-prisons-manus-island.html>

4. People ask us why we protested in parliament for refugees. We ask, why didn't you?

How can we remain passive and silent while asylum seekers are held indefinitely, tortured and raped in detention?

The Guardian

By Mara Bonacci, Sam Castro, Kat Moore and Kerry Woodward

Saturday 3 December 2016 15.33 AEDT

Australia is a country built on the spilt blood of Indigenous people. We are a country whose secret past is founded on a violent boat invasion and occupation of First Nations land.

For Waca (Whistleblowers, Activists and Citizens Alliance) and many compassionate and caring people in Australia, the fear of asylum seekers arriving by boat, and the normalisation of violence against refugees detained on offshore death camps, represents an extension of this violent colonial mentality.

For many years, members of Waca have collectively campaigned for the rights of refugees, visiting those held in onshore and offshore detention centres, attending rallies, speaking with friends and family, petitioning the government and calling on our representatives to legislate humane refugee policies.

However, time and time again, successive governments have ignored the pleas of the community, of doctors, of lawyers and even the United Nations while continuing to militarise their response to what is essentially a humanitarian crisis.

We, like the millions of Australians who support resettling refugees in Australia, feel our politicians are not listening and that every day on Manus Island, Christmas Island and Nauru is another day in hell. We believe this is a state of emergency and one that requires community intervention because our leaders have failed us and those seeking asylum.

That is why during the last sitting week of parliament, activists travelled from around the country to join Waca members in delivering a message to our leaders.

People ask why we did it. We ask, why didn't you? How can we remain passive and silent while people are held indefinitely, tortured and raped, and others in such states of despair are self-immolating. We travelled to parliament to speak the truth to both sides of politics. To tell them they are complicit in the murder, rape, torture and child abuse of refugees, that they are playing political games with people's lives.

We did this to demand that they close the camps. The only way that law and society evolve is when people challenge the status quo. Protest is an essential component of a participatory democracy and has been for centuries; it is our right and our responsibility.

It appears that people are more upset by us interrupting parliament than they are about what is happening on Manus and Nauru; this highlights the normalisation of the maltreatment of refugees and our passive attitude towards engaging in the democratic process.

One of the central functions of the fourth estate is to investigate the actions of the political elite that acts in our names. The media have failed to focus on the abuse and suffering of asylum seekers and have instead chosen to report on the personal lives and appearances of the refugee advocates who participated in the protests. Anyone with a social conscience is dismissed as a bleeding heart.

The stereotyping of protesters must stop. There seems to be no understanding of the diversity of the 50 participants or of the time, effort, personal and financial cost involved. Additionally, the parliamentary security laws were slated to be changed long before those responsible had any inkling of our protest; it is typical of the government to use their critics as a scapegoat for their anti-democratic laws.

Regardless, it's a shame that the media chooses to focus on anything but the issue. This is not about parliamentary security. Who we are is irrelevant. The real issue is the torture and abuse of refugees and asylum seekers held in detention.

Contrary to some media reports, we did not "storm" parliament. We entered calmly as citizens. Anyone who has ever seen question time knows our politicians behave like children, constantly ridiculing and interrupting each other.

The response of these (mostly) men, who ostensibly work for us, was cowardly and juvenile. Bill Shorten's comments that "this is the exact opposite of democracy" show that he has forgotten where his party came from; Malcolm Turnbull turned away and smirked; Peter Dutton could not look us in the eye; the majority of the Liberal party walked out. Why won't they listen?

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/03/people-ask-us-why-we-protested-in-parliament-for-refugees-we-ask-why-didnt-you>

5. Eva Orner, Steven Glass: Proof that our politicians turn a blind eye to the plight of refugees

Sydney Morning Herald
December 2 2016 - 11:45PM
Eva Orner, Steven Glass

If Peter Dutton really wanted to deal with the difficult issues in his portfolio rather than scoring cheap political points against protesters who engage in civil disobedience, he might have come to see *Chasing Asylum*, a feature documentary that screened in Parliament House on Tuesday night, just a few metres from his office.

But he didn't. Neither did the Prime Minister, who recently claimed, falsely, that our refugee policy is "generous". Neither did anybody from the government. Sarah Hanson-Young, who hosted the screening, sent out 4000 invitations, including to all MPs and their staff, but the only politicians who attended were Senator Hanson-Young herself and one member of the ALP. The other attendees were ambassadors from a range of European countries, an embassy official from the United States, and a handful of journalists.

Chasing Asylum shows us the real impact of Australia's offshore detention policies. It features footage secretly obtained from inside the offshore detention camps, revealing the personal impact of sending those in search of a safe home to languish in limbo. It makes us witness to the mental, physical and fiscal consequences of Australia's decision to lock away refugees and asylum seekers in unsafe and unsanitary conditions, hidden from media scrutiny, destroying their lives under the pretext of saving them.

The film was released theatrically in May. It is the highest grossing Australian documentary of the year. In the past few weeks it has been broadcast by the BBC in Britain and NHK in Japan. By the middle of next year it will have screened throughout Europe and in the United States.

Since the premiere in Toronto in April we have participated in more than 80 question-and-answer sessions at screenings in Australia and around the world. This week's Parliament House screening was the first occasion that one of these sessions was not packed. In fact, it was barely attended at all.

It's a shocking indictment of our lawmakers, virtually none of whom have ever visited our offshore detention centres, that they appear to have such disinterest in seeing for themselves the impact that the laws they have enacted are having on the people affected by them. Politicians pursuing good, principled policy development in Australia's national interest would, we'd have thought, prefer to act on evidence rather than on the political expediency of "stop the boats" sloganeering. By showing the film in their own workplace, we could hardly have made it easier for them to do so. Advertisement

In other policy areas it has been a productive period in Parliament. Last week a new industrial relations law was passed that included the strongest protection for whistle blowers ever legislated in this country. Individuals who do in union officials – even for minor infractions, even if they do it anonymously, and even if it is done in bad faith – are protected from having their identity disclosed, and reprisals against them including inadvertent ones are illegal. But under our border protection laws, if you are a school teacher or a welfare worker in Manus or Nauru, acting in the utmost good faith, you face imprisonment for two years for blowing the whistle on a security guard who has raped a young child.

All of this suggests that our politicians have an inexplicable but very serious blind spot when it comes to people seeking asylum.

And they want to blind us, too. The film includes gut-wrenching testimony from social workers, health workers, a security official and department of immigration official, all of whom worked on Manus and Nauru. Yet people like this now operate under the cloud of legislation that can impose jail time for telling the truth. As citizens whose tax dollars are spent in vast sums to enforce this policy, and who have a right to make an informed choice in the ballot box, we are entitled to hear what they have to say.

Hopefully, the three-year nightmare for those in these camps will soon end, with a deal having been announced that will enable many of them to live in safety in the United States. But what does that deal say about the effectiveness of offshore detention? Simultaneously with the announcement of the deal the government told us that a flotilla of naval vessels would be deployed to protect our northern borders from an expected surge in boat arrivals. There could not be a more eloquent or forceful admission of the tragic failure and futility of offshore detention as a means of deterring people from seeking protection from persecution.

---->>> *Eva Orner is an Australian filmmaker. Steven Glass is a partner at law firm Gilbert + Tobin.*

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/proof-that-our-politicians-turn-a-blind-eye-to-the-plight-of-refugees-20161201-gt1iw1.html>

6. Barri Phatarfod: Remembering Hamid Khazaei, the young detainee failed by Australia's 'outstanding care'

Sydney Morning Herald
December 6 2016 - 4:21PM
Barri Phatarfod

The last place most doctors want to be is in a coroners court. For these two weeks, however, I am attending the coronial Inquest into the death of Hamid Khazaei – not as someone whose own actions will be scrutinised, but as a representative of Doctors for Refugees, an organisation of volunteer doctors in Australia that advocates for fair and appropriate healthcare for people in Australia's immigration detention system.

Hamid Khazaei, an Iranian national, died after a cut foot he sustained while in detention on Manus Island became infected in late August 2014. Despite numerous requests from the doctors for his evacuation, he was not transferred to Brisbane until he had had several heart attacks and was in the early stages of brain death. Hamid's life support was turned off on September 5 this year and he was pronounced deceased. He was 24 years old.

That a previously healthy 24-year-old could die while under what then minister Scott Morrison subsequently described as "outstanding care" seems unthinkable. We all know someone like this young man – healthy, fit, perhaps enjoying university life or getting married at the same time Hamid was writhing in agony, strapped to a stretcher on a Papua New Guinean airport tarmac and slowly dying under the midday sun while government agencies argued about who was responsible for his treatment. I wonder if his death would have been easier to endure if Hamid had been elderly or suffering from some chronic medical condition. Quite possibly, as we simply don't want to acknowledge the hideous truth: that this young man died because our government – or those to whom it outsources healthcare – has a cavalier disregard for the welfare of those it imprisons.

Hamid died, and unlike other refugees who have died in Australian offshore detention centres while seeking protection, Hamid died in Australia, so the wheels of Australian justice are forced to turn.

The Coroners Court is a somewhat surreal experience, especially when it involves such a politically fraught issue as offshore detention. Lawyers occupy the front two benches, representing: the Khazaei family; the Commonwealth; the International Health and Medical Services (IHMS), who are contracted by the Commonwealth to provide healthcare for people in their detention centres; International SOS (ISOS), the parent company for IHMS; and us, Doctors for Refugees – an organisation granted leave to appear by the coroner and able to cross-examine witnesses.

Unlike most of the others, we have no actions to defend or from which to deflect blame and are simply here to help uncover what happened. We watch as the various agencies point the finger of blame at each other. Lawyers representing seemingly tight-knit agencies such as the Commonwealth and IHMS regularly jump up to object to one another's testimony. Individual doctors with IHMS and ISOS who happened to be on duty that day and simply followed protocols suddenly find themselves unrepresented by the legal team covering IHMS and ISOS. The fact that working in offshore detention is a thankless task must really hit home now.

As doctors, paramedics and others are called from around Australia or appear via video link from the US, Africa, PNG and Europe to be cross-examined by the legal teams, as trolleys of thick ring-bound files are wheeled in and out of the courtroom, and as journalists click on their keyboards, it's hard for anyone to escape the realisation that the time, expense and resources devoted to this trial is in grotesque contrast with that provided to Hamid when he so desperately needed it. It is also hard to separate the questions of his medical management from the Commonwealth's controversial policy of detaining individuals in such remote locations.

By the end of the first week of this four-week hearing, the court has heard multiple interpretations from health staff of the observation charts that recorded Hamid's deteriorating vital readings during the critical period of August 23-26 before he was eventually transferred to Pacific International Hospital (PIH) on the afternoon of August 26. Despite its rather grandiose name, PIH is a hospital on the mainland of PNG described as woefully ill-equipped to deal with such an emergency. Why Hamid was transferred there when doctors had recommended urgent transfer to Brisbane, a "centre of excellence" where staff would be transferred for much less urgent conditions; why the devastatingly critical delay, and why the PNG antibiotics guidelines that advised the correct antibiotics as the first line treatment were not followed – all will hopefully be answered over coming weeks.

Most harrowing has been the voice recordings of the doctors advising the urgent evacuation of this dying young man – especially now that we know the outcome we all wish we could change.

That Hamid had been routinely described as "pleasant, co-operative ... a model transferee" somehow adds to the tragedy, as it seems that nothing these individuals can ever do could affect their fate. They are tragic pawns in this monstrous political game. And this is why doctors need to remain here in court and elsewhere – to constantly challenge this dangerous and unethical practice of offshore detention.

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/remembering-hamid-khazaei-the-young-detainee-failed-by-australias-outstanding-care-20161205-gt4qwr.html>

7. Hamid Kehazaei inquest exposes failures of Australia's secretive immigration regime

The Iranian asylum seeker was the victim of a system of control from Canberra that resisted efforts to move critically ill patients to higher levels of care

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Saturday 10 December 2016 09.59 AEDT

In the quiet, neat calm of a Brisbane courtroom, a world from the muggy heat and steel fences of the Manus Island detention centre, the final, agonised days of Hamid Kehazaei's life have been forensically assayed and analysed.

The bare details of the 24-year-old asylum seeker's death in 2014 are well known – the worsening infection, the stubborn fever that could not be shifted by any treatment, the requests to move him to hospital delayed and resisted, the heart attacks, the brain death, and finally, the end.

But laid before Queensland state coroner Terry Ryan over two weeks there has been new evidence with brutal details, including:

- Doctors' instructions to provide Kehazaei with intravenous paracetamol were ignored two nights in a row by night staff, leaving him in increasing pain, vomiting and growing increasingly confused as infection took over his body and left him without enough oxygen going to his brain.
- As he grew increasingly sick and sepsis took hold, Kehazaei was heard, even from outside the medical centre, screaming unrelentingly, how he was unable to recognise friends and staff whom he knew well.
- Severely hypoxic, scared and unable to understand what was happening to him, Kehazaei pulled the intravenous lines from his arm, became combative with staff and refused to wear a mask.
- Kehazaei was left lying unsheltered from the tropical sun at the airfield – febrile and septic, but unsedated – while he waited for the air ambulance to land and finally fly him off the island to a hospital.

"He was the most awful colour I've ever seen in a human being," Dr Marten Muis said of Kehazaei's final conscious moments on the island. "He was a sort of grey-purple colour."

"His breathing was over 30, he seemed confused. If you went anywhere near him to put a mask on him, he would put his arms up or strike out."

Over a fortnight of hearings at the coronial inquest into Kehazaei's death, Manus Island medical staff appeared in steady succession before the coroner to explain in detail how the 24-year-old's health deteriorated precipitously while he was being treated in detention, as their pleas to have him moved to a hospital were either ignored or refused by Australian immigration department officials.

One doctor revealed how he was reduced to rummaging through a cupboard, "the very small pharmacy that we had", to see if there were any more antibiotics they might give Kehazaei, because nothing over 36 hours had helped him, and he was growing sicker by the hour.

Another was reportedly furious at being told by bureaucrats in Australia that Kehazaei couldn't be moved – "You're on your own and you're going to have to keep this man overnight" – and that her instructions to give him pain relief medicine overnight were ignored two nights in a row.

But beyond Kehazaei's specific, tragic circumstance, and perhaps ultimately of greater import, are the statements made before the coroner about the broader systemic failures of a regime that is maintained as a closely guarded secret.

A succession of health professionals gave evidence that the clinical opinions of health professionals are routinely overruled in offshore detention by non-medically trained department bureaucrats.

Doctors on Manus Island also told the coroner they were constantly frustrated at their working conditions within the rudimentary clinic, by poorly trained staff who ignored clinical directions, by a lack of medication and diagnostic equipment, by unhygienic conditions, and most crucially, by a system of control from Canberra that resisted all efforts to move critically ill patients to higher levels of care in hospital.

"There was a pressure regarding finances and budgets of doing air ambulance evacuations ... and for people to travel to Australia we knew that there was a political pressure in the department," one doctor said.

A cohort of immigration and border protection staff called to appear before the coroner attempted to resolutely – truculently at times – defend the policies.

Each ran, without much variation or sophistication, a defence that they were following orders.

“My role was not to question or to seek further information,” Caroline Gow, the department’s former assistant director of detention health services, said when asked why she hadn’t sought more information on Kehazaei’s worsening health.

“I can’t undermine my bosses and go above them. It’s their responsibility to give the approval.”

Their answers revealed the dangers of a hollowed out department, where frank and fearless advice, and any commitment to the genuine service of the public interest are at risk from a slavish prosecution of a policy that is known to be dangerous.

None of the senior immigration officials appearing before the coroner, rising to the level of first assistant secretary, seemed to acknowledge there was any moral dimension to their responsibilities or to those of their organisation. None conceded to understanding there was a higher responsibility to keep Kehazaei alive.

Before the coroner, examples abounded of lapse, followed by justification.

An “urgent medical transfer request” at 1.15pm that warned Kehazaei was at risk of “sepsis, life-threatening widespread systemic infection”, nonetheless “did not paint a picture of urgency” to the director of detention health services, Amanda Little, who declined to send the case to her superiors for approval.

When she did ultimately “escalate” the case to assistant secretary Paul Windsor – at 7:24pm - he had gone home for the day and did not read his emails for another 13 hours.

“The time it took me to put something forward was not something that would significantly delay the process,” he told the coroner in defence of the delay.

“You could argue that the process could be streamlined so it didn’t have to pass through the hands of four officers. I would argue that the process worked well on many occasions.”

The evidence before this coronial inquest has also shown, beyond any reasonable argument, who runs offshore detention.

Australia controls offshore detention, and micromanages the decisions that take place within the camps on Nauru and Manus Island. No asylum seeker or refugee can be moved from an offshore camp without the express permission of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Canberra. The department retains absolute and forensic control of everything that happens in those places.

Approval for an asylum seeker in detention to go to hospital needed to pass across the desk of five department bureaucrats “to ensure that the officer commanding Operation Sovereign Borders, and subsequently the minister was aware of transferee movements”, Little told the coroner.

Papua New Guinea and Nauru are, in this respect if not entirely, client states of Australia. The argument that they are independent sovereign nations running offshore detention of their own accord is a fiction long been rejected by almost-universal legal opinion. This coronial inquiry has only reinforced Australia’s realist domination of its two neighbours.

Ryan will sit again in February for two weeks to further examine Kehazaei’s treatment, decline and death.

But the evidence already before him shows a systemically impaired system that was known to provide insufficient and ineffective healthcare to those it was supposed to look after for.

Healthcare in offshore detention is “broadly comparable” with that available in the Australian community, Mark Parrish, the regional director of International Health and Medical Services, told the coroner. That phrasing – “broadly comparable” – has been widely adopted, by ministers and prime ministers, and by the department, and was repeated by officials brought before the coroner as evidence in and of itself that all is fine offshore.

But saying something over and over again does not make it true: this coronial inquest, long before it has finished, has exposed the flaws in that statement.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/10/hamid-kehazaei-inquest-exposes-failures-of-australias-secretive-immigration-regime>

8. 'Absolutely inappropriate': Malcolm Turnbull blasts teachers' refugee protest

Prime minister links campaigning to poor results in international rankings, saying 'teachers should be focused on teaching'

The Guardian

Paul Karp

Thursday 8 December 2016 13.21 AEDT

Malcolm Turnbull has condemned teachers planning to wear T-shirts with messages protesting offshore detention of refugees, labelling the plan "absolutely inappropriate".

From next week a group called Teachers for Refugees plans to wear shirts with messages including "close the camps, bring them here", calling for an end to offshore detention on Manus Island and Nauru.

A spokeswoman for Teachers for Refugees, Lucy Honan, told Guardian Australia 500 teachers in Victoria and more in New South Wales would take part.

Asked about the protest on Melbourne's 3AW Radio on Thursday, the prime minister said the protest was "absolutely inappropriate in classrooms" because "teachers should be focused on teaching".

Turnbull linked the activism to recent poor results in science and maths and the three-yearly international Pisa standard, noting "our ranking has gone backwards" in the tests.

"There is a lot of work to be done in our schools, and it doesn't involve political campaigning."

Honan said it was not surprising that Turnbull and the federal government wanted to silence the protest, noting the Border Force Act prohibited teachers who worked in offshore detention from speaking out about conditions there.

Honan said the protest would still go ahead because teachers were "very good at standing up to bullying" and had strong support from the Australian Education Union and refugee advocacy groups.

The federal education minister, Simon Birmingham, has reportedly written to his Victorian and NSW counterparts, urging them to ensure teachers were aware of their requirements under policies.

"Parents rightly expect teachers to have the education of their students as their priority and not a focus on -advocating a political position," he wrote.

A spokeswoman for the Victorian education department said that teachers in government schools "are free to support causes in their own time but they should not use their professional position to make political statements".

"Principals can advise teachers about how they can take part in this type of activity and still comply with their obligations as teachers."

Honan said the community expected teachers to stand up against the abuse of children and the treatment of children in Nauru constituted "mass scale abuse".

She said teachers had a right to political opinions and protest. The group was not concerned about possible disciplinary consequences because they were confident in their numbers and the tide of public opinion, Honan said.

Over the past three years the remote immigration detention facilities have been plagued by reports of shocking conditions, poor management and deteriorating mental health of asylum seekers.

The Guardian's publication of the Nauru files showed the trauma and abuse inflicted on asylum seekers and refugees – particularly children – on Nauru.

An asylum seeker was beaten to death by guards in a wave of unrest on Manus Island in February 2014, and on Nauru in May 2016 an asylum seeker self-immolated in front of staff from the UN high commissioner for refugees.

Turnbull also expressed confidence that Australia's refugee resettlement deal with the United States would go ahead, despite reports that congressional Republicans wanted greater scrutiny of the deal, which could lead to the president elect, Donald Trump, tearing it up once in office.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/08/absolutely-inappropriate-malcolm-turnbull-blasts-teachers-refugee-protest>

9. Australian Border Force Act used to deny academic request for published visa data

Immigration department concedes it made a mistake in denying ANU expert's request for information on working holiday visa holders

The Guardian

Christopher Knaus

Tuesday 29 November 2016 11.38 AEDT

The immigration department has conceded it should not have used the Australian Border Force Act to deny an academic's request for previously published data on the location of visa holders.

Australian National University migration and labour mobility expert Henry Sherrell was last month refused access to aggregated data on the location of second-year working holiday visa holders.

The information, which had removed the identifies of the visa holders, had already been published in a submission to a Senate inquiry, but only in map form, and Sherrell sought the raw data to use in his research.

But the department refused his request, saying it "did not comply with the ABF Act".

Sherrell, a former immigration bureaucrat, feared the refusal was "a small, but worrying" example of how the law's secrecy provisions might stymie legitimate research.

A provision in the act allows the disclosure of information that has already been lawfully published.

"I want to make sure people are aware that this is happening, and even people in the department are aware that this is happening," Sherrell said.

"I want people to know that the Australian Border Force Act is having these implications, because I don't imagine anyone who drafted that legislation intended for it to have this kind of effect," he said.

After Guardian Australia put questions to the department, it again contacted Sherrell, telling him it was granting him full access to the data.

On Tuesday morning a spokeswoman conceded the department had made a "mistake" in refusing the request.

The data was initially handed to the agriculture department, which subsequently used it in a submission to the Senate inquiry into working holiday reforms.

The immigration spokeswoman said the original data given to the agriculture department had contained extra detail, which could not be passed on to Sherrell due to privacy provisions in the act.

"The original data provided by the department to the Department of Agriculture contained postcodes, number of grants, industry and citizenship," the spokeswoman said.

"The researcher was willing to forgo the industry and citizenship information, however this reduction in the data requested was missed by departmental officers leading to the data request refusal."

Sherrell's initial efforts to extract a more detailed explanation for the refusal were unsuccessful.

But he believes the secrecy provisions of the act, which carry a two-year jail sentence for workers who disclose "protected information", were behind the department's early reluctance to give him the information.

No one has yet been charged under those provisions.

But opponents say they have a chilling effect on officials or anyone else who believes they have protected information.

Health workers feared the laws would prevent them speaking out about conditions in immigration detention, although an amendment in September specifically excluded them from prosecution.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/29/australian-border-force-act-used-to-deny-academic-request-for-published-visa-data>

10. Coalition's secret visa plan 'risks increasing violent extremism'

Leaked government document reveals Department of Social Services concerns new visas that remove social safety net may undermine refugee resettlement

The Guardian

Paul Karp

Wednesday 30 November 2016 15.57 AEDT

A secret Coalition plan to create a class of provisional visas with less access to social services may undermine resettlement of refugees, reduce social cohesion and increase the risk of violent extremism, according to a leaked government document.

Speaking at question time, Malcolm Turnbull acknowledged the authenticity of the “protected” document, first revealed by Fairfax Media on Wednesday, and said the leak had been referred to the Australian federal police.

The minute dated 23 November, prepared for the Department of Social Services (DSS) secretary, Finn Pratt, records a meeting with immigration officials at which DSS raised numerous concerns with the plan.

Consideration of the proposal began on 1 March when the national security committee of cabinet agreed to a “new simplified visa framework”.

The minute said the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, was seeking cabinet agreement for a new system with eight types of visas.

It discusses a visa change proposal including a “provisional visa system”, and warns that removing or altering the social safety net for those under this system may impact social cohesion and productivity.

“DSS is concerned that the proposed reforms risk undermining Australia’s social cohesion and potentially increase the risk factors that may lead to violent extremism,” it said.

DSS is working with the immigration department “on costing six options for access to social security payments and identifying associated savings and social impacts”.

In the document, DSS recommended that “humanitarian entrants be excluded from any social security changes”, indicating that the proposal under consideration is to alter or remove social security payments or services from visa holders including refugees.

It said delayed access to welfare would be harmful to the most vulnerable migrants, such as refugees and those who experienced domestic violence.

Social security support was “key to [the] successful long-term settlement” of people on humanitarian visas, it said.

The note said the immigration department had begun engaging with other departments on the plan “which will reframe temporary, provisional and permanent migration and citizenship”.

But it noted DSS’s concern that “changing the longstanding national narrative to one which treats all migrants with suspicion does not best leverage migrants’ willingness and potential to contribute”.

DSS argued that people who opted for a “provisional pathway to permanence” are not the same as temporary residents and should receive “better treatment in terms of payments and supports than those not making any ongoing commitment to Australia”.

The minute noted DSS’s concern the proposed timeline for the reform is “too short”. It said that savings may be “not as significant” as the immigration department expected, but the costs would be “huge”.

Asked about the document in question time, Turnbull said it was “not a cabinet document” but it was a document “exchanged between bureaucrats” that dealt with matters “to be submitted to cabinet”.

“The secretary, Mr Pratt, is conducting an investigation,” he said.

Turnbull said the leak should be referred to the AFP then, after question time was delayed by 15 minutes by a noisy and well-coordinated protest by refugee activists, he added he was advised it had now been referred.

The Greens immigration spokesman, Nick McKim, said the proposed visa changes discussed in the document are “deeply xenophobic” and a continuation of Dutton’s “attack on multiculturalism in Australia”.

“This is nothing less than a blueprint to return our country to the divisive days of the White Australia Policy,” he said.

Revelation of the proposed plan comes two weeks after Dutton said it was a “mistake” for Malcolm Fraser to let in certain groups of refugees in the 1970s, later specifying Lebanese Muslims in particular.

During the election, Dutton controversially suggested that migrants were illiterate and would take Australian jobs.

Senior government figures including Turnbull and deputy Liberal leader, Julie Bishop, defended the remarks, arguing the immigration minister was simply acknowledging the high cost of resettlement services including English classes.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/30/coalitions-secret-visa-plan-risks-increasing-violent-extremism>

11. Nauru blocking release of information about asylum seekers, court documents show

Documents filed by the immigration department urge blocking of freedom of information request

The Guardian
Calla Wahlquist
Wednesday 30 November 2016 13.21 AEDT

Nauru is blocking the release of information requested under Australian freedom of information laws relating to refugees and asylum seekers held on the island, according to court documents.

Documents filed by the immigration department to the Administrative Appeal Tribunal cite Nauru’s objection as a key reason to block a freedom of information request.

The department had put in an application for extra time to appeal a decision of the information commissioner to release the documents.

The tribunal approved the extension last week, allowing the department to appeal despite missing the deadline by five months. The lengthy delay was blamed on a lapse by an “unidentified officer”.

It comes four weeks after Guardian Australia obtained an email from the department that suggested Fol requests relating to Nauru had been “frozen”.

The information sought under the Fol, filed in July 2015 by the Melbourne-based lawyer Alex Cuthbertson, was the number of people of a certain religion, ethnicity and language group on Nauru.

The request was for raw numbers only. The department opposed it under the personal privacy provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, arguing that the population of asylum seekers on Nauru was so small that the information could be used to identify individuals.

In his decision overturning that objection and approving the release of information in March, the information commissioner, Timothy Pilgrim, said that the likelihood of being able to identify anyone based on the information sought was “so impractical that there is almost no likelihood of it occurring”.

The deadline for appealing that decision passed in April but the department did not file an appeal with the tribunal until September, after receiving the letter from Nauru and after Cuthbertson sent a follow-up letter in August demanding the release of the documents.

In an affidavit on the court file, the assistant director of the department’s Fol division, Kelly Tulloch, said that the file had been inadvertently closed by a junior officer.

Tulloch said when she received Cuthbertson’s email in August she realised the request concerned Nauru and had a conversation with colleagues about the “high degree of sensitivity with the disclosure of any information from, or concerning, the processing of protection claims by the government of Nauru”.

The department then filed an appeal under both the personal privacy provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, claiming Pilgrim had erred in his decision, and under international relations provisions.

Cuthbertson told a tribunal hearing earlier this month that she required the information as background for the high court case of an asylum seeker who had been held in Nauru and was now held in Australia. She said she was concerned, based on Guardian Australia’s reports, that the information was being blocked just because it concerned Nauru.

Cuthbertson’s client is fighting to stay in Australia. She has been guaranteed 72 hours’ notice of any plans to return her to Nauru and Cuthbertson said her case had been prejudiced by the failure to release the information.

In her reasons for approving the application for appeal the tribunal's deputy president, Stephanie Forgie, said the department's explanation for the delay was "understandable" and that she did not believe there had been any "improper motive".

Forgie said she did not believe the department email published in Guardian Australia indicated the department was seeking to delay access to information, because the email was written by an Fol officer "and not by an officer with line responsibility in a policy or operational area in the department".

She continued: "The email does not lead me to the conclusion that the department's Fol section was the instigator of that delay. It does not lead me to take the view that the premature closure of the file was anything other than an unfortunate error."

Forgie also did not believe Cuthbertson had been prejudiced by the delay, saying that: "In so far as the resources of the tribunal enable expedition, the matter can be expedited."

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/30/nauru-blocking-release-of-information-about-asylum-seekers-court-documents-show>

12. Nauru police say male refugee charged with assaulting girl under 16

Deputy police commissioner says girl reported attack to domestic violence and sexual assault unit

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Wednesday 30 November 2016 17.30 AEDT

A male refugee has been charged with the sexual assault of a young Nauruan girl, Nauruan police have said.

The deputy Nauru police commissioner, Kalinda Blake, told Sky News that police had been investigating since the alleged victim, a girl aged under 16 who is not in detention, reported the alleged attack about two weeks ago.

She had come forward to the police department's domestic violence and sexual assault unit, Blake said.

"We are still gathering more witness statements and making the case more concrete before we take it to the [Department of Public Prosecutions] office."

She said the man was about 30 years old.

It is not the first allegation of violence by a refugee or asylum seeker.

In December last year a six-year-old girl was allegedly sexually assaulted by a male refugee known to the family, also refugees. The parents, who said they caught the man in the act, accused the police of not acting swiftly or adequately to arrest the suspect, who remained in the community for at least several weeks after the alleged attack.

The Nauruan police force have been criticised in the past for failing to bring about prosecutions or convictions in cases of assault against refugees and asylum seekers.

Another case, which is about to go before the court, involving the sexual assault of a six-year-old refugee girl, is thought to be the first to reach that stage.

Blake said claims of assault made by refugees and asylum seekers were usually "fabrications". She also said they withdrew complaints before charges could be laid against perpetrators.

The Nauruan government was contacted for comment but did not respond.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/30/nauru-police-say-male-refugee-charged-with-assaulting-girl-under-16>

13. Turnbull insists US Nauru and Manus deal will survive Trump's inauguration

Turnbull insists US deal to resettle refugees from Nauru and Manus will survive Trump's inauguration

The Age
December 4 2016 - 10:49PM
David Wroe

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull maintains he is confident a Trump administration will not torpedo a deal for the US to take refugees from Nauru and Manus Island as American officials prepared to start vetting people in the offshore detention centres.

Mr Turnbull said in Sydney on Sunday he did not believe that Donald Trump, who campaigned on dramatic immigration restrictions, would torpedo the arrangement after he is inaugurated on January 20.

"It's a very good arrangement and we are confident that it will continue through the change in administration," he said.

US officials from the Department of Homeland Security were expected to begin work on Nauru this week to screen people who have been accepted as refugees for possible resettlement in the US under the deal struck between Mr Turnbull and US President Barack Obama.

But with no chance of the process being completed by January 20, Australia faces the possibility that Mr Trump could reverse the Obama administration decision to accept refugees from Australia's offshore detention system as part of a swap.

During the US campaign, Mr Trump vowed to ban all Muslim immigration to the country, though he later adjusted this to a pledge of "extreme vetting" of would-be immigrants.

The Turnbull government has been at pains not to be seen to pressure the US over the deal. It has refused to reveal how many of the roughly 1800 asylum seekers the US is likely to accept.

Cabinet secretary Arthur Sinodinos told Sky News on Sunday that Washington ambassador Joe Hockey and Foreign Minister Julie Bishop had both been speaking with "senior people in the transition team" of Mr Trump and that Australia would provide any further information the President-elect's incoming administration needed.

He said he thought it would "still go ahead because I don't believe it poses any particular danger to the US".

White House deputy press secretary Eric Schultz said late last week: "We have one President at a time ... The President-elect, Donald Trump, will set the policies once he takes the oath of office."

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton flatly denied last week suggestions the number of refugees the US was planning to accept could be as low as 300.

He said the priority would be women, children and families, followed by single men. Manus Island houses only single men.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/turnbull-insists-us-deal-to-resettle-refugees-from-nauru-and-manus-will-survive-trumps-inauguration-20161204-gt3oe3.html>

14. Trump administration could scuttle refugee resettlement deal, White House concedes

ABC News Online

By political reporters Uma Patel and Matthew Doran

Saturday December 3, 2016

The White House has cast doubt over the future of Australia's refugee resettlement agreement with the United States, conceding the incoming Trump administration could scuttle the deal.

Last month, the Federal Government announced the one-off arrangement to resettle some of the 1,600 people currently housed in offshore detention on Manus Island and Nauru.

White House deputy spokesman Eric Schultz was asked by reporters about concerns in the US Congress relating to the screening processes for those being resettled, and whether the deal meets President-elect Donald Trump's stance on immigration.

"One of the principles that we believe in and adhere to, as does the president-elect, is that we have one president at a time," he said.

"So we have one president at a time, the commander-in-chief, this president sets the policies.

"The President-elect Donald Trump will set the policies once he takes the oath of office."

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has previously sought to downplay concerns about Mr Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has also refused to be drawn on the future of the deal.

"We've entered into this arrangement with the Obama administration," he told the ABC last month.

"We'll continue to work with the Obama administration and we'll work with the Trump administration."

The ABC understands the resettlement offer will be made to the vast majority of people still in offshore detention centres and those currently in Australia for medical reasons.

The offer will not be made to those who have accepted resettlement elsewhere, nor those who arrived in the offshore centres after November 13.

US officials have already begun assessing the asylum seekers, and are expected to arrive on Nauru next week.

Mr Turnbull has continued to stress it would be up to the Homeland Security staff assessing refugees to decide on a final number to be resettled.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-03/trump-could-scuttle-us-refugee-resettlement-deal:-wh/8089766>

15. Peter Dutton reveals the US has a limit to the number of refugees it will take

The Age
November 29 2016 - 7:19PM
Michael Koziol

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has acknowledged there is a limit to the number of refugees who will go to the US as part of a resettlement deal with Australia, but said it is "not in our best interests" to reveal the figure.

He emphatically denied a Sky News report that claimed Washington may take just 300 or 400 of the 1600 refugees eligible to apply for resettlement in the US. "That is completely false," Mr Dutton said.

The Turnbull government has repeatedly refused to reveal how many refugees from Manus Island and Nauru the Obama Administration has agreed to take, or whether there is a cap.

But Mr Dutton on Tuesday admitted there was such a limit, when asked directly if he had discussed it with the US. "Yes and I'm not going to detail that, and there are very good reasons for that," he told Sky News.

"It's not in our best interests to have that number out there. [But] the reports about the 300 number are completely false. I don't want people to conjure up in their mind that this is limited by that number - it's not."

Department of Immigration statistics show there were 872 men on Manus Island and 390 people on Nauru at the end of October. A further 750 people live outside the regional processing centre in the Nauruan community.

There were also 377 people, including about 90 families, on the Australian mainland who were brought here for medical treatment. They are eligible to apply for the US offer but may have to return to Nauru or Manus first.

A spokeswoman for the minister confirmed that of those 2400 people, about 1600 have been found to be refugees, with the others either found not to be owed protection or still being processed.

Sky News reported that 16 officers from the US Department of Homeland Security will arrive in Nauru on Sunday to commence work on the arrangement but it will not be finalised before Donald Trump is inaugurated on January 20.

The pay-TV network, which was given rare access to Nauru, asylum seekers and officials, interviewed many refugees and found most were keen to settle in the US but were sceptical about it happening. Some were hostile to the idea.

Aziz Khan, a Rohingya Muslim from Myanmar who has been on Nauru for two years, said he did not want to go to the US under Mr Trump. "No, I don't prefer. Because I am a Muslim. The President-elect Donald Trump doesn't like Muslims in his country as a migrant," he said.

Nauruan deputy police commissioner Kalinda Blake said police were concerned about the fate of those who are inevitably left behind, including the possibility they would commit acts of violence or self-harm.

"The Nauru Police force is actually putting plans in place just to cater for should that happen," she said on Sky News. "I would not wish there would be any [cases of self-harm] but will be ready for it if there should be."

In another of the Sky News program's revelations, acting Nauruan president David Adyang admitted the country had banned Australian media outlets from visiting the island, but waived it in certain circumstances.

"Selectively we bring in Australian media to try and provide balanced reporting on what we are doing," he said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/peter-dutton-reveals-the-us-has-a-limit-to-the-number-of-refugees-it-will-take-20161129-gt05dx.html>

16. Nauru refugees sceptical of resettlement deal with US, Sky reporter says after visit

Laura Jayes says some refugees doubt whether the deal is real and she was surprised to find a Muslim man who didn't want to go to 'Trump's America'

The Guardian

Helen Davidson

Tuesday 29 November 2016 16.50 AEDT

There is widespread scepticism among refugees on Nauru about Australia's refugee resettlement deal with the US, and allegations of violence on the island continue, Sky News reporter Laura Jayes has said after visiting the island.

"There's a lot of scepticism about whether the deal is real, for reasons that are quite complex – some are so weary about there being a solution to their situation that they're managing expectations," she said.

Jayes and Sky News cameraman Josh Brown last week spent three days on Nauru, reporting on conditions for refugees and their reaction to the recently announced deal with the US government.

Jayes said she was surprised to find at least one young man – a Rohingya Muslim – who said he didn't want to go to "Trump's America".

"Others I can tell are talking to advocates who are warning them not to sign anything, to be very wary of the deal ... Others simply know the deal is not for them, that the US is only going to look at families."

Lawyers have warned refugees and asylum seekers engaged with legal action related to their detention about signing any agreement, because it may affect their cases.

Sky is only the third Australian media outlet (after the Australian and A Current Affair) to be given access to Nauru and the Australian immigration processing centre since the country clamped down on access.

Sky management said on Monday it would provide no information until the broadcast on Tuesday night regarding if or how they paid the \$8,000 application fee for the Nauruan media visa.

Jayes said she was given unrestricted access to the island, and spoke to asylum seekers, refugees, centre and service provider staff, Nauruan locals and government officials, as well as Australian Border Force officials.

"Obviously for security reasons [inside the centre] there was always someone close by but not within earshot of interviews or shepherding us to interviews," she said.

Jayes heard a number of allegations from people of fighting and theft, and said the responses from police would be revealed in Tuesday evening's report.

Stressing it was her anecdotal finding, Jayes said a lot of violence she came across was "refugee on refugee", and her report would examine a recent case of a refugee adult allegedly sexually assaulting a Nauruan minor.

In August Guardian Australia published the Nauru files, which revealed more than 2,000 internal documents including numerous allegations and incidents of assault, abuse and trauma, particularly among children.

Within the leaked cache were 19 cases of violence and sexual assault – including eight involving children – which were referred to police but no prosecutions made.

The 2014 Moss review also substantiated numerous incidents of assault.

Jayes said her assessment after visiting Nauru was that there was "some very serious allegations but there are some very minor ones".

"I think with the volume of allegations and incidents, often the headline betrays what the story actually is, but that's not to say there aren't some very serious allegations in there.

"I can only go from what people tell me, and there is claim and counterclaim about what is alleged and what is actually true, and what actually can be investigated."

She said there was "no doubt" that some were living with severe psychological trauma, including among children.

"I met a 13-year-old boy whose father said he hasn't spoken in six months, he doesn't really get out of bed ... That is tragic, utterly tragic. I saw the medication he's on – he is on antidepressants and 13. I can't imagine what kind of headspace he's in. That's the evidence I saw with children. But as anywhere children are so resilient."

Jayes said she wasn't a psychologist, but it "wasn't a great place".

"It's not a bright happy place, and if they're not working or going to school they're kind of whiling away their days inside these little air-conditioned homes."

In the three-and-a-half day trip, Jayes visited the detention centre's accommodation and community housing, which she said was air-conditioned but basic, people had freedom of movement and in some ways was seen as better than Nauruan housing because it was comparatively new. A few dozen men were still residing in tents.

She also visited a newly built Nauruan school. Jayes said there were two young girls who were "happy and smiling" but who hid their faces and were timid when the cameras came in, something Jayes attributed to "a belief that if they are seen to be unhappy or not getting ahead it might help their cause to get off the island".

She said the children she saw weren't interacting with Nauruan students but she didn't witness any bullying. A young girl accused Jayes of only filming the "good school" and only wanting to show the good parts.

"I said, 'But darling, you weren't in the old school. You were in the new school. Do you go to the old classrooms?' She said 'no, but some people do'."

Former teachers who worked at the Australian-run school inside the centre have previously told Guardian Australia the decision to shut it down and send students to local schools was one of the lowest points for children on the island. Several have since spoken out about the effect of indefinite detention on the children they taught daily.

Nauruan locals were welcoming but particularly upset at negative portrayals of their country, Jayes said.

Jayes interviewed the Nauruan justice minister, David Adeang, who she said also "expressed frustration" about sections of the media. The Nauru government has previously accused refugees, advocates and media outlets, including Guardian Australia, of fabricating stories. It has also misrepresented stories written by Guardian Australia in its criticisms.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/29/nauru-refugees-sceptical-of-resettlement-deal-with-us-sky-reporter-says-after-visit>

17. Reveal refugee deal text: US congressmen

December 8 2016 - 7:52AM
The Age / AAP

Los Angeles: Anger is growing in the United States congress over Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull's "secret" deal with the Obama administration to resettle refugees held on Nauru and Manus Island in the US.

The plan's two most vocal US critics, Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Charles Grassley and House of Representatives Judiciary Committee chairman Bob Goodlatte, were given a closed door briefing by the State Department and Homeland Security in an attempt to appease their fears.

The congressmen are now demanding the deal, involving potentially more than 2400 refugees from potential terror hotspot countries including Syria, Somalia, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Sudan, be made public.

"We appreciate your making staff available to provide us with the document in a classified setting and to brief us regarding the circumstances surrounding the agreement," the congressmen wrote in a letter to US Secretary of State John Kerry and head of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson.

"It is now absolutely apparent to us that there was no reason for the agreement to be classified from the outset, and that it should not continue to be classified.

"To that end, we request that you declassify the document outlining the agreement so that the American people can read it."

"The American people have a right to be fully aware of the actions of their government regarding foreign nationals who may be admitted to the US."

The congressmen set a December 13 deadline for a decision on the de-classification.

The resettlement deal also faces being scuttled by incoming president Donald Trump, who last week vowed to stop the flow of Middle East refugees to the US "dead cold flat" when he moves into the White House next month.

Another US congressman, Texas representative Brian Babin, also blasted what he described as the "secret deal" hatched by Mr Turnbull and outgoing president Barack Obama.

Mr Babin has demanded congress reject a \$US3.9 billion (\$A5.2 billion) refugee funding request from Mr Obama.

"Remarkably, Obama's increased funding request comes at a time when the administration has cut a secret deal - hidden from congress and the public - to import nearly 2500 refugees that even Australia has deemed too dangerous," Mr Babin wrote in an opinion piece distributed to media outlets.

"The fact that the details of who these refugees are has been kept from congress should be reason alone to reject this funding increase - not create a slush fund to provide these dangerous refugees welfare and handouts."

<http://www.theage.com.au/world/reveal-refugee-deal-text-us-congressmen-20161207-gt6e8j.html>

18. Plan B? Coalition MP suggests US refugee deal in doubt as US Republicans demand answers

The Age
December 7 2016
Tom McIlroy

Senior US Republicans have set the Obama administration a deadline of December 13 to make public information about its refugee resettlement deal with the Turnbull government, in the latest threat to the plan before Donald Trump's inauguration as president.

New concerns from members of Congress came as Liberal backbench MP Craig Kelly cast doubt on the plan's viability on Wednesday, conceding it wasn't "a done deal" and suggesting Immigration Minister Peter Dutton should be developing a contingency plan.

The chairmen of the powerful House and Senate Judiciary Committees in Washington, Congressman Bob Goodlatte and Senator Chuck Grassley, restated their calls for the Obama administration to declassify information about the one-off plan signed with Australia last month, objecting to secret negotiations, which they said had "left Americans in the dark".

Previously, the pair said many of the 1800 refugees and asylum seekers being considered for resettlement came "from countries of national security concern" and some designated by the US State Department as state sponsors of terrorism.

They called on Department of Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson and Secretary of State John Kerry to provide Congress with a briefing to review the classified agreement and said the American people should be given access to its terms.

"It is now absolutely apparent to us that there was no reason for the agreement to be classified from the outset, and that it should not continue to be classified," the pair wrote.

"The American people have a right to be fully aware of the actions of their government regarding foreign nationals who may be admitted to the United States.

"American taxpayers not only foot the bill for the majority of the refugee resettlement in the United States, but they bear any consequences regarding the security implications of those admitted to the US."

Fairfax Media understands the State Department is preparing to respond to the letter directly, while staff on the two committees have received classified and unclassified briefings about the plans.

Mr Trump called for a moratorium on Muslim immigration to the US during the election campaign.

The Republicans will control Congress and the White House after January 20, raising the prospect of the Australia-US deal being overturned before any transfers take place.

Mr Kelly was critical of refugees being held in Australian detention who have said they are unwilling to go to the US.

"It's not a done deal until the people from Nauru go to the USA but one of the issues . . . is some of the people on Nauru say they don't want to go to the USA," he told Sky News.

"They're given an opportunity people would kill for, a Green Card to the USA, and they're rejecting it."

Mr Kelly said the government was preparing contingency plans in case the deal was scrapped.

"I am sure Peter Dutton is looking at a plan B as we speak. Plan A is to offer places in the USA, [a] fantastic opportunity for people to get themselves off Nauru.

"Obviously ministers are working on a plan B in case it falls over."

A spokeswoman for Mr Dutton said had "made it clear they are not going to be providing a running commentary on these matters."

Mr Dutton said in November the government would not provide any specifics about the deal and wouldn't comment on any negotiations Australia might be having with other countries.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/plan-b-coalition-mp-suggests-us-refugee-deal-in-doubt-as-us-republicans-demand-answers-20161207-gt5tmj.html>

19. Question Time suspended as pro-refugee protesters call to 'close the camps' and 'bring them here'

ABC News Online
By political reporter Henry Belot
Wednesday November 30, 2016

Close to 40 chanting pro-refugees protesters have caused chaos at Parliament House after supergluing themselves to railings and suspending Question Time.

Speaker of the House Tony Smith adjourned proceedings while security and Australian Federal Police officers removed protesters from the chamber.

In chaotic scenes, security guards forcibly dragged a number of protesters from the public gallery with many heard screaming "don't hurt me".

Some continued to protest in the Mural Hall inside Parliament House while authorities worked to clear others from inside the chamber.

The protest did not appear to be violent, with many shouting "close the camps" and "bring them here".

"We are here today because you have become world leaders in cruelty," the protesters shouted on Wednesday.

"We are here today because your policies are breaking our heart."

The final protesters were removed from the chamber close to 30 minutes after proceedings were suspended.

Activists from the Whistleblowers Activists and Citizens Alliance claimed responsibility for the protest.

A protester from the same group stormed a stage yelling obscenities while Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull delivered an economic speech in August.

In a statement, a spokeswoman for the group said protesters came to Parliament House to tell the Government to "stop the madness" and close processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island.

Question Time restarted at 2:40pm (AEDT) and Mr Smith said he suspended proceedings "as a last resort".

"I wondered whether we could press on in the extraordinary circumstance and I made a judgement that we could not," he said.

"Our purpose here is to conduct the business of the House and in the period of time we have been suspended it is very clear we were unable to do that and the dignity of the House would have been severely compromised."

Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce labelled the protesters "outrageous" and "selfish", adding that Australians "would have been really upset by it".

"It's their Parliament, and they have a right to see the people they elect do their job during Question Time," he told Lateline.

"People would be saying, 'you've got no right to come into my Parliament and shut my Parliament down'.

"If you've got a problem, sure, say it. Say it outside, go into your local member, have the appointment, but don't go into your nation's Parliament ... and shut down our Parliament, that's just outrageous."

Cabinet Minister Christopher Pyne said it was the most serious intrusion into the Parliament since 1996, and apologised to the public for the disruption.

"As the person responsible for the chamber and the House I would suggest you conduct a thorough investigation," Mr Pyne said.

"If people are signed in from the public area and in many cases to the chamber, they are signed in by a member of Parliament.

"There may well be trail of where the miscreants who disrupted the Parliament came from and I think it would be important to determine that."

A spokesman for Greens senator Nick McKim denied his party had any involvement in the protest.

Greens leader Richard Di Natale thanked one protester and told her "we are so proud of what you have done".

Mr Joyce questioned the move, saying: "You're congratulating them for shutting down our nation's Parliament. Have you completely and utterly lost the plot Richard di Natale? Why would you do that?"

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten thanked security staff at Parliament House for their handling of the protest.

"The reason why the Labor Party stayed in here today is because we will never give in to those who wish to shut down this Parliament," he said on Wednesday.

"This is the exact opposite of democracy."

The Question Time protest came days after revelations authorities are planning to improve security at Parliament House amid concerns the building is vulnerable to a terrorist attack.

The restrictions, which are likely to be introduced over the summer period, received mixed reactions from politicians, with many suggesting additional security measures were unnecessary.

Earlier on Wednesday, Senator Di Natale said the improvements to security would entrench a gulf between politicians and the public.

"The Parliament is supposed to be the people's house and not a politicians' bunker," he said.

"This building was designed so that people were able to stand above their politicians. It was designed so that politicians served at the feet of the people."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-30/protesters-disrupt-question-time/8079674>

20. Pro-refugee protesters disrupt parliament and shut down question time

Christopher Pyne calls for 'thorough investigation' after group opposed to government's treatment of asylum seekers chant, unfurl banners and superglue hands to railing

The Guardian
Gareth Hutchens
Wednesday 30 November 2016 18.33 AEDT

About 50 protesters threw Parliament House into disarray on Wednesday, forcing question time to shut down for more than 20 minutes as security guards struggled to remove them.

The protest against the government's treatment of asylum seekers began in the public gallery in the House of Representatives, with activists standing up and chanting: "Where is your moral compass? ... We will not stop until you close all the detention centres!"

The Speaker of the house, Tony Smith, was forced to postpone question time until the protesters were removed. Some of the protesters had superglued their hands to railings while others had unfurled banners.

The group, from the Whistleblowers, Activists and Citizens Alliance, were the same group who disrupted a speech by Malcolm Turnbull in August.

After the protest, a member of the organisation, Samantha Castro, told journalists their motivation was the treatment of asylum seekers.

"If the government had listened to the Australian public and our request to bring [asylum seekers] here and let them stay, we wouldn't have to take such actions," she said.

“We’d wish that they would listen to the parliamentary inquiries, that they would listen to the Senate, that they would listen to the submissions that had been taken to the Senate, but they’re not listening.

“After years and years of inquiries and petitions, nobody’s listening so we have to take this type of direct action.”

The Turnbull government is now calling for a review of the security arrangements to Parliament House.

Christopher Pyne said he also wants a “thorough investigation” to determine if the protesters were signed in by members of parliament. The protesters said they entered as members of the public, which doesn’t require a sign-in from someone who works in the building.

“This is the most serious intrusion into the Parliament since the riots organised by the ACTU in 1996,” Pyne said after question time resumed.

“Mr Speaker, as the Speaker and as the person responsible for the House and the chamber, I would request that you conduct a thorough investigation because obviously if people are signed in from the public to the building and, in many cases to the chamber, they are signed in by a member of Parliament.

“There may well be a trial of where the miscreants who disrupted the Parliament came from, and I think it would be important to determine that.”

The Greens leader, Richard Di Natale, and the immigration spokesman, Nick McKim, left the building to meet with protesters in the public carpark after the protest was over. “Well done, well done. Good on you,” Di Natale said to one protester.

“The Greens wanted to come down and express our solidarity, to say that we stand with you, and we think there are many millions of decent Australians who share your concerns.”

When asked if the Greens had helped to organise the protest, Di Natale said they hadn’t. “No we didn’t play any part in organising it,” he said.

“But we’re so proud to stand with these brave people who have given a voice to those thousands of innocent people who have come to this country doing nothing other than looking for help and refuge, at a time when we have a government who has been prepared to inflict torture and harm on innocent children and their families.”

Di Natale’s office later told Guardian Australia no one from the Greens had signed any of the protesters into the building beforehand. Protesters said they had all entered the building as members of the public.

The 50 protesters had come to Canberra in the days before, travelling from various cities including Melbourne, Sydney and Newcastle.

The activist group has been running a campaign to boycott and blockade Wilson Security, the Australian corporation that holds security contracts for the detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru. They want to stop corporations profiteering from the detention of refugees. They also want to close the detention centres.

In 1996, the ACTU organised a barbecue on the lawns of Parliament House which resulted in a riot and the invasion of the Parliament. “Those people who were in the Parliament would remember it very well. A drunken riot,” Pyne said on Wednesday.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/30/pro-refugee-protesters-disrupt-parliament-and-shut-down-question-time>

21. Refugee protesters abseil down Parliament House and dye fountain red

Activists demanding end to offshore detention return for second day, as Turnbull accuses them of ‘denying democracy’ and says he’s surprised they weren’t charged

The Guardian
Paul Karp
Thursday 1 December 2016 11.30 AEDT

Refugee activists have used parliament as a stage for dramatic protests to demand closure of offshore detention centres for the second day in a row.

On Thursday, two climbers from the Whistleblowers, Activists and Citizens Alliance (Waca) abseiled down the edifice of Parliament House, while others stood in the waters of the fountain, dyed red to represent blood, carrying signs calling for the camps’ closure.

On the same day parliament approved changes to increase security, after Waca activists interrupted question time on Wednesday, with some gluing their hands to furniture to delay being dragged out of the lower house by security staff.

Protesters in the fountain carried signs criticising the Liberals as “world leaders in cruelty” and the Labor party for providing “no opposition to cruelty”.

Two professional climbers hung from parliament with the main banner that read “Close the bloody camps now #justiceforrefugees”, one of whom was involved in the group’s protest at the Melbourne Arts Centre in February, where they scaled the landmark spire, as part of Let Them Stay protests.

The parliament protest started at 8:30am and lasted about two hours.

In a statement the Australian Federal Police said the two abseilers ended their protest after negotiations with police, which onlookers could hear included a threat to cut them down.

It said the two abseilers will be summonsed to appear before court. Those in the pond came out of their own accord and were asked to move on.

Speaking at the protest, Waca spokesman Phil Evans said the action “continues the call for urgent action on refugees”, including closing offshore detention camps and bringing all refugees and asylum seekers in them to Australia.

Evans confirmed no charges were laid over Wednesday’s protest, nor were the group given paperwork banning them from the parliamentary precinct.

Asked about their treatment by security on Wednesday, he said it was “fine ... and pales in comparison to the treatment of people on Manus Island and Nauru” who are being “tortured raped and abused”.

The Greens senator Lee Rhiannon attended the protest and gave a gift of chocolates to the activists. Asked about the appropriateness of the protest, she noted it was non-violent and argued “they should be here”.

“The problem lies with the human rights abuses, the mental health problems, the anguish. We’re breaking our international obligations ... that’s where the laws are being broken.

“These people are courageous, they are showing what the parliament should do.”

Rhiannon said she only found out about the protest an hour ago, in effect denying any coordination between the Greens and protesters.

Over the last three years offshore detention facilities on Manus Island and Nauru have been plagued by reports of shocking conditions, poor management and deteriorating mental health of asylum seekers.

The Guardian’s publication of the Nauru files showed the devastating trauma and abuse inflicted on children on Nauru.

An asylum seeker was beaten to death by guards in a wave of unrest on Manus Island in February 2014, and on Nauru in May 2016 an asylum seeker self-immolated in front of staff from the UN high commissioner for refugees.

On Thursday in a radio interview with 2GB, Malcolm Turnbull criticised refugee protesters who disrupted question time, accusing them of “denying democracy”.

“And it tells you a lot about the Greens party in particular that they praised them. Imagine that, they praise people who interfere with democracy who wanted to shut down the parliament.”

On Thursday parliament approved a security upgrade including fencing off the sloped lawns leading up to the roof of parliament.

Turnbull said erecting a glass barrier in front of the public gallery would be considered but he was personally “very reluctant” to do so.

He said it would interfere with the sense parliament was the people’s house, and suggested instead that security should “do a better job of checking who is coming in and more quickly moving out if they do the wrong thing”.

Turnbull said he was surprised no charges had been laid over Wednesday’s protest, but that was a matter for the police.

“There’s got to be a strong message sent that if you want to come into this place and disrupt the people’s house in that way, then there has to be a very strong message sent that that is not acceptable.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/01/refugee-protesters-abseil-down-parliament-house-and-dye-fountain-red>

22. Protesters return to Parliament House as Malcolm Turnbull says he's 'surprised' they weren't charged

The Age
December 1 2016
Fergus Hunter & Mark Kenny

Protesters have returned to Parliament House for the second day in a row, this time scaling the building's front wall and unfurling a banner which reads "close the bloody camps now".

The group, also including a dozen people who waded into the ceremonial pool in Parliament's forecourt, is again targeting Australia's immigration policies.

In an extraordinary coincidence, MPs have also used the final parliamentary sitting day of the year to vote through security upgrades that will close off the upper slopes of Parliament's iconic lawns as part of some \$60 million in works around the sprawling complex.

New 2.6 metre high barriers will limit public access to most of the lawns and would likely have made the abseiling aspect of the current protest impossible.

In the Senate only the Greens and senator Derryn Hinch opposed the restrictions - revealed by Fairfax Media earlier this week

The second protest was organised by the same group who disrupted question time in the House of Representatives on Wednesday, gluing themselves to the furniture and causing proceedings to be suspended as they were dramatically removed from the building.

Members of the Whistleblowers, Activists and Citizens Alliance turned the forecourt's water feature red, representing deaths from turn-backs at sea, with signs reading "Turnbacks Are Murder" and "Blood On Your Hands".

The abseiling protesters came down shortly before 11am and those in the pool left shortly after. There were no arrests but the abseiling pair have been ordered to appear in court, according to the Australian Federal Police.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said punishment for Wednesday's intruders was a matter for law enforcement but said he was "surprised that no charges have been laid, if that is the case, but I'll certainly look into it".

He also said a glass barrier in front of the public viewing gallery in the House of Representatives would probably be considered in the wake of the disturbance but that he would be "very reluctant" to introduce such a measure.

"Part of the whole experience of coming to Parliament is that it's big open spaces, it belongs to the people, it's the people's house," he told Sydney radio station 2GB.

"And I would prefer that we did a better job, that our security people did a better job at checking who is coming in and were able to more quickly move them out if they do the wrong thing.

"But, you know, there's a lot of things we've had to do in modern times to defend ourselves from a security point of view that we'd rather not do."

One government MP said there was "a lot of nonsense" being spoken about democracy and the right to protest.

"If this was someone wanting to do more than lower a banner and wade in the pond, where would we be... we have to get real, this threat is not some theoretical thing," the MPs said.

"They're playing right into our hands," said another senior figure supporting the new security measures.

The security changes will include new fencing, gates, external security points, and extra heavily armed police.

Security in the Parliament is ultimately the responsibility of the two presiding officers, House of Representatives Speaker Tony Smith and Senate President, Stephen Parry.

Mr Smith, introducing the measures to Parliament, said it was "important to acknowledge these works do have an impact on the original design intent of Parliament House however it is also important to acknowledge the world has changed since the original design brief for Parliament House was created in the 1970s".

He said the measures would not change how people enter the building and people would continue to access the roof in the same way.

Senator James McGrath, the Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister, said "the book should be thrown at" the protesters, labelling them "K-Mart Castros".

"What a bunch of grubs. These people are selfish. They are sooks. Should wake up to themselves and get a job," he told Sky News.

The Greens have strongly backed the activists, visiting them on both days and introducing a supportive motion in the Senate.

"These protesters were trying to focus on the fact that there are young children, women, families being locked up indefinitely in these hellholes offshore and they have been there for years," party leader Richard Di Natale told Sky News.

WACA spokeswoman Kat Moore said on Thursday: "We are here today to tell the Australian Parliament they are all complicit in the murder, rape, torture and child abuse of refugees. This is a state of emergency and a humanitarian crisis."

The protesters say Manus Island, Nauru and Christmas Island are death camps and demanding every single person in offshore detention be evacuated immediately and the camps shut down.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/protesters-return-to-parliament-house-as-malcolm-turnbull-says-hes-surprised-they-werent-charged-20161130-gt1c2b.html>

23. Doctor wanted sick asylum seeker on Manus Island sent to Brisbane, not Port Moresby

ABC News Online
By Louisa Rebgetz
Tuesday November 29, 2016

A doctor involved in the evacuation of a sick Iranian asylum seeker from Manus Island recommended he be flown to Brisbane ahead of Port Moresby due to Papua New Guinea's lower level of emergency care, an inquest has heard.

Queensland coroner Terry Ryan is investigating the death of 24-year-old Hamid Khazaei, who died in Brisbane's Mater Hospital in August 2014, 13 days after presenting to the Manus Island clinic in August 2014.

He suffered severe sepsis from a leg infection and was first moved to Port Moresby before being flown to Brisbane where nothing could be done to save his life.

The court has heard an urgent recommendation to move Mr Khazaei was delayed due to immigration department approvals.

Dr Stewart Condon, who previously worked for International SOS, the company contracted by the Australian Government to evacuate patients from Manus Island, told the inquest he received a call from a doctor at the Manus Island clinic the day after Mr Khazaei was due to be moved off Manus Island.

Counsel assisting the coroner told the doctor around the time of the phone call, an approval to evacuate Mr Khazaei from Manus Island had been made.

The Iranian suffered cardiac arrest at the Port Moresby hospital.

Dr Condon told the inquest although he had never been to Port Moresby, assessments by other doctors through International SOS helped him form the opinion it was not the hospital of choice.

"We knew with this body of information that the Pacific International Hospital had limited facilities in terms of their emergency care, their intensive care unit and in the skill sense of the doctors working there," Dr Condon said.

He said he had been told "the level of hygiene was poor" and some doctors who had made visits to the Port Moresby hospital said the Manus Island clinic provided better health care if a patient was needing intensive care treatment.

He wrote a recommendation for Mr Khazaei to be moved to Brisbane as the first preference followed by Port Moresby.

When questioned by the counsel assisting the coroner why he even offered Port Moresby as an option he said it was as a result of the situation he was in.

"The relationship between the International SOS, IHMS [International Health & Medical Services] and the department, the client, was at times, I understand being outside a lot of these discussions, at times quite challenging," Dr Condon said.

"The policy was to provide medical care as much as possible to people in these situations and provide first-world care, but there was a pressure regarding finances and budgets of doing air ambulance evacuations quite regularly at times and for people to travel to Australia.

"We knew that there was political pressure in the department."

Lawyers for the Department of Immigration objected to the response.

Dr Condon told the inquest there were often delays in the approval process when needing to evacuate patients.

The inquest runs for two weeks before reconvening in February next year.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-29/hamid-khazaei-inquest-doctor-wanted-asylum-seeker-sent-brisbane/8074322>

24. Sick Iranian asylum seeker stuck on Manus Island 'deteriorated fast', doctor says

ABC News Online

By Louisa Rebgetz

Wednesday November 30, 2016

A sick Iranian asylum seeker on Manus Island missed a flight to Port Moresby because of visa issues, an inquest into his death has heard.

Queensland coroner Terry Ryan is investigating the death of 24-year-old Hamid Khazaei, who died in Brisbane's Mater Hospital in August 2014, 13 days after presenting to the Manus Island clinic in August 2014.

He suffered severe sepsis from a leg infection and was first moved to Port Moresby before being flown to Brisbane where nothing could be done to save his life.

Today in the court in Brisbane the inquest heard from Doctor Marten Muis, who had just arrived to work on the island when he was told to organise an urgent evacuation of Mr Khazaei to a Port Moresby hospital.

Dr Muis said as the medical team were making flight preparations, he rang his International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) colleagues as he had not heard if the flight had been confirmed.

Dr Muis said he was told, "It's not happening because we haven't obtained a visa".

He said he was told people in detention in Papua New Guinea needed a visa to leave Manus Island.

"It was really all double Dutch to me," Dr Muis said.

He said he was told there were no other options to get Mr Khazaei off the island until the following day as there were no medical evacuations at night.

Dr Muis said he was told, "I'm very sorry but you're on your own and you'll have to keep this man overnight".

When asked what his response was, Mr Muis said, "What can you do?".

'I've never seen anyone deteriorate that fast'

Dr Muis said when he arrived at the clinic the next day, Mr Khazaei had rapidly deteriorated and looked completely different. "He was the most awful colour I'd ever seen in a human being," Dr Muis said. "He was just grey, blue."

Dr Muis said Mr Khazaei was breathing very rapidly, seemed confused and had ripped out his IV lines. "I've never seen anyone deteriorate that fast," he said.

Dr Muis was filling in as the senior medical officer on Manus Island for 11 days. He said Mr Khazai was already a patient when he started working at the clinic.

Dr Muis said he was not familiar with the medical evacuation plans or policies by IHMS.

He told the inquest while he received a comprehensive security induction and a physical examination, he was not given much of an induction in terms of the facilities of the Manus Island clinic. "It was an extremely basic set up," he said. "The only test we could do at the time I was there was a malaria test."

Mr Khazaei was eventually evacuated to Port Moresby. The inquest continues.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-11-30/hamid-khazaei-inquest-asylum-seeker-deteriorated-fast-doctor/8079234>

25. Hamid Kehazaei inquest: doctors faced 'political pressure' over patient transfers

'We knew that there was a political pressure' about sending sick asylum seekers to Australia, doctor tells coroner

The Guardian

Ben Doherty in Brisbane

Tuesday 29 November 2016 16.33 AEDT

Doctors faced "political pressure" from Australia not to bring critically-ill asylum seekers from Papua New Guinea, despite knowledge the healthcare in PNG was inferior and inadequate, an inquest into the death of an asylum seeker has heard.

The inquest into the death of Iranian asylum seeker Hamid Kehazaei – who died following a treatable infection contracted on Manus island in 2014 – was told of a "quite challenging" relationship between the doctors responsible for the care of asylum seekers detained on the island, and the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection which resisted medical movements for budgetary and political reasons.

"The policy was to provide medical care as much as possible to people in these situations, to provide first-world care, but there was a pressure regarding finances and budgets of doing air ambulance evacuations quite regularly at times, and for people to travel to Australia we knew that there was a political pressure in the department," said Dr Stewart Condon, a coordinating doctor with International SOS who requested Kehazaei's medical evacuation.

Critically ill from a leg infection that had developed into sepsis, Kehazaei was flown by air ambulance from Manus Island to Port Moresby's Pacific International hospital on 26 August 2014, despite doctors being unanimous in their opinion that he should be brought to Australia for treatment.

Kehazaei, who had at that point been in care on Manus Island for more than 60 hours, had a persistent fever, low blood pressure, a rapid heartbeat and rapid breathing rate. He was not responding to a host of antibiotics and pain relief, could not sit up unaided, and could not walk to the toilet. He had cellulitis, abscesses, and unburst blisters on his legs, and a hard swelling in his groin.

"Sounds like he's septic, really, doesn't he," Condon said in discussion with Kehazaei's treating doctor on the island.

Condon, working from Sydney on 26 August 2014, said he had recommended that morning that Kehazaei required an urgent medical evacuation to Australia. International SOS was contracted by International Health and Medical Services (IHMS), the offshore detention's medical provider, to coordinate medical transfers.

"I made the recommendation that he travel to Brisbane as a centre for medical excellence," Condon said.

However, as a secondary option, Condon's recommendation said Kehazaei could be moved to Port Moresby's Pacific International hospital. Despite this, he told the inquest in a formal statement that because of Kehazaei's critical situation: "Port Moresby was no longer medically appropriate."

Asked by counsel assisting the inquest why he offered a "secondary" medical option when he didn't believe that option could provide adequate care, Condon said there was a pressure not to move asylum seekers to Australia.

The policy not to move sick or injured asylum seekers off Manus Island was codified in the medical evacuation response plan his organisation worked by.

In a section marked "transferees", that is, asylum seekers and refugees in offshore detention, it read:

"For transferees consideration should be given to the possibility of treatment for PNG. Recommendations for transportation to Australia can be made only once local options have been exhausted."

Taken to Port Moresby's Pacific International hospital on the afternoon of 26 August, Kehazaei suffered three heart attacks there, before he was moved, unconscious, to Brisbane the next day. He died a week later in Brisbane's Mater hospital, without ever regaining consciousness.

The Australian government has consistently maintained that asylum seekers and refugees in offshore detention receive medical care "broadly comparable" with that available in Australia.

But Condon said it was known that the level of care available in Port Moresby's Pacific International hospital was inferior to that in Australia.

"We knew with this body of information that PIH had limited facilities in terms of their emergency care, the intensive care unit, and in the skill sets of the doctors working there," he told the inquest.

“People had told me the level of hygiene was poor, the level of staff cover was limited, and, as a hospital, while it could do some things reasonably well, it certainly wasn’t a level of care we were happy with. It was not something that we would recommend.”

Condon said the department responded to his recommendation to move Kehazaei to Australia by opting, instead to send him to Port Moresby.

“I was surprised because we had sent the updated recommendation, they were acting on old information as to how Hamid could travel off Manus Island.

“They took the option that offered quite a basic level of care, not the one that could manage his situation appropriately.”

Condon said that the medical team of International SOS always sought to prioritise patients’ medical care, but that there was “pressure” put on the operations side of the company by the government to reduce costs.

“There was an understanding that an air ambulance, for example, coming from some of these locations, would cost \$100,000, and that the client was concerned at the continuing cost of that.”

Asked who “the client” was, Condon replied: “The Department of Immigration and Border Protection.”

Condon said there were regularly delays in transporting seriously- and critically-ill patients from the offshore detention centres on Manus Island and Nauru.

“There are cases where we made urgent recommendations for an air ambulance where we expected it to be happening within hours, and we waited days for approval.”

Asked by the coroner how he would categorise Hamid Kehazaei’s circumstance, Condon answered: “That was an emergency. His blood pressure and his numbers, the observations in my notes, they are critical numbers. If those numbers are seen in any of the emergency department I work in, medical teams, nurses, respond very quickly, try to fluid resuscitate people. That was an emergency.”

Doctors on Manus Island first recommended Kehazaei be urgently transferred off the island on the morning of 25 August, a full 36 hours before he was ultimately moved.

Kehazaei first presented to the medical clinic within the Manus Island detention centre at about 5.30pm on the evening of 23 August. Doctors reported he was shivering, with his hands held inside his shirt, and complaining of a fever, chills, body aches, a runny nose and sore throat. He had been unwell for two days, he said.

Condon’s evidence to the coronial inquiry, before coroner Terry Ryan, continues in Brisbane.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/29/hamid-kehazaei-inquest-doctors-faced-political-pressure-over-patient-transfers>

26. Hamid Kehazaei left critically ill on Manus because Australia delayed transfer, inquest told

Asylum seeker left stranded on island because of bureaucratic delays from immigration department, and because he didn’t have a PNG visa, inquest told

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 30 November 2016 16.48 AEDT

A critically ill asylum seeker was left without proper care on Manus Island because Australian immigration officials failed to give permission for his transfer to a hospital, an inquest has been told.

Four doctors agreed that Hamid Kehazaei, who died in 2014 from a treatable bacterial infection, needed to be “urgently transferred” because facilities on Manus Island were inadequate, the third day of an inquest into his death in Brisbane heard on Wednesday.

But Kehazaei was left stranded on the island another full day because of bureaucratic delays from Canberra, and because he didn’t have a Papua New Guinea visa, even though he was already in the country.

Doctors have told the inquest that the Manus Island detention centre clinic was, at that time of Kehazaei’s death, not sterile and stricken by regular power failures, that nurses were insufficiently trained and regularly failed to follow instructions, and that the limited numbers of diagnostic machines were broken.

The inquest also heard that critically ill asylum seekers could not be moved from the detention centre without express permission from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Canberra, or without a Papua New Guinean visa, which they needed even to travel to a hospital elsewhere in PNG.

Marten Muis, the senior medical officer on Manus Island on 25 August, said it was clear at 8am that morning that the 24-year-old Iranian man needed to be urgently moved to hospital.

Muis spoke to the emergency doctor on the island, Leslie King, and the area medical director for Manus, Anthony Renshaw, who both agreed that Kehazaei needed to be flown off the island to hospital on the commercial flight that was scheduled for that afternoon.

Muis also spoke with Sydney-based Yliana Dennett at International SOS – the company which organised medical transfers – who agreed that moving Kehazaei to hospital that day “was a very good idea ... he’s a chance to develop a much worse infection”.

A fifth doctor, Richard McGrath, who was also on Manus, had agreed to be Kehazaei’s medical escort on the flight.

However, Kehazaei was not moved from the island until lunchtime the next day, 26 August. By that time his condition had deteriorated so badly he had to be flown by air ambulance to Port Moresby’s Pacific International hospital. His transfer to Port Moresby was in defiance of doctors’ recommendations, who had requested he be flown directly to Australia.

Once in Port Moresby, he suffered three heart attacks before being flown, again by air ambulance, and now unconscious, to Brisbane.

Kehazaei never regained consciousness and was declared braindead at Brisbane’s Mater hospital on 2 September. His life support machines were turned off, with his family’s permission, on 5 September.

On Manus Island, Muis said the medical facilities to care for sick asylum seekers were “extremely basic”.

“There was no x-ray machine or laboratory to carry out diagnostic facilities,” he said.

There was a machine for basic blood tests, but it was broken at the time. “The only test we could do at the time I was there was a malaria test,” Muis said.

A document showed to the inquest demonstrated a Piccolo blood-test machine did run tests on Kehazaei but was not seen by Muis until after he had been evacuated.

Muis told the inquest on Wednesday there was “no way in hell” he would send a patient to Lorengau hospital on Manus Island which “wasn’t ... what we would call a hospital”. It also suffered from staffing and equipment problems too.

“They had a nice x-ray machine, but the radiologist had gone back to Moresby because she hadn’t been paid for three months,” he said.

Muis said he spoke to International SOS on the morning of 25 August to arrange for Kehazaei’s transfer to Port Moresby on a commercial flight at 5pm that day. That flight was agreed to in a conversation played to the inquest on Wednesday.

But by 3pm, there had been no formal approval.

“I rang [International SOS] and said ‘I thought we had an agreement for an urgent transfer, we are under the impression that this patient is going with the outgoing senior medical officer at 5[pm]. We haven’t got much time left, can you tell me what’s happening?’

“I was told ‘it’s not happening, because we haven’t obtained a visa’. They then went into some kind of story about people in the detention centre, even though they were already on PNG soil ... needed a visa [to be transferred to a PNG hospital].”

Muis was told that if plans had been made earlier, an air ambulance could have been organised, but because the Momote airfield on Manus Island was “daytime only” it could not be arranged for that day.

“They said ‘we’re very sorry, but you’re on your own and you’re going to have to keep this man overnight’.”

Muis said the emergency doctor in the detention centre, Leslie King, was “very distressed and angry” about Kehazaei not being moved.

“At that stage, he certainly wasn’t well enough for any major interventions. I went to the little pharmacy, and I remember looking through what else we had in the way of intravenous antibiotics.”

By the next morning, Kehazaei’s condition had deteriorated further. The overnight nursing staff had not followed instructions and had failed to provide him with intravenous fluids.

In the morning, he had become confused and combative with staff. He had ripped the IV lines out of his arms, and was refusing to wear a facemask.

“He was the most awful colour I’ve ever seen in a human being,” Muis, a doctor of 40 years’ experience, said.

“He had noticeably deteriorated, he was a sort of grey-purple colour. His breathing was over 30, he seemed confused. If you went anywhere near him to put a mask on him, he would put his arms up or strike out.

“It wasn’t an urgent case any more, it was an emergency and we needed to get him out.”

Manus Island health services manager Lyn Baczocha told the inquest she was told by immigration department officials on Manus that Kehazaei could not be moved because approval had not been granted by senior staff in Canberra.

“I had the ambulance drivers ready, the paperwork was ready, the security was ready, the medical escort was ready.”

Stephen Keim, acting for Kehazaei’s family, asked Baczocha: “The only thing that was missing was the go-ahead from Canberra?”

“Yes,” Baczocha replied.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/nov/30/hamid-kehazaei-left-critically-ill-on-manus-because-australia-blocked-transfer>

27. Hamid Kehazaei inquest: faulty machine ruled out use of vital drug

Doctors treating Manus Island asylum seeker considered gentamicin but the monitoring equipment was broken

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 2 December 2016 13.15 AEDT

Doctors treating the asylum seeker Hamid Kehazaei inside the Manus Island detention centre debated giving him gentamicin – an antibiotic that might have countered the rare bacteria that had infected him – but decided it was too dangerous because the laboratory equipment needed to monitor its use was broken.

Kehazaei, 24, died in a Brisbane hospital in 2014 after he developed sepsis from a small infection in his leg that was contracted inside the Manus detention centre. His transfer to hospital was postponed a full day by bureaucratic delays and his body went into septic shock. He suffered three heart attacks and ultimately died because of a lack of oxygen to his brain.

Much of the coronial inquest into his death, being held in Brisbane before the Queensland state coroner Terry Ryan, has focused on the delays in moving Kehazaei to a hospital, and the decision to take him to Port Moresby rather than Brisbane as his doctors recommended.

But several doctors who treated Kehazaei have been asked about prescribing him gentamicin while he was still on Manus. The medical clinic in the detention centre had a limited supply of the broad spectrum antibiotic.

Kehazaei’s initial infection was ultimately found to be chromobacterium violaceum. Gentamicin is regarded as effective in treating the rare water-borne bacteria, but the drug is potentially toxic to kidneys, and is usually prescribed only in a setting where its effect can be monitored with blood chemical testing.

The Piccolo Xpress blood chemistry analysing machine inside the Manus Island detention centre was broken. Kehazaei was prescribed several different antibiotics – though not gentamicin - during the 68 hours he was in the Manus Island detention centre medical clinic.

The emergency doctor Leslie King said she and her colleagues debated prescribing gentamicin.

“I specifically remember having a long conversation about it,” King told the coroner.

“We decided against it just at the time, because we had no labs, we had no chemistry. We could not monitor his renal function.

“We knew he was dehydrated, we knew he was febrile, we were really afraid for his kidneys ... if we used that drug. I thought we needed to be careful with that particular medication.”

King said the analyser in the detention centre medical clinic was broken and could perform only a basic white blood-cell count, not any of the functions needed to monitor gentamicin’s effect.

“The entire time I worked there it did not function,” she said.

The required equipment at a laboratory within Lorengau hospital, on the other side of Manus Island, which the detention centre medical clinic sometimes used, was also broken at the time.

The senior medical officer on Manus, Dr Marten Muis, said he found some gentamicin in a cupboard in the Manus Island clinic, but he had never prescribed the drug. He said it was a therapy he was more familiar with being prescribed in a hospital setting, where its effects could be monitored.

The inquest heard on Friday that when the critically-ill Kehazaei was finally moved from Manus Island – by then in septic shock – he was left lying in the sun at the island’s airfield, had torn out the IV lines in his arm and did not have an oxygen mask on.

The inquest continues.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/02/hamid-kehazaei-inquest-manus-island-asylum-seeker-gentamicin>

28. Immigration officials routinely ignore medical advice on detainees, inquest told

Critically ill asylum seeker Hamid Kehazaei flown to hospital more than a day after doctor sought transfer, coroner hears

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Friday 2 December 2016 06.00 AEDT

Australia’s Department of Immigration routinely rejects doctors’ advice to move critically ill asylum seekers to hospital, and refuses permission for offshore detainees to be transferred to Australia, an inquest has heard.

The fourth day of the inquest into the 2014 death of the Iranian asylum seeker Hamid Kehazaei has again focused on the bureaucratic delays in transferring the critically ill asylum seeker from the Manus Island detention centre.

The transfer of Kehazaei, who was suffering from a bacterial infection, was initially delayed by more than a day, and he was then taken, in defiance of doctors’ advice, to the Papua New Guinea capital, Port Moresby, instead of Brisbane.

After suffering three heart attacks in Port Moresby, he was flown by air ambulance – by then unconscious – to Brisbane, where he died a week later.

Yliana Dennett, a co-ordinating doctor with International SOS, the company subcontracted to organise medical transfers from offshore detention, told the Queensland state coroner on Thursday that Australia’s Department of Immigration and Border Protection routinely refused doctors’ recommendations to move critically ill asylum seekers to Australian hospitals.

“Experience has shown the department is very reluctant to bring patients to Australia ... If we recommended someone transferred to Australia, we knew it would not be approved,” she told the inquest.

On 25 August 2014 Dennett recommended the transfer of Kehazaei, who was suffering a severe and worsening infection that was not responding to any antibiotic treatments available on Manus, to Port Moresby’s Pacific international hospital.

She told the inquest that while the medical care in Port Moresby was a “step up” from that available on Manus, it was “not the best option”, and that transfers to Port Moresby were not used for any patients except asylum seekers from the detention centre.

“We usually do not recommend medical transfer to Port Moresby,” she told the inquest. “The medical care in Port Moresby ... and the expertise of the local doctors is not up to Australian or international standards.”

The inquest has previously heard that the Pacific international hospital in Port Moresby was unhygienic, that it had an insufficient number of staff, and its doctors and nurses were inadequately trained.

But Dennett said she had recommended the transfer to Port Moresby because “we knew that a transfer to Australia would not be approved by the department”.

“We have had several cases prior to that case where we have recommend Australia as a first or only option, and the majority of cases – these have not been approved, or have not been approved in an adequate timeframe, or have had considerable delay,” she said.

Under questioning from counsel for the commonwealth, Dennett said she had personally dealt with cases in which she had recommended urgent transfer for patients with serious heart conditions or psychiatric illnesses, but their transfer had been refused by the department.

In other cases, she said, approval had been delayed for several days or a number of weeks.

In the case of Kehazaei, the department – which retains ultimate control over asylum seekers detained offshore – received a request for his urgent transfer at 10.55am on 25 August.

The department was urged to approve Kehazaei's travel immediately for a flight leaving the island that evening and was told the 24-year-old had a "risk of infection spreading, leading to sepsis – life-threatening widespread systemic infection".

The department did not respond until 6.01pm – after the flight had left – when its director of detention health operations, Amanda Little, emailed the area medical director for offshore processing, Dr Anthony Renshaw, who had recommended Kehazaei be moved.

The email, which was presented to the coroner, said: "I am wondering why this can't be managed at Lorengau hospital [on Manus]? Even using something 'unusual' should be able to be managed locally. Is there a [drug] supply issue that we are unaware of? Again, these should be brought in, rather than the person being transferred if this is the case. DIBP staff on island are being pushed for this urgent transfer in the next 18 hours, however I don't have adequate information to be able to escalate at this point if this is still warranted."

Renshaw told the inquest he was surprised at the response. "I felt we had made the rationale very clear to the department that Lorengau was not a suitable location. As a doctor, I had provided sufficient rationale for this man to be moved offsite."

Little, along with several other immigration department bureaucrats who handled Kehazaei's case, will be called before the coroner next week.

Kehazaei was not moved from Manus until lunchtime on 26 August, more than a full day after his transfer was requested, and three days after he first presented to the detention centre clinic.

By that time he was reportedly suffering septic shock and acute respiratory distress syndrome. Doctors say he was confused, distressed and moaning in pain.

Leslie King, the emergency doctor who treated Kehazaei at the Manus Island detention centre, said if he had been moved on the first day his transfer was requested, "he would have had a very different outcome".

"I wish he could have left that day, by whatever means," she told the inquest. "I really feel strongly that if he could have left that day, gotten to a place that had a laboratory, that had facilities we didn't have, he would have had a very different outcome ... he would have had much more of a fighting chance."

King also said that on two consecutive nights in the detention centre clinic, her directions to give Kehazaei intravenous paracetamol were ignored by night staff.

The department, successive immigration ministers and the offshore detention health provider International Health and Medical Services have consistently maintained asylum seekers and refugees held in offshore detention are afforded international-standard healthcare.

IHMS's regional medical director, Mark Parrish, told the inquest in a statement that asylum seekers held in offshore detention were afforded health services "broadly comparable" with those available in Australia.

But IHMS's own medical evacuation response plan – an internal document presented to the coronial inquiry – imposes a two-tier health system, where detention centre staff who fall ill are immediately transferred to Australia, but asylum seekers are kept in Papua New Guinea.

The plan says detention centre staff working on Manus – known as "stakeholders" – who require medical treatment beyond the capability of the detention centre clinic should be transferred immediately to an Australian hospital.

The document states, "for transferees [asylum seekers and refugees held in detention] consideration should be given to the possibility of treatment for PNG. Recommendations for transportation to Australia can be made only once local options have been exhausted."

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/02/immigration-officials-routinely-ignore-medical-advice-on-detainees-inquest-told>

29. Hamid Kehazaei inquest hears immigration bureaucracy left asylum seeker stranded extra day

Coroner heard urgent medical transfers to move seriously ill asylum seekers needed to be 'escalated' through five immigration department bureaucrats

Dysfunction within the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in Canberra left the critically ill asylum seeker Hamid Kehazaei stranded on Manus Island a full day after doctors recommended he be urgently transferred to hospital, an inquest into his death has heard.

The sixth day of the inquest into Kehazaei's death in 2014 from an infection contracted in the Manus Island detention centre heard conflicting and contradictory advice from within the department, as the Queensland coroner focused on the bureaucratic delays in approving Kehazaei's transfer to hospital.

The coroner heard urgent medical transfers to move seriously ill asylum seekers needed to be "escalated" through at least five immigration department bureaucrats on Manus Island and in Canberra before an asylum seeker could be sent to a hospital, a process that generally took up to 72 hours.

The immigration department's former assistant director of detention health operations Caroline Gow told the coroner that, on the morning of 25 August 2014, she was asked to seek approval for Kehazaei's transfer "on the next available commercial flight". She was told it was at 11am the next day.

However, there was a scheduled flight leaving Manus Island at 5.30pm that day.

Her evidence directly contradicted the evidence of four doctors involved in Kehazaei's care, as well as that of her department colleague Jessica Costello, who have all told the coronial inquiry it had been decided – and directly communicated to Gow and other medical officials – that it was intended for Kehazaei to be transferred from the island on the 5.30pm flight.

Area medical director for offshore processing Dr Anthony Renshaw relayed details of a phone call he made to Gow on the morning of 25 August, during which he said he specifically told her about the 5.30pm flight and recommended Kehazaei be approved to fly on it.

"If we miss today's flight, it may be a problem," he told the coroner he told Gow. "We need it to happen today, because there's a slot in the afternoon flight. There's already a doctor on the flight, so we need a quick turnaround on this one."

Gow disputed that Renshaw mentioned the 5.30pm flight. She said he told her the next available flight was at 11am the next day.

Asked whether it was possible that Renshaw mentioned the 5.30pm flight: "No, not at all."

As the afternoon of August 25 progressed, and approval for Kehazaei to travel was not forthcoming, Gow said she didn't inquire as to its progress because she did not want to "undermine" her superiors, nor the department's chain of command.

"My responsibility is to send it to the director and it's the director's responsibility to escalate it up the line to the assistant secretary."

But the court heard Gow received an email at 3.20pm from her department colleague Costello, the Manus-based transfers officer, asking for an update on the progress of Kehazaei's transfer approval.

Gow replied: "This case has gone to the executive for approval."

Costello said she then telephoned Gow at 5.15pm, again inquiring as to the progress of Kehazaei's approval. She said she was told the request was with superiors and that the approval would be emailed when it was made.

Gow claims Costello never called her.

The approval process to move an ill asylum seeker from detention on Manus Island to advanced medical care off the island was convoluted and time-consuming, the coroner's court heard, needing to pass through at least five separate immigration department officials.

Requests for an urgent medical transfer needed to be "escalated" from Manus transfer officer Costello to assistant director Gow, to director Amanda Little, to assistant secretary Paul Windsor and, finally, to first assistant secretary John Cahill and back down again.

In Kehazaei's case, the email sent by Little to Windsor at 7.24pm on 25 August seeking approval for Kehazaei's transfer was not read for more than 13 hours.

Windsor told the coroner he did not check emails on his department-issued iPhone overnight on 25 August and did not see the email until he arrived at work at 8.30am on 26 August. Windsor said he was often called out of hours about emergency medical cases on Manus but was not called in Kehazaei's case.

He defended the delay before the coroner.

“The time it took me to put something forward was not something that would significantly delay the process,” Windsor said. “You could argue that the process could be streamlined so it didn’t have to pass through the hands of four officers. I would argue that the process worked well on many occasions.”

Kehazaei’s approval to travel was granted on the morning of 26 August and he was flown off the island at lunchtime that day. By this time, his condition had deteriorated so badly that he could no longer fly on a commercial flight but needed an air ambulance.

In defiance of doctors’ recommendation he be transferred immediately to Brisbane, he was instead taken to Port Moresby’s Pacific International Hospital. Overnight there, he suffered three heart attacks. The next morning – now unconscious – he was finally transferred to Brisbane.

He died eight days later without ever regaining consciousness, aged 24.

Costello, the department official who actually worked on Manus Island, told the coroner the process to move unwell asylum seekers would be improved by giving authority to department and medical staff on the island, rather than waiting on the imprimatur of non-medically trained staff in Canberra, which usually took days.

“I think one of the things that could be recommended is that the lead-on-island [the senior department official on Manus Island] could be given more autonomy to have that decision making ability and approval ability ... that could be beneficial.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/06/hamid-kehazaei-inquest-hears-immigration-bureaucracy-left-asylum-seeker-stranded-extra-day>

30. Hamid Kehazaei inquest told 'life-threatening' infection warning didn't seem urgent

Senior immigration department official says medical transfer request didn’t identify sepsis as an immediate risk

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 7 December 2016 17.47 AEDT

A doctor’s urgent request to transfer Hamid Kehazaei off Manus Island, warning he faced a risk of “life-threatening widespread systemic infection”, was not escalated by a senior immigration department official because it “did not paint a picture of urgency”, the inquest into his death has been told.

Amanda Little was the immigration department’s Canberra-based director of detention health operations on 25 August 2014 when a request was sent to her to move Kehazaei immediately to hospital because his condition was dramatically worsening despite 36 hours of antibiotic treatment for a bacterial infection.

Doctors on Manus Island were planning to move Kehazaei on a scheduled commercial flight, accompanied by a medical escort, at 5.30pm that afternoon.

An email, sent to Little at 1.15pm, requested Kehazaei’s “urgent medical transfer” from the island:

“There is a lack of microbiological investigative diagnostics at Lorengau [local hospital]. There is a lack of appropriate antibiotic treatment at Lorengau. This client has exhausted all antibiotic treatment that is available on Manus Island. The client is deteriorating despite treatment with antibiotics available. There are risks of the infection spreading, leading to sepsis – life-threatening widespread systemic infection.”

Little had been verbally told Kehazaei’s medical transfer request was imminent, but was in meetings for five hours that afternoon, and did not check her emails to see the request until a subordinate rang her to tell her about it.

She replied at 6.01pm, after the 5.30pm flight had left without Kehazaei on it, and without approval for him to be moved.

“I am wondering why this can’t be managed at Lorengau hospital [on Manus]? Even using something ‘unusual’ should be able to be managed locally. Is there a [drug] supply issue that we are unaware of? Again, these should be brought in, rather than the person being transferred if this is the case. DIBP staff on island are being pushed for this urgent transfer in the next 18 hours, however I don’t have adequate information to be able to escalate at this point if this is still warranted.”

Under questioning from Emily Cooper, the counsel assisting the coroner, Little said her response was not a disputation of the doctor’s recommendation.

“My questions are not challenging that statement, but seeking clarification,” Little said.

“Did that statement indicate any urgency at all to dealing with this request?” Cooper asked.

Little: “It paints a picture of the gentleman being unwell, it doesn’t paint a picture of urgency.”

Challenged that the medical request said Kehazaei faced a risk of “life-threatening widespread systemic infection”, Little said the risk was not “immediate”.

“The form ... didn’t state that it was an immediate risk, nor did it say Mr Kehazaei was suffering from sepsis.”

Stephen Keim SC, representing Kehazaei’s family, put it to Little that her “clarification” was not that, rather a rejection of the clinical advice and “denying the request for transfer”.

“I don’t agree with that,” Little said.

“And that by seeking clarification and delaying the transfer, you were ignoring the risk that had been clearly spelled out to you?”

“I don’t agree with that.”

Much of the coronial inquest has focused on the systemic bureaucratic delays in moving asylum seekers from offshore detention to hospital. Kehazaei was not moved off Manus Island for more than 60 hours after he first presented as unwell at the detention centre clinic, and more than 36 hours after his urgent transfer was first requested by doctors.

Little said the approval process for moving asylum seekers from offshore detention to hospital needed to be “escalated” through five immigration department officials “to ensure that the officer commanding Operation Sovereign Borders, and subsequently the minister, were aware of transferee movements”.

Former first assistant secretary of the department John Cahill – who was required to give ultimate authorisation for Kehazaei’s transfer – was asked by counsel assisting whether the initial urgent transfer request sent to Little was sufficient to approve the transfer without needing further clarification.

“Yes, I believe it would be ... in broad terms terms I would say it stands on it own.”

He said the process to transfer asylum seekers from Manus Island to hospital in Port Moresby could have been streamlined, rather than requests passing through four immigration department officials before coming to him. “I believe they could have been made more routinely without coming to my level,” he said.

Little ultimately escalated the request to move Kehazaei to her immediate superior, assistant secretary Paul Windsor, at 7.24pm. But he had gone home for the day and did not check his emails for 13 hours.

Kehazaei’s evacuation was ultimately approved on the morning of 26 August, by which time his condition had deteriorated so dramatically he could not fly on a commercial flight, but needed an air ambulance.

Kehazaei was now unable to walk or sit up, was moaning in pain, and was suffering from a lack of oxygen to his brain.

He was distressed and confused, doctors reported. He had pulled the intravenous lines from his arm, was combative with staff and was refusing to wear an oxygen mask.

He was also left, the inquest has heard, lying on a gurney in the sun at the Manus airfield, without shade.

In defiance of doctors’ recommendations Kehazaei be taken immediately to a Brisbane hospital, he was flown to Port Moresby’s Pacific International hospital.

There he suffered three heart attacks overnight before he was finally moved – now unconscious – to Brisbane’s Mater Hospital on 27 August.

He never regained consciousness. He was declared braindead on 2 September. On 5 September, his family gave permission for his life support machine to be turned off, with instructions his organs be donated.

The inquest continues.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/07/hamid-kehazaei-inquest-told-warning-infection-was-life-threatening-didnt-seem-urgent>