

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Friday, 10 November 2017

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1. Leading Aussies plea with PM Jacinda Ardern to save Manus refugees

New Zealand Herald
9 Nov, 2017 6:36pm

More than 60 prominent Australians have written to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern urging her to intervene on Manus Island, where over 600 desperate refugees without food or running water now face eviction by force within two days.

It comes as the Papua New Guinea authorities have written to the men, saying they can be moved by force to a site at East Lorengau within two days if the stand-off continues.

"This land will revert to PNG Defence Force and if you still remain here after demolition of the fences, you will be deemed to be unlawfully on a military base and will face eviction or arrest and prosecution," says a letter to the men from the PNG Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority.

It adds that the site is a serious health hazard with overflowing sewage, piles of rubbish, no running water, electricity or food.

More than 600 refugees have refused to leave the detention centre since it was shut down over a week ago, saying they fear for their safety.

Ardern has offered to take 150 refugees, which she took to her Australian counterpart Malcolm Turnbull during their meeting on Sunday. The offer was rejected but Ardern, who is on her way to Apec, said it remains on the table.

The situation, described as a humanitarian crisis, prompted a group of Australians to write to Ardern, including former ministers, heads of state departments, a former chief justice, professors, barristers, and refugee and surgeon Munjed Al Muderis.

The letter implores Ardern to bypass Australia and work directly with Papua New Guinea and the United Nations, an option that Ardern has so far declined.

"We urge you to actively pursue negotiations with the PNG Government and the UNHCR Regional Representative to resettle as many of the men from Manus Island as soon as possible," the letter says.

Former Family Court of Australia chief justice Alastair Nicholson said the situation "deepens my feelings of shame for my country", while former Department of Defence secretary Paul Barratt said it was a matter "of lasting shame that both our major political parties have failed to carry out their most basic obligations under the Refugee Convention".

The letter continues: "We acknowledge, with regret, the unfortunate necessity of writing to you to request that New Zealand step in to resolve this crisis when it is so clearly an Australian responsibility.

"The moral leadership New Zealand can take on this issue will increase the pressure on the Australian Government to work with resettlement countries to resolve the current crisis. We will do all in our power to assist you."

Yesterday morning, five Australians were arrested for attempting to unfurl banners on the roof of the Sydney Opera House saying "Evacuate Manus, bring them here" and "Australia: World leader in cruelty".

Signatories:

- Associate Professor Munjed Al Muderis, Orthopaedic surgeon
- Reverend Dr Sarah Bachelard, Founder, Benedictus Contemplative Church
- Rob Baker, Former public servant
- Greg Barns, Barrister
- Dr Cynthia Banham, Research Fellow, University of Queensland
- Paul Barratt AO, Former Secretary, Department of Defence
- Paul Bauert OAM FRACP, Paediatrician Representative, AMA Federal Council
- Dr Margaret Beavis, Immediate Past President, Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia)
- Professor Bill Bellw, School of Public Health, The University of Sydney
- Dr Jacoba Brasch QC, Barrister
- Fr Frank Brennan SJ AO, CEO, Catholic Social Services Australia
- Dr Alison Broinowski, Writer and former Australian diplomat
- Bishop George Browning, Former Bishop Canberra and Goulburn
- Julian Burnside AO QC, Barrister
- Robyn Cadwallader, Author
- Joseph Camilleri OAM, Emeritus Professor, La Trobe University
- Benadict Coyne, President, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
- Ian Dunlop, Director Australia 21, Fellow, Centre for Policy Development
- Dr Susan Ennis, Researcher and ESL Teacher of Refugees

- David C Fahl, Barrister
- Michelle Fahy, Human rights advocate
- John Falzon, CEO, National Council, St Vincent de Paul Society
- Andrew Farran, International lawyer
- David Farrow, Former Manager, Australian Volunteers Program, PNG (ret'd)
- Michael Hamel-Green, Emeritus Professor, Victoria University Melbourne
- Rev Belinda Groves, Minister, Canberra Baptist Church
- Dale Hess, Executive Secretary, The Arnold Foundation
- Khanh Hoang and Scott Cosgriff, Co-chairs, Refugee Rights Subcommittee, Australian Lawyers for Human Rights
- Dr Deborah Hunn, School of Media Culture and Creative Arts, Curtin University
- Josephina Jordan, Presiding Clerk of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia
- Stephen Keim SC, Barrister-at-Law
- Harry Kerr, Convenor, Pax Christi, Victoria
- Barry Kissane, Emeritus Associate Professor, Murdoch University, WA
- John Langmore, Professorial Fellow, University of Melbourne
- Carmen Lawrence, Winthrop Professor, University of Western Australia
- Marion Le AM, Registered Migration Agent; specialist in International Law and Refugee Resettlement
- Dr Ibolya Losoncz, Research Fellow, Australian National University
- Julie Lyford OAM, Chair, Groundswell Gloucester
- Jake Lynch, Associate Professor, Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Sydney
- Dr Chris McGrath, Barrister
- Jeff McMullen AM, Journalist, Author, Film-maker
- John Menadue AO, Former Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
- Dr John Minns, Australian National University
- Rebecca Minty, Human Rights lawyer
- Dr David Morawetz, Founder and Director, Social Justice Fund
- Professor Philomena Murray, The University of Melbourne
- The Honourable Alastair Nicholson AO RFD QC, Former Chief Justice, Family Court of Australia, Chair, Children's Rights International
- Dr Jill Parris, Counselling Psychologist
- Professor Alison Phipps OBE, UNESCO Chair Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts
- Professor John Polesel, The University of Melbourne
- Beverley Polzin, Peace & Social Justice Network, Religious Society of Friends (Victoria)
- Marc Purcell, CEO, Australian Council For International Development
- Kathy Ragless AM, Director, Companion House
- Stuart Rees, Emeritus Professor, University of Sydney
- Deborah Rice, Director, Australia21
- Franklin Rosenfeldt FRACS, Adjunct Professor, Swinburne University of Technology
- Sue Salthouse, Chair, Women With Disabilities ACT
- Professor Ben Saul, Challis Chair of International Law, University of Sydney
- Anand Shah, Barrister-at-Law
- Jon Stanhope AO, Former Chief Minister, Australian Capital Territory
- Lorel Thomas, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), Victoria Regional Meeting
- Johan Top, Project Manager
- Kellie Tranter, Lawyer and human rights activist
- Dr Sue Wareham OAM, President, Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia)
- John Warhurst AO, Emeritus Professor, Australian National University
- Dr Helen Watchirs OAM, President and Human Rights Commissioner, ACT Human Rights Commission
- Matthew Zagor, Associate Professor, ANU College of Law

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11942353

2. Nick McKim: Australia's migrant catastrophe is proving Trump right

Washington Post

By Nick McKim

November 4 at 5:12 PM

PAPUA NEW GUINEA – On Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, the Australian government is creating a humanitarian catastrophe.

More than 600 men, mostly from the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, have been imprisoned there for over four years. This Australian government has shut off their food, electricity, medication and drinking water. Over 20 percent of them are clinically depressed or suffer from post-traumatic disorders and have had their access to crucial psychotropic medication cut off. It's over 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) every day, choking with humidity and swarming with mosquitoes. The men have resorted to digging holes for water and adding hoarded salt and sugar to the water they do get.

The deprivations they have suffered have taken a massive toll on their physical and mental health. They have witnessed murder, riots, beatings and suicides. They have been attacked by locals and have come under machine-gun attack from Papua New Guinea navy personnel. These men have fled war and persecution — some are Rohingya Muslims, fleeing violence in Burma. Australia is just compounding their trauma.

The Papua New Guinea Supreme Court declared the Manus Island prison illegal last year. Rather than accept its ruling and bring the men to safety and freedom in Australia, the Australian government set an arbitrary date for closure. There is not enough safe or suitable accommodation elsewhere on the island. The men have resisted being relocated to the nearby town of Lorengau because it is simply not safe for them there. Multiple knife and machete attacks by locals, some so serious that the victims have required medical evacuation to Papua New Guinea's capital, Port Moresby, for treatment, have made them too scared to come out.

So they are determined to resist, because despite the obvious threats to their life and health, they genuinely believe their Manus Island prison is the least unsafe place for them to be.

How on earth did this humanitarian emergency happen? The past 16 years of Australia's treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum have been a foul stain on our national conscience. It began in 2001, when a group of 433 asylum seekers were rescued from drowning at sea by the Norwegian freighter MV Tampa. A terrible standoff followed when the Tampa was banned from entering Australian waters for many weeks. The Liberal government, fearing the electoral threat posed by the white-nationalist One Nation party, created the "Pacific Solution."

It involved sending people who arrived by boat seeking asylum to offshore detention centers — Australia's Southern Hemisphere version of rendition. These detention centers, on Manus Island and the tiny Pacific island nation of Nauru, were designed to be as harsh and inhospitable as possible. They were deliberately meant to inflict serious harm to persuade other desperate people to seek safety elsewhere. In other words, they were designed to torture.

Years of international condemnation of Australia followed, and the policy of offshore detention was abandoned in 2008, when the Labor Party came back into power. But with the flow of boats increasing and under sustained attack from Rupert Murdoch's media and right-wing extremists, Labor caved and reopened Manus Island in 2012.

Offshore detention and boat turn-backs are, and always have been, driven by racism and xenophobia. In 2011, then-immigration spokesman Scott Morrison urged his colleagues in government to capitalize on concerns about "Muslim immigration," "Muslims in Australia" and the "inability" of Muslim migrants to integrate. It's no mere coincidence that neo-Nazis and far-right extremists across Europe have become cheerleaders for the Australian government's slogans and imagery.

In 2013, facing electoral oblivion, then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd promised that no asylum seeker who arrived by boat would ever settle in Australia. It failed in saving his political career but succeeded in delivering years of mass human suffering and misery. We simply do not know how many people have drowned, or were returned to suffer or die at their persecutors' hands, because of Australia's actions. The detention centers are remote and inaccessible by design, so the disgraceful treatment of men, women and children can be hidden from the world. The government claims that the policy is designed to prevent drowning at sea, but the grim reality is that all it has achieved is to get the deaths off our television screens.

Beyond the inhumane relocation policy now, my country is in the process of militarizing its borders. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship was renamed the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Customs and immigration services were merged to create the Australian Border Force, complete with all-black uniforms, new weapons and draconian powers. The immigration department spends more on medals each year than the Australian military, rewarding the Border Force with bling for the delivery of torture and human misery.

Some of the refugees may be relocated to the United States. New Zealand has offered to accept 150 of them, but to date the Australian government has refused its generosity. But after 1,700 days of hell, the lives of 600 people now hang in the balance as their situation becomes direr by the hour.

President Trump recently told our prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, "You are worse than I am" over our treatment of migrants and refugees. By his abandonment of the men on Manus Island, Turnbull has proved Trump right.

---->>>> *Sen. Nick McKim is the Australian Green Party's spokesman for immigration and justice. He has been to Manus Island three times to support the detainees and raise awareness of their plight.*

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/11/04/australias-migrant-catastrophe-is-proving-trump-right>

3. Serco a high-risk client with history of failures, offshore law firm found

The Guardian
Christopher Knaus
Tuesday 7 November 2017 05.16 AEDT

Appleby, at centre of Paradise Papers leak, ran risk assessment before agreeing to help firm set up holding company in Mauritius

An offshore law firm regarded Serco, a company that runs sensitive government services in Australia and the UK, as a “high-risk” client, expressing concern about its “history of problems, failures, fatal errors and overcharging”, the Paradise Papers reveal.

Chief among the law firm’s concerns about Serco were allegations of fraud, the cover-up of the abuse of detainees, and the mishandling of radioactive waste.

The concerns are outlined in the Paradise Papers, based on millions of documents from two offshore service providers and the company registries of 19 tax havens, which were obtained by the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung and shared by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists with partners including the Guardian.

They have prompted Serco’s critics to question the appropriateness of having the company provide critical services on behalf of the Australian and UK governments.

Serco runs 11 of Australia’s onshore immigration detention centres, including on Christmas Island, and is regularly contracted for defence projects.

It has been asked to provide 250 staff to Australia’s troubled phone support system for welfare recipients, and will build and run the country’s largest private prison, in Grafton, New South Wales. Elsewhere, it runs private prisons in Western Australia and Queensland, provides non-clinical services in hospitals and is building Australia’s next Antarctic discovery vessel, or icebreaker, which it will go on to operate.

The company was founded in the UK, where it is based, and had revenues of £3bn last year. In Britain, it operates six adult prisons and the Yarl’s Wood immigration detention centre, helps manage healthcare facilities and provides critical support services to the military.

Serco first approached Appleby through a London law firm on 1 September 2015, asking for help to “establish a subsidiary in Mauritius to acquire 49% of a company in Abu Dhabi”.

It would later use the Mauritius company solely to facilitate part of a major sale of its business interests in the Middle East and India.

Serco has flatly denied that the structure was used to help it avoid tax, and the Guardian is not suggesting the company acted unlawfully in any way.

The request prompted a flurry of activity within the Appleby compliance arm. The team began running its standard checks on the risks Serco could pose as a client.

The results were less than convincing. Appleby’s compliance team found what they described as a “history of blunders and controversies surrounding many of its contracts”, including through its involvement in Obamacare and the running of prisons in Australia and New Zealand.

“It has a history of problems, failures, fatal errors and overcharging,” a senior Appleby compliance officer wrote.

At the time, the company was under investigation by the UK’s Serious Fraud Office for billing the government for the electronic monitoring of criminals who were either still behind bars or dead. It paid back £68.5m to the government over the scandal, but was later cleared of fraud.

Serco, it was noted, was part of a consortium the UK’s Office for Nuclear Regulation had accused of breaching its responsibilities for the handling of radioactive waste. It had also presented false data to the NHS 252 times, was accused of fraudulent record keeping and had allegedly manipulated results when it failed to meet targets, the compliance team warned.

“The company is alleged to have covered up the sexual abuse of immigrants in Yarl’s Wood removal centre,” the compliance officer wrote.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/nov/06/serco-a-high-risk-client-with-history-of-failures-offshore-law-firm-found>

4. Turnbull says Manus detainees aren't scared, just manipulated by 'activists in Australia'

PM dismisses fears of refugees too afraid to leave compound and says people smugglers would take advantage of New Zealand's offer to take refugees

The Guardian

Gareth Hutchens

Tuesday 7 November 2017 10.26 AEDT

Malcolm Turnbull has dismissed the fears of refugees who are too scared to leave Australia's now-abandoned detention centre in Papua New Guinea, instead claiming they are being encouraged to stay there by refugee advocates and the Greens.

He has also rejected New Zealand's offer to take 150 refugees off Australia's hands, saying he would like the Australia-United States resettlement deal to be exhausted before considering that option.

He said one of the main reasons why New Zealand had the capacity to make that offer was because it had been a "prime beneficiary" of Australia's strong border protection policies which had stopped asylum seekers entering New Zealand waters in recent years.

"Do you know we have intercepted and turned back boats which were heading to New Zealand?" Turnbull said on Tuesday.

"The only reason New Zealand does not have thousands of people arriving in an unauthorised way on their shores is because of our border protection policies. New Zealand is a prime beneficiary from our strong border protection policies."

Turnbull was speaking on the ABC's Radio National program.

He was asked about the hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers who have barricaded themselves inside PNG's Manus Island detention centre, which was closed last Tuesday.

Electricity was shut off to the final compounds last Wednesday morning, more than 12 hours after the scheduled 5pm shutdown, and the generator was removed. Food, water and other essential services had already been stopped, and all staff left early on Tuesday last week.

The asylum seekers still living in the compound have pleaded for Australia to come to their aid, saying they are too scared to leave the compound to seek alternative accommodation in the main township out of fear they will be attacked by locals.

Turnbull was asked if he accepted the proposition that they were scared to leave, and he dismissed the idea.

"I think the reality is, and this is the very sad reality, there are some activists in Australia, including the Greens senator Nick McKim, who are basically encouraging these people not to move," Turnbull said.

"I think that the responsible course of action is to encourage them to comply with the lawful requests and requirements of the PNG authorities."

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, said last week three alternative locations for the detainees were much better facilities than the now-closed centre. He also claimed activists were telling the asylum seekers to remain in the mothballed compound.

Greens senator Nick McKim said Turnbull's claim that he had encouraged the refugees at the former Manus Island detention to stay put was false.

"Despite years of torture at his government's hands, these men still have free agency," McKim said.

"They have made their own decisions, and I and many others have simply supported them in the choices they have made. I will keep doing so, because it is their lives which are at risk.

"Turnbull's accusations are a desperate attempt to deflect from the fact that he is trampling all over the basic human rights of people in his care."

Turnbull said if Australia accepted New Zealand's offer to resettle 150 refugees immediately it would be used as a marketing tool by people smugglers, because they view Australia and New Zealand as essentially the same country.

"It would be marketed by the people smugglers as a backdoor to Australia. Let's be quite clear about this," he said.

"Everything the Greens and people on the left of the Labor party say about this is used as marketing by the people smugglers."

"They're saying to these people 'Don't budge, don't budge, get lots of pictures on the Australian news, the ABC is giving it a big run' – I'm not criticising you for covering it, but you know – they'll say 'It's getting a big run in the Australian media, and before too long the Australian government will weaken and allow you to come to Australia'," he said.

"That will then be the big opportunity, the marketing opportunity that the people smugglers [want]."

Human Rights Watch recently detailed an upsurge in violent attacks on refugees and asylum seekers by groups of armed locals. On Tuesday last week there were multiple reports of looting by locals after staff abandoned the centre.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/07/turnbull-says-manus-detainees-arent-scared-just-manipulated-by-activists-in-australia>

5. 'We don't want to see any violence': Peter Dutton's warning as PNG authorities dismantle Manus

Canberra Times

Fergus Hunter

Friday 10 November 2017 - 3:59PM

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton says the Australian government does not want any violence on Manus Island after Papua New Guinean authorities threatened to forcibly evict hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers from the now-decommissioned detention centre.

On Friday, PNG officials began dismantling makeshift shelters and emptying water supplies used by the detainees over the 10 days since the centre was shut down. The government has called on the men to leave by Saturday and warned that "force may be used" if they don't comply voluntarily.

Mr Dutton has also cautioned that, according to the government's intelligence, the ongoing stand-off is being closely monitored by people in south-east Asia looking for a chance to travel to Australia aboard a people smuggling boat.

"We've got group of core agitators, of organisers, who I think will try and provide some sort of scene where there is a confrontation with police. They will do that because they want that footage broadcast back here," the Immigration Minister told radio station 3AW on Friday.

He made clear Australia would not be shifting its policies and said the government, in consultations with PNG over the Manus shutdown, had "made it very clear we don't want to see any violence, we want to see people move voluntarily".

Since Thursday, local authorities have been removing the security fencing surrounding the compound and the detainees' improvised facilities.

"Police and Immigration destroyed our shelters. Inside the rooms is very hot without power for fans. We built these shelters to provide shade and cover from tropical sun and rain," Kurdish-Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani said from inside the centre.

"They destroyed the rubbish bins where we have been collecting water too."

Detainees have been refusing to relocate to new "transit centres" established closer to the island's main town of Lorengau. While the Australian and PNG governments insist they are ready for an influx of 600 people, refugee advocates and UN refugee agency UNHCR have disputed this.

The protesting men – the vast majority of whom have refugee status – have cited fears for their safety around Lorengau and their desperation for permanent resettlement in a third country.

Fresh footage and images – covertly captured by activist group GetUp! and published on Friday – has laid bare the brutal squalor that has developed inside the decommissioned compound since its power, water, food and sanitation services were terminated on October 31.

Dismissing the new material, Mr Dutton suggested the detainees had intentionally "trashed the accommodation".

"The conditions we see in the photographs today do not resemble at all the conditions in which people have been living over a long period of time," he said.

Amid renewed calls for the detainees to be evacuated, Mr Dutton said: "All of the intelligence that I see and there's chatter at the moment up in Indonesia and elsewhere ... says people are watching this very closely and their view is that if they can hold it out on Manus or Nauru for a couple of years and then come to Australia, that's worth paying the people smugglers for."

A spokeswoman for UN refugee agency UNHCR, which has been visiting Manus in recent days, warned that "forced movement of these refugees and asylum seekers is inappropriate and should be avoided".

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/we-dont-want-to-see-any-violence-peter-duttons-warning-as-png-authorities-dismantle-manus-20171110-gzixpl.html>

6. Australia should bring Manus and Nauru refugees to immediate safety, UN says

UN human rights committee says mandatory detention policy is unlawful and Australia cannot 'pick and choose' which international laws it follows

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Friday 10 November 2017 10.13 AEDT

Australia remains responsible for the people held in its offshore detention regimes on Manus Island and Nauru, and should immediately close the centres and bring refugees and asylum seekers to Australia or another safe country, the United Nations human rights committee has told the government.

In an excoriating report, the expert committee said it was concerned about the conditions in the offshore immigration processing facilities in Manus Island and Nauru, which also holds children, "including inadequate mental health services, serious safety concerns and instances of assault, sexual abuse, self-harm and suspicious deaths; and about reports that harsh conditions compelled some asylum seekers to return to their country of origin despite the risks that they face there".

Instances of refugees and asylum seekers being encouraged to return to places where they might face danger – a breach of Australia's non-refoulement obligations under international law - have previously been reported by the Guardian.

At the height of the Myanmar military's "ethnic cleansing" operation against the minority Muslim Rohingya population, Rohingya held in Australia's offshore regime were being encouraged to return to Myanmar with offers of up to \$25,000 in cash if they abandoned their claim for protection.

The human rights committee – an 18-member expert panel – said Australia exercised "effective control" over the offshore regime and should close it immediately.

Australia should end the practice of "offshore processing", immediately close Nauru and Manus Island, and "take all measures necessary to protect the rights of refugees and asylum seekers affected ... ensure their transfer to Australia or their relocation to other appropriate safe countries".

The committee said Australia's policy of mandatory – and in some cases indefinite – detention of asylum seekers was unlawful. Mandatory detention, including of children, was instituted by the Keating Labor government in 1992 as a temporary measure. A 273-day time limit on detention was abandoned in 1994.

During hearings last month, Australia was castigated for its routine refusals to implement the findings of the committee.

Prof Yuval Shany, the committee's vice-chair, said it was "unacceptable" for Australia to "routinely reject" the committee's views or "self-judge" international human rights treaties, telling Australia it could not "pick and choose" which laws it followed and which rights it wanted to uphold.

The committee also condemned Australia's "marginalising and stigmatising" postal survey on marriage equality, saying it was "not an acceptable decision-making method"; the low age (as young as 10) of criminal responsibility in some states; and the persistently high rates of Indigenous incarceration, in particular mandatory sentencing laws, and allowing imprisonment for fine defaults.

Australia's confronting appraisal comes as its asylum policies reach new domestic and international attention.

Australia was last month elected – in an uncontested "clean slate" poll – to the powerful UN human rights council, but the ascension brought criticism of its sustained breaches of international human rights laws.

And refugees and asylum seekers in the Manus Island detention centre are currently embroiled in a standoff with Australian and Papua New Guinea authorities who are attempting to force them to move to new accommodation in the Manus community.

Men have been living more than a week without food, running water, electricity or medicine. The UN high commissioner for refugees has described the situation as a "humanitarian emergency".

Several attacks and incidents have marred recent months and the 600 men refusing to leave say they are not safe in the local community. Independent observers say the proposed new housing is inadequate and unfinished.

PNG immigration has given the men until Saturday to accede to moving, or face being forcibly removed.

The Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, blamed refugee advocates for the impasse, saying they were “encouraging these people not to move”.

“I think that the responsible course of action is to encourage them to comply with the lawful requests and requirements of the PNG authorities,” he said.

GetUp’s human rights co-director Shen Narayanasamy, who spent time inside the now-closed detention centre, said death or serious illness was inevitable in coming days.

“The conditions are appalling and it’s obvious you wouldn’t choose to stay here if you thought you could be safer elsewhere.

“There is a great threat of violence from the PNG army, and the Manus island community has made it very clear it doesn’t want the men to move into accommodation closer to town.”

The executive director of the Human Rights Law Centre, Hugh de Kretser, said Manus remained on a knife edge, and Australia was responsible for protecting those held there.

“Instead, the Australian government has cut food, power and water. These innocent men are in great danger but they have nowhere safe to go. They’re terrified of violence if they stay. They’re terrified of violence if they leave. These men deserve a future, but instead of bringing them to safety, our government is trying to bludgeon them into returning to persecution or moving from one dead-end camp to another.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/10/australia-should-bring-manus-and-瑙鲁-refugees-to-immediate-safety-un-says>

7. Manus Island police begin destroying shelters housing refugees

Immigration officials and police enter compounds to tear down makeshift facilities as secret footage reveals squalor inside closed detention centre

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and agencies
Friday 10 November 2017 16.50 AEDT

Papua New Guinean immigration officials and police have started destroying makeshift shelters built by about 600 refugees and asylum seekers who refuse to relocate from the now closed Manus Island detention centre.

The initial efforts to dismantle the camp started on Friday, a day before a slated deadline for forcible removal that Prime Minister Peter O’Neill warned of on Thursday.

Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani said: “Police and immigration destroyed our shelters. Inside the rooms is very hot with power for fans. We built these shelters to provide shade and cover from tropical sun and rain.”

Boochani told the Guardian the officials pulled down shelters in Oscar camp and then left, before returning to destroy the same facilities in Delta compound. They also destroyed the rubbish bins that were used to store water. The raids passed without violence, he said.

Thunderstorms are predicted for Manus Island with the temperature hitting 30C and high humidity.

Almost 60 refugees and asylum seekers had already voluntarily boarded buses and trucks to be taken to new accommodation on Friday as a result of the operation, said Police Chief Superintendent Dominic Kakas.

“Police and military personnel from the naval base... are at the centre facilitating the smooth and orderly movement of refugees to their new location. Progress of the relocation is going well and smoothly,” he said.

Manus province police commander David Yapu said the relocation of refugees and asylum seekers would be “conducted smoothly and orderly without use of force”.

On Thursday, PNG immigration officials told the 600 refugees and asylum seekers still refusing to leave the camp that they had two days to accede to leaving, before facing before forcibly removed. Many on the island expect police – including the notorious PNG police mobile squad – to move in sometime on Saturday.

In Australia, immigration minister Peter Dutton accused the refugees and asylum seekers of destroying their own accommodation to make conditions look as bad as possible. “They have trashed the accommodation ... the conditions we see in the photographs today do not resemble at all the conditions in which people have been living over a long period of time.

“This is like having a tenant in a ... house and asking them to move in six months’ time into a new house. We cut off water, power to the old house and we are paying for you to go to the new house. We will give you meals, with all of the security and medical needs you could need and people say ‘no, I will not leave the old house, I am going to stay here’. And trashed the place and then put images out of that.”

Australia’s department of immigration has said that the men who are refusing to leave the detention centre were doing so voluntarily. “We categorically reject all claims that this represents a ‘humanitarian emergency’ as has been alleged in some quarters. Refugees and failed asylum seekers staying at the RPC [regional processing centre] site are making an informed choice to do so, and have been provided with information and assurances from the PNG government that facilities are ready and waiting at alternative locations.”

The 600 men refusing to leave and settle in new accommodation in the Manus community say they are not safe in the local community. Independent observers say the proposed new housing is inadequate and unfinished.

New footage showing the cramped and unhygienic conditions inside the detention centre has emerged. The United Nations high commissioner for refugees has described the situation there as a “humanitarian emergency”.

The footage was filmed by Australian non-government organisation GetUp! and shows men sleeping outside on tables to escape the heat inside. It also shows a lack of basic sanitation including running water or washing facilities and how the men have uilt wells to stay hydrated.

It has been nine days since the the Australian government cut off the food, water, medical assistance and electricity to the refugees at the centre.

GetUp spent eight hours in the camp after being smuggled in under the cover of darkness by Manus Islanders.

GetUp’s human rights co-director, Shen Narayanasamy, who spent time inside the now-closed detention centre, said death or serious illness was inevitable in coming days.

“The conditions are appalling and it’s obvious you wouldn’t choose to stay here if you thought you could be safer elsewhere.

“There is a great threat of violence from the PNG army, and the Manus island community has made it very clear it doesn’t want the men to move into accommodation closer to town.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/10/secret-footage-reveals-squalor-inside-closed-manus-detention-centre>

8. The refugee who wants to stay on Manus Island

Canberra Times
Thursday November 9 2017 - 7:48PM
Richard Baker, Nick McKenzie

Alex Rashid is, in some ways, a poster boy for Australian policy on Manus Island.

He holds out no forlorn hope of settling in Australia. Nor does he want to move to the United States or New Zealand. He wants to settle in Manus permanently.

The problem is, he cannot afford the immigration fees, has no idea how to navigate the process, and says the Australian government is providing no help at all.

Mr Rashid fled Burma by boat more than four years ago to escape the persecution of the Rohingya minority that he was born into. Now, as the Australian government hoped all the Manus refugees would, he wants to stay on Manus Island. Forever.

"My life is a beautiful life. I have two babies, my wife, my family is here," the 26-year-old said.

Mr Rashid lives with his family and is not involved in the increasingly tense standoff at the former Australian-funded processing centre. But hours after the Fairfax Media interview, the Papua New Guinea authorities threatened to dismantle fences around the centre and forcibly remove asylum seekers still inside.

The PNG Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority warned those remaining that it was in a "very unhygienic state" and "a health hazard". Fairfax Media understands video footage taken by activist group GetUp in recent days confirms the deplorable conditions.

Mr Rashid is fighting a different battle: to become a PNG citizen.

Speaking to Fairfax Media on Thursday and filmed last weekend by GetUp, Mr Rashid said the process of being re-settled in PNG was proving far more difficult than the Australian Government had made it out to be.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said in April that PNG had a "responsibility to settle" legitimate refugees who opted to remain after closure of the Australian-funded centre.

But Mr Rashid said the Australian-funded support programs never provided him with advice on how to achieve PNG citizenship nor any financial assistance to meet the \$4000 application fee.

He had, however, had three meetings set up for him with United States officials to discuss resettlement.

"But I don't want to go there. My future is in PNG," he said.

Mr Rashid's journey has been a long and dangerous one. After witnessing murder, rape and burning villages in Burma, he fled by boat and ended up at Christmas Island. He was then transferred to Manus Island.

For his first two years, he was "without hope, without wishes, nothing".

Everything changed when he met a local woman named Molly. They fell in love and married. More good news arrived when PNG accepted his status as a genuine refugee in August 2015.

A letter from PNG's then immigration minister, Rimbink Pato, outlined a process to apply for a visa and identity document to "prepare for life in PNG".

Two years later, Mr Rashid is again concerned about his future. His travel permit and identity document have not been renewed by PNG authorities since they expired in January. This means he cannot travel to see his mother in Yangon.

"I cannot see, I cannot touch, I cannot feel," he said.

Mr Rashid said it was hard for him not to feel let down by Australia. He thought that by opting to remain in PNG, he was doing what Australia wanted.

"I just want Australia's help to stay here and start a life with my family. Nothing else. Please help me," he said.

A Department of Immigration and Border Protection spokesman said on Thursday that "refugee settlement and citizenship in PNG is a matter for the PNG Government".

The refugees and asylum seekers still at the processing centre say they need to remain because the alternative facilities are unsafe. The government dismisses this, saying they are ready, and that many of those refusing to move are regular visitors to the nearby township.

Senior Australian government sources said PNG authorities were reluctant to use force, despite warning they would. The PNG government strategy, quietly supported by the Federal Government, appears to be to weaken resolve among those holding out at the decommissioned centre by denying essential services and encouraging small groups to break ranks.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/the-refugee-who-wants-to-stay-on-manus-island-20171109-gzi917.html>

9. 'You have two days': PNG authorities prepare to forcibly remove Manus detainees

Canberra Times
Thursday November 9 2017 - 3:23PM
Fergus Hunter

Almost 600 men still holed up in the Manus Island detention centre are bracing for confrontation after being given two days to relocate to new accommodation and Papua New Guinean authorities warning them "force may be used" if they do not leave voluntarily.

A notice issued at the now-decommissioned centre on Thursday said the facility was returning to PNG defence force control and declared the detainees had no legal justification to stay following the Supreme Court's ruling on Tuesday they should move to the new "transit centres".

"If necessary, force may be used to relocate those who refuse to move voluntarily for your own sake," the notice from PNG's Immigration and Citizenship Service Authority said.

"Demolition of fences will commence today and your security and safety here is not guaranteed...This land will revert to [defence force control] and if you still remain here after demolition of the fences, you will be deemed to be unlawfully on a military base and will face eviction or arrest and prosecution."

Human rights advocates warned a confrontation would put lives at risk and called for services to be restored at the detention centre.

"Any use of force in this highly charged environment is likely to lead to serious injury or loss of life," Amnesty International's Pacific researcher Kate Scheutze, who recently visited the island, said.

"There is a clear, alternative course of action. Services must be restored until a safe and dignified solution to the situation is agreed, one that respect the rights of the refugees."

The notice from the PNG government said a health inspector had examined the site on Monday and was concerned about the health effects on the men of living among "overflowing sewerage, heaps of rubbish, no clean running water, no electricity and no food".

"He has instructed that this place be evacuated immediately," the notice said, emphasising "it is NOT our desire to see anyone of you get evicted by force".

The men have been refusing to leave the facility since its closure on October 31. The stand-off has been labelled an "unfolding humanitarian emergency" by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

A dispute over the standard of new facilities has persisted. While the Australian and PNG governments insist they are ready for an influx of 600 people, refugee advocates and UN refugee agency UNHCR have disputed this.

The protesting men – the vast majority of whom have refugee status – have cited fears for their safety closer to the island's main town of Lorengau, and their desperation for permanent resettlement in a third country.

Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani told Fairfax Media the use of force was "completely unacceptable".

"We are not doing anything wrong, we are only resisting peacefully. We are asking again for freedom in a safe third country," he said from inside the centre.

Lawyers representing Boochani have lodged an appeal with the PNG Supreme Court against its rejection this week of an application to restore operations at the compound.

Australian barrister Greg Barns, advising the legal team, said the court's decision was made using inadequate information about the standard of the new facilities and failed to acknowledge Boochani's "very real" fear of violence if moved to Lorengau.

Mr Barns also said the PNG government's threats "show a complete contempt for the rule of law and amount to a very serious interference with the justice process" as the court considers an appeal.

On Thursday, Manus detainees were told all basic services were up and running at the new facilities and "security is available at both locations to ensure your safety is guaranteed" with a "regular police presence".

UNHCR spokeswoman Catherine Stubberfield said on Wednesday that substantive parts of the new accommodation were "still not ready" and Elaine Pearson, Australia director of Human Rights Watch, said detainees had been "repeatedly robbed and assaulted" in Lorengau.

Two of the facilities have been established for those who have been granted refugee status, while the third is for the approximately 200 men who have not.

PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill insisted on Wednesday that the original centre would not be reopened and said the government had to intervene for the wellbeing of detainees.

"Those involved in disruption have been identified and appropriate means will be used to apprehend individuals who are causing unnecessary anxiety and violence," Mr O'Neill said in a statement.

Australian Immigration Minister Peter Dutton also insisted the Turnbull government "won't be backing down".

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/you-have-two-days-png-authorities-prepare-to-forcibly-remove-manus-detainees-20171109-gzhxtf.html>

10. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus fences being dismantled

Thursday November 9, 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Within a couple of hours of a notice being handed to the refugees inside the Manus detention centre, fences around the Mike Compound have begun to be taken down.

Reducing the security around the centre will only raise the detainees' fears of being attacked even further. It was through the Mike fences that PNG locals and staff attacked the asylum seekers in 2014. It was in Mike Compound that Reza Barati was killed and scores of others were savagely bashed.

The moves to dismantle the fences comes as it is revealed that there are no proper security in the areas that the government is trying to force the refugees to move to.

The point that the refugees have made over and over again, is that the Lorengau settlement area is not safe. There is a fence around the East Lorengau facility but because people are forced to go to the Lorengau settlement area for food and medications, they are vulnerable to attack. And the attacks are frequent and brutal.

Despite more lies from Peter Dutton about the state of the other two facilities, Hillside Haus and West Lorengau Haus - even the Murdoch press have revealed there are not even perimeter fences around them.

"Removing the fence around Mike shows the contempt that the Australian and the PNG governments have for the security of refugees who are in their care and need protection. Defenceless people just became more vulnerable. It is a form of psychological torture," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"It also shows the contempt for the governments' responsibility to provide permanent security for the refugees and asylum seekers. Their demand is for enduring protection in a safe, third country. Many of those who have been deemed negative have never submitted a refugee claim in PNG, because they claimed protection from Australia when they arrived in 2013.

"The PNG government has no right to detain the people on Manus. The PNG and Australian governments are in contempt of the PNG Supreme Court ruling in 2016, which reads in part, 'Naturally it follows that the forceful bringing into and detention of the asylum seekers in MIPC is unconstitutional and therefore illegal.' Their on-going detention on Manus is illegal.

"The government has created a humanitarian disaster on Manus Island; it needs to urgently end the siege, and bring the refugees and asylum seekers here, to provide the security they need."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

11. Asylum seekers told to relocate from PNG detention centre or 'force may be used'

ABC News Online
By Liam Fox in PNG, staff
Thursday November 9, 2017

The men refusing to leave the Manus Island detention centre have been warned they have two days to leave the site or force may be used to relocate them.

A notice put up by Papua New Guinea immigration authorities instructs the men to leave the centre immediately because of unhygienic conditions.

The notice says the men have been given two days to move and warns "force may be used to relocate those who refuse to move voluntarily".

"You cannot continue to remain here in this condition," the notice says.

"It is very bad for your health and wellbeing if you continue to refuse to move to your new accommodation where there is food, water and other services."

The notice says the demolition of fences around the centre will begin today and that the safety and security of the men inside "is not guaranteed".

Around 600 men are still in the detention centre eight days after it was officially closed and food, power and water supplies cut off, saying they fear for their safety at the new facilities.

"Security is available at both locations to ensure your safety is guaranteed. There will also be a regular police presence," the message says.

"It is not our desire to see anyone of you get evicted by force and we sincerely ask you to co-operate with us and move to your new accommodation TODAY before demolition."

Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected an application to restore basic services to the Manus Island centre, with Chief Justice Sir Salamo Injia finding the alternative accommodation was "of good standard" and allowed for free movement.

Refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani on Thursday tweeted "police mobile squad and immigration officers are inside the prison camp" handing the message to refugees.

He said workers had begun removing the fences from Mike compound and refugees were "watching them fearfully".

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had called for services to be restored at the centre to end the "unfolding humanitarian emergency".

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-09/manus-island-centre-men-told-to-relocate-or-force-may-be-used/9134472>

12. Manus standoff 'ringleaders' threatened by Papua New Guinea prime minister

Peter O'Neill says men will be removed by force and apprehended, as refugees and asylum seekers warned they have two days to leave detention centre

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thursday 9 November 2017 15.06 AEDT

The alleged "ringleaders" of the standoff at the Manus Island detention centre have been publicly threatened by the Papua New Guinean prime minister with being "apprehended" and forcibly removed to new accommodation.

A notice posted inside the detention centre on Thursday afternoon said refugees and asylum seekers had two days to move or face eviction.

"If necessary, force may be used to relocate those who refuse to move voluntarily," the message warns. Members of PNG's paramilitary "mobile squad" are already on the island.

The PNG prime minister, Peter O'Neill, who has long resented the Manus camp's imposition on the remote province, said the centre had closed and those refusing to leave it must go.

"Those involved in disruption have been identified and appropriate means will be used to apprehend individuals who are causing unnecessary anxiety and violence.

"Their actions are now heading towards a law and order situation, as well as a hygiene and sanitation problem, and it will be dealt with as such."

O'Neill said the detention centre would not be reopened after being officially closed on Tuesday last week. The PNG supreme court ruled last year the detention of the men there was "illegal and unconstitutional".

"The centre will not be reopened and it will be returned to its former function as a defence force facility.

"Given the supreme court's decision, the government has no choice but to intervene for the wellbeing of both the refugees and non-refugees."

The message posted inside the detention centre said refugees and asylum seekers were being urged to leave immediately, but that they had two days to move before they were forcibly removed.

"You cannot continue to remain here in this condition. It is very bad for your health and wellbeing if you continue to refuse to move to your new accommodation where there is food, water, electricity and other services," the message, signed by PNG immigration officials, says.

"It is not our desire to see any one of you evicted by force and we sincerely ask you to cooperate with us ... If necessary force may be used to relocate those who refuse to move voluntarily for your own sake."

The refugees and asylum seekers still in the detention centre say they will not leave because they are not safe in the Manusian community. Tensions between locals and the transplanted refugee community have been growing over recent months.

As the standoff at the Manus detention centre draws into its second week, stores of food, water and medicine inside the centre are dwindling, while a military blockade is stopping further supplies coming in or independent observers accessing the centre.

Power has been cut from the camp and generators removed. Water pipes have also been cut. If the PNG navy intends to take over the detention centre – built by Australia – these would need to be reconnected.

O'Neill said there were 610 refugees and 210 asylum seekers still inside the detention centre. He said all protection claims had been assessed. However, officials on the island have confirmed some men held on Manus have still not had their refugee status finally determined, after more than four years in detention.

O'Neill said the three alternative accommodation sites were ready for habitation and were better than the current centre.

"The locations to where they are being moved have much better facilities than the closed centre, with services and utilities provided for much more comfort and healthier living."

But the United Nations' refugee agency says there are not enough beds, not enough doctors and no running water or electricity at some of the new accommodation centres. Some do not have perimeter fences and are not safe from external incursion. The detention centre has been attacked several times by outsiders.

"Substantive parts of the planned alternative accommodation are still not ready, UNHCR spokeswoman Catherine Stubberfield told the Guardian. "If the [approximately] 600 refugees and asylum seekers still in the regional processing centre were to leave it, existing alternative arrangements would not be sufficient for all of them."

Four protestors climbed the Sydney Opera House on Thursday morning and attempted to hang a banner with the words "Evacuate Manus #BringThemHere". Police stopped them before they could unfurl the banner fully.

The protestors held up smaller signs that said "Australian world leaders in cruelty" and "Evacuate Manus".

Their protest follows another at the Melbourne Cup and at the office of foreign minister Julie Bishop.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/09/manus-standoff-ringleaders-threatened-by-papua-new-guinea-prime-minister>

13. Manus Island standoff: Peter Dutton insists new accommodation facilities are ready

Canberra Times
Wednesday November 8 2017

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has dismissed claims by the United Nations that alternative accommodation for refugees on Manus Island is not ready.

Almost 600 men have barricaded themselves inside the Papua New Guinea island's mothballed detention centre, a week after it was shut down.

They believe it's safer to remain in the compound than risk being attacked by locals at new facilities near the main township of Lorengau.

The UN's refugee agency has claimed substantive parts of the alternative accommodation were still not ready.

But Mr Dutton said such claims were untrue.

"The facilities are completed," he said on Wednesday.

East Lorengau has been opened for a couple of years and had cost Australian taxpayers millions of dollars, he said.

"We've got security there, we've got health services there," Mr Dutton said.

News Corp on Wednesday published photographs of unfinished facilities on Manus Island, which it said cast doubt on the government's claims the accommodation is complete.

The photographs, which are not able to be verified, show unfinished demountables with incomplete sewerage works, unconnected pipes and unfinished security fences, surrounded by a muddy construction site.

Mr Dutton labelled claims that refugees and asylum seekers feared for their safety "nonsense", saying it was a "disgraceful and deceitful" myth being pushed by advocates for their own political gains.

"Hundreds of people each day go from the regional processing centre on Manus by bus or walk into the local village, they go shopping, they hang out at the beach, some are in relationships with the locals," he said.

"The fact that somehow security is not provided or there's a problem around security, it's a nonsense."

Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected an application to restore basic services - including electricity, food, medical care and water - to the decommissioned centre on human rights grounds.

The application would also have blocked PNG officials from forcibly evicting the 600 men inside the complex.

The judgment said Australia's legal responsibility for the future welfare of the asylum seekers ended with the closure of the detention centre.

But it also said refugees might be eligible for damages because of the government's "heavy-handed tactics" to force them out of the centre.

Lawyer Ben Lomai, who put forward the original application on behalf of the refugees, is set to file an appeal on Wednesday.

Mr Dutton said the Turnbull government wants to close the centre as quickly as possible and urged those refusing to leave to go.

Nothing they do will change their mind about letting them resettle in Australia, he said.

"We now ask the advocates to stop messaging the people within the regional processing centre telling them not to move, because that is not going to leverage us into changing our position and allowing people to come to Australia."

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/manus-island-standoff-peter-dutton-insists-new-accommodation-facilities-are-ready-20171108-gzh6li.html>

14. Manus refugees being coerced to move to centre with no running water, UN says

UNHCR says situation growing critical due to lack of beds and services at some of the new accommodation – but Peter Dutton rejects the claims

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 8 November 2017 14.36 AEDT

There are not enough beds, not enough doctors and no running water or electricity at some of the new accommodation refugees on Manus Island are being coerced to move to, the United Nations refugee agency says.

As the standoff at the Manus detention centre draws into its second week, stores of food, water and medicine inside the centre are dwindling, while a military blockade is stopping further supplies coming in or independent observers accessing the centre.

Food, water and electricity have been cut off for a week – ostensibly for the military to take control of the centre – but also in an effort to coerce people to leave.

A spokeswoman for the UNHCR, Catherine Stubberfield, said from Manus that the situation for those still in the detention was growing critical, and the alternatives were not sufficient.

"Substantive parts of the planned alternative accommodation are still not ready. If the [approximately] 600 refugees and asylum seekers still in the regional processing centre were to leave it, existing alternative arrangements would not be sufficient for all of them."

Sir Salamo Injia, the chief justice of the PNG supreme court, denied an application from a refugee to have essential services restored to the detention centre on Tuesday, saying he was satisfied the governments of PNG and Australia had provided alternative accommodation and services "of good standard".

But the West Lorengau site, to where refugees are being told they must move, is still a building site. Bulldozers and other heavy machinery remain on the site. There is no electricity or water connected, and only four squat toilets and showers are able to be used. There is not yet a comprehensive perimeter fence.

Those who had not yet been recognised as refugees, or whose claims for protection had been refused, are being told they must move to Hillside Haus. That facility is complete and has air-conditioning, the federal government says. But there are fewer beds at Hillside Haus than there are people being told they must move there.

Stubberfield said the lack of services and durable solutions remained the critical issue.

“For refugees and asylum seekers with emergency medical needs, care available on Manus Island is inadequate. The case of an asylum seeker with coronary disease this week underscores how limited local medical facilities are.”

However, immigration minister Peter Dutton rejected the UNCHR’s claims, telling Sky News on Wednesday that the “facilities are completed ... We’ve got security there, we’ve got health services there”.

He labelled claims that refugees and asylum seekers feared for their safety “nonsense”, saying it was a “disgraceful and deceitful” myth being pushed by advocates for their own political gains.

A refugee with a history of heart attacks waited for four hours, suffering chest pain and shortness of breath, before he was taken to Lorengau hospital last week. Doctors there were ultimately only able to take his blood pressure, and the hospital’s ECG machine was not working.

The UNHCR says that beyond the immediate issue of the situation of those still within the regional processing centre, there is little prospect for long-term resettlement in PNG for all but a handful of refugees.

While, over four years, about 30 refugees have resettled in different parts of PNG, the vast majority say they are unsafe in the country. The vaunted “US deal” is making little visible progress on Manus, and has resettled only 22 refugees from the island.

“Long-term solutions outside of Papua New Guinea are now desperately needed,” Stubberfield said.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/08/manus-refugees-being-coerced-to-move-to-centre-with-no-running-water-un-says>

15. Manus refugee who reached Canada last week says deaths are 'very likely'

Amir Taghinia flew to British Columbia last week, thanks to a group of private sponsors, after nearly four years on Manus

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Monday 6 November 2017 19.30 AEDT

A refugee who was detained on Manus Island has left to begin a new life in Canada, through a group of private citizens who sponsored his freedom.

Amir Taghinia, a refugee from Iran, flew to Coquitlam, British Columbia last week, after nearly four years on Manus Island.

“To be honest, I cannot believe I am in Canada, I am so thankful,” Taghinia told the Guardian. “But I cannot forget about my friends, they are starving, they have no water to drink. It is very, very likely we will have more deaths in the next coming days.”

Taghinia said he was overwhelmingly grateful to the Canadians who had worked together to find him a path to freedom. He is living at the house of Wayne and Linda Taylor after their daughter, Chelsea, met him in 2015 while she was administering immunisations to Manus Island detainees.

“I really respect these people, I now consider them as part of my family. I am seeing the generosity Canadians have towards human beings. But look what is happening to Australia: Australia’s reputation is being ruined by what the Australian government is doing to people.

“Here, when people hear I am a refugee they are so happy to help me, to assist me in any way they can. On Manus Island, the Australian guards, they hate me because I am a refugee They call me by my boat number – EDE039. But here they call me my name, they respect me as a human being. I am glad to call myself Canadian.”

The realisation of a private sponsorship from Canada, from a group of a dozen residents in Coquitlam, comes as the stand-off on Manus Island worsens and the men still inside the centre run out of food and water.

Australia has again rejected New Zealand’s standing offer to accept 150 refugees from its offshore detention islands, and progress on the vaunted US resettlement deal, which has taken 54 refugees so far, has ground to a near standstill.

Taghinia was formally recognised as a refugee on Manus Island: that is, authorities judged he had a “well-founded fear of persecution” in Iran and could not legally be returned there. “I was hostage there,” he told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. “If the Canadian government and my sponsors weren’t there, I may have died on this island.”

Taghinia was outspoken in his criticism of conditions in the Australian-run detention centre during his time on the island.

“I couldn’t sit silent,” he told CBC. “The [camp administration] intelligence report, they called me the agitator of the centre and a trouble-maker. I was not making any trouble. I was just defending human rights.”

For more than 30 years, private sponsorship of refugees – by families, private citizens, religious, and community groups – has been a feature of Canada’s refugee resettlement effort. Refugees who are privately sponsored are in addition to those resettled by the government.

Since the late 1970s, more than 280,000 have been resettled in Canada by private sponsors, who commit the equivalent of one year of social security – about \$30,000 – in cash or by in-kind commitment of housing, clothing, furniture and food, to assist a refugee family of five to settle into the country.

Australia has a pilot private resettlement program, with up to 1,000 places this year. But the cost is prohibitively high – up to \$55,000 for a family of five, to which the government plans to add an “assurance of support” of \$30,000 to \$60,000 – and each refugee resettled privately is offset against the number resettled through the government’s program.

There have been calls from Liberal, National, and Labor parliamentarians to boost Australia’s private sponsorship program to as high as 10,000 annually.

“I will be relieved when every single person on Manus and Nauru are in a safe place. Australia has completely withdrawn from the centre, they have dumped these people there in the hands of nobody,” Taghinia said.

Tim O’Connor from the Refugee Council of Australia said the Australian government was threatening the lives of hundreds of innocent people through its inaction, while governments and communities elsewhere in the world were “bending over backwards to provide solutions”.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/06/manus-refugee-who-reached-canada-last-week-says-deaths-are-very-likely>

16. MEDIA RELEASE: Defiant stand: We will not move to another detention centre

Tuesday November 7, 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Despite the Chief Justice of the PNG Supreme Court finding that, 'asylum seekers' Constitutional rights had been breached or were about to be breached', the court declined to issue orders to the government to provide food, water and power to the detention centre. The siege continues.

But so does the resistance.

In the aftermath of the PNG Supreme Court decision the refugees on Manus, defiantly gathered to send a powerful message from inside the detention to the world - see video clip attached.

"We have been denied our basic needs, water and food and electricity. That does not mean that we are going to surrender. We have been in this place for four and half years, and we have not committed any crime....We were expecting that the outcome [of the court] would be negative," said Sudanese refugee, Aziz.

Kurdish journalist refugee, Behrouz Boochani, stated, "The past week, we have been travelling with starvation. There is no food or water in this detention centre....We send a clear message to the PNG and Australian government, that we are not going to leave this detention centre to go to another detention centre. We only want freedom in a safe country..."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

17. Manus refugees being coerced to move to centre with no running water, UN says

UNHCR says situation at closed detention centre growing critical, but there is a lack of beds and services at some of the new accommodation

There are not enough beds, not enough doctors and no running water or electricity at some of the new accommodation refugees on Manus Island are being coerced to move to, the United Nations refugee agency says.

As the standoff at the Manus detention centre draws into its second week, stores of food, water and medicine inside the centre are dwindling, while a military blockade is stopping further supplies coming in or independent observers accessing the centre.

Food, water and electricity have been cut off for a week – ostensibly for the military to take control of the centre – but also in an effort to coerce people to leave.

A spokeswoman for the UNHCR, Catherine Stubberfield, said from Manus that the situation for those still in the detention was growing critical, and the alternatives were not sufficient.

“Substantive parts of the planned alternative accommodation are still not ready. If the [approximately] 600 refugees and asylum seekers still in the regional processing centre were to leave it, existing alternative arrangements would not be sufficient for all of them.”

Sir Salamo Injia, the chief justice of the PNG supreme court, denied an application from a refugee to have essential services restored to the detention centre on Tuesday, saying he was satisfied the governments of PNG and Australia had provided alternative accommodation and services “of good standard”.

But the West Lorengau site, to where refugees are being told they must move, is still a building site. Bulldozers and other heavy machinery remain on the site. There is no electricity or water connected, and only four squat toilets and showers are able to be used. There is not yet a comprehensive perimeter fence.

Those who had not yet been recognised as refugees, or whose claims for protection had been refused, are being told they must move to Hillside Haus. That facility is complete and has air-conditioning, the federal government says. But there are fewer beds at Hillside Haus than there are people being told they must move there.

Stubberfield said the lack of services and durable solutions remained the critical issue.

“For refugees and asylum seekers with emergency medical needs, care available on Manus Island is inadequate. The case of an asylum seeker with coronary disease this week underscores how limited local medical facilities are.”

A refugee with a history of heart attacks waited for four hours, suffering chest pain and shortness of breath, before he was taken to Lorengau hospital last week. Doctors there were ultimately only able to take his blood pressure, and the hospital’s ECG machine was not working.

The UNHCR says that beyond the immediate issue of the situation of those still within the regional processing centre, there is little prospect for long-term resettlement in PNG for all but a handful of refugees.

While, over four years, about 30 refugees have resettled in different parts of PNG, the vast majority say they are unsafe in the country. The vaunted “US deal” is making little visible progress on Manus, and has resettled only 22 refugees from the island.

“Long-term solutions outside of Papua New Guinea are now desperately needed,” Stubberfield said.

“The massive decrease in Australian government presence and reduction of essential services does nothing to change Australia’s ongoing responsibility. Unless and until appropriate solutions outside of Papua New Guinea are found for all refugees and asylum seekers, Australia’s obligations for their safety and wellbeing will continue.”

While most Australian service providers have withdrawn from Manus, the Australian government maintains a significant presence on the island, of military, border force and other government personnel. Australia also maintains authority for critical operational decisions, including the ultimate control of critical medical transfers.

The current detention centre – known as the Manus regional processing centre and where refugees and asylum seekers have been held for more than four years – is on the site of Lombrum military base, about a 40-minute drive from Lorengau town.

After the detention regime there was ruled illegal and unconstitutional by the PNG supreme court in April 2016, the detention regime was relaxed. In May this year, it was announced the centre would close on 31 October and be taken over by the PNG military. While some refugees and asylum seekers have moved to a new facility built at Lorengau township, about 600 remain within the detention centre and are refusing to leave, saying they are not safe in Lorengau.

Tensions between local people and the refugee population have been growing in recent months, and the history of the detention centre has been marred by violent encounters.

Reza Barati was murdered by guards inside the compound in 2014, this year soldiers shot at refugees inside the compound, and several refugees who have gone outside the compound have been beaten, robbed and attacked with machetes.

Many Manusians in the Lorengau community are sympathetic towards the refugees' situation and have been trying to assist them. Others, however, resent the imposition of hundreds of young men on their small community. They argue there are not the resources or space in the town to support new people.

And, after initial support, there is a growing sense of disenchantment with Australia's actions in Manus, and a sense that the richer, more powerful country has simply abandoned people on the island without concern for their, or the local people's, welfare.

Australia's immigration and border protection department has rejected much of the testimony of independent observers and refugees themselves, saying: "There has been significant misreporting in recent days about the situation in Manus province.

"Claims that Australia 'abandoned' former-residents are not correct however; the department's staff no longer had authority to remain on the PNG naval base and they departed, along with other service provider personnel and PNG ICSA staff.

"Former residents who choose to stay at the RPC site are doing so fully informed that PNG has provided them with suitable alternatives and that these can be accessed at any time. Any claims to the contrary are simply not true."

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/08/manus-refugees-being-coerced-to-move-to-centre-with-no-running-water-un-says>

18. Manus Island crisis: refugee collapses after reporting heart pain

Detainees say Iranian forced to wait more than four hours for Papua New Guinean authorities to take him to hospital

The Guardian
Guardian staff
Sunday 5 November 2017 12.50 AEDT

A refugee in the Manus Island detention centre standoff collapsed with heart pain on Saturday night and waited more than four hours for Papua New Guinean authorities to take him to hospital.

The man is among 600 refugees and asylum seekers barricaded inside the mothballed detention centre, which closed on Tuesday.

The Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani told Guardian Australia one of his fellow countrymen collapsed at about 7.30pm.

"When he collapsed last night we were without power so everywhere was dark and the refugees became so scared," he said. "It was a such hard night. Some of the refugees tried to look after him and we tried to help him. We had two phone numbers that immigration had earlier put up in case of emergency. We called those numbers but nobody answered."

Boochani said the asylum seekers and refugees unsuccessfully tried to call police and the navy.

"Finally we were able to get a message to [International Health and Medical Services] who are working in East Lorengau camp but they said, 'We cannot help you there while you are refusing to leave the prison camp,'" he said.

"After two hours, a car belonging to the police mobile squad appeared and we stopped them and asked them to help. They said there is no ambulance here and you must wait until morning, then make your way to East Lorengau to receive medical treatment.

"Finally PNG immigration sent a car and picked up the sick refugee, after more than four-and-a-half hours since he collapsed."

Boochani said the refugee was taken to Lorengau hospital half an hour away however they did not have adequate equipment to deal with his condition.

The man had a long history of heart pain and had seen two specialists in Port Moresby in February who had recommended treatment in Australia but that request had been denied.

Dr Barri Phatarfod from Doctors for Refugees expressed concerns about the man's medical treatment at Lorengau hospital, saying no electrocardiogram heart monitoring or blood tests were carried out.

"It is impossible to adequately assess a potential myocardial infarct in the absence of both of these investigations," she said. "If this occurred in Australia it would be grossly negligent."

Six detainees have died on Manus Island – including one who was murdered – since it was reopened in 2012.

The Greens say the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, must be held to account for the standoff on Manus Island. Dutton, however, accused the Greens of stoking tensions on the island.

"The Australian government has stopped deaths at sea," he said on Sunday. "If we allow people who sought to our country by boat to reside in Australia permanently, that will mean that the people smugglers are back in business."

On Sunday, the New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, confirmed she had restated her country's offer to accept 150 refugees from among the almost 600 still holding out on Manus Island.

But the Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, said he would "consider" New Zealand's offer to take refugees from the Manus Island detention centre only once the government has completed its refugee transfer arrangement with the United States.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/05/manus-island-crisis-refugee-collapses-after-reporting-heart-pain>

19. PNG warns services can't be reconnected at Manus Island centre, urges detainees to move

Canberra Times

Monday November 6, 2017 - 4:10PM

Fergus Hunter

Papua New Guinea immigration minister Petrus Thomas says it is "no longer possible" to restore services at the Manus Island detention centre and has urged detainees to call off their protest and relocate to three new facilities.

A week since the Manus compound was shut down to comply with a 2016 court ruling, up to 600 men are refusing to relocate, citing safety fears and asking for permanent resettlement in another country.

On Tuesday morning, PNG's Supreme Court will announce its decision on an application to restore food, water, power, security and medical services at the detention centre. The application, made last week on behalf of Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani, argues the termination of basic operations is in breach of the country's constitution.

The stand-off – which has seen the men stockpile rainwater in garbage bins and lose access to medication – has been labelled an "unfolding humanitarian emergency" by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Authorities have reportedly been turning away PNG locals coming to the centre offering food.

Four days ago, UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency, said many of the men "would not find adequate or sufficient accommodation elsewhere" if all 600 were to leave and asserted one of the new facilities was "incomplete".

Backing the position of the Turnbull government, Mr Thomas says the facilities are ready.

"I want to be very clear that there is no capacity to restore services, there is no service provider to deliver services and, more significantly, as services are available to the new facilities, there is no need for services to be reconnected," Mr Thomas said.

"We have also taken into consideration the security concerns of the residents and discussed with service providers to have increased security measures and presence at the new facilities. Refugees and non-refugees should no longer have any security concerns and continue to remain at the decommissioned facility."

He said detainees had travelled freely between the Manus centre, which sits inside a PNG naval base, and the main town of Lorengau "without any major incident" since April 2016.

Elaine Pearson, the Australia director of Human Rights Watch, rejected Mr Petrus' claim as "not true".

"Refugees and asylum seekers have been repeatedly robbed and assaulted in Lorengau town, with little action taken by police. There has been an escalation in violent assaults in recent months, three attacks since June required medical evacuations to Port Moresby or Australia due to inadequate medical care on the island," Ms Pearson said.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull knocked back a renewed offer from New Zealand to take 150 refugees, saying the government was focused on the resettlement agreement with the US. The arrangement will see the US take up to 1250 detainees from Manus and Nauru but "extreme vetting" had slowed the process, with 54 transferred so far.

"We are pursuing those arrangements at the moment and that is our commitment. So we want to pursue those, conclude those arrangements and then in the wake of that, obviously we can consider other ones," Mr Turnbull said.

The Australian government has made clear it would not change its longstanding policy prohibiting the asylum seekers from resettling in Australia. NZ prime Minister Jacinda Ardern has ruled out the possibility of negotiating an agreement directly with PNG.

Approximately 1600 asylum seekers and refugees remain in PNG and Nauru.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/png-urges-manus-detainees-to-move-as-lawyers-prepare-for-court-challenge-20171105-gzfgql.html>

20. MEDIA RELEASE: Lawyers will appeal court ruling on Manus detention siege

Tuesday November 7, 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

The PNG Supreme Court has declined to issue an injunction to restore immediately food, water, and power to the Manus detention centre.

The Chief Justice found that while the applicant's (Behrouz Boochani) human rights may have been breached, that damages rather than an injunction is the suitable remedy.

The lawyers in the case will appeal this finding, as early as tomorrow (Wed 8 November).

"The decision of the PNG Supreme Court decision does not alter the inhumanity of the siege on Manus Island, nor alter the role of the Australian government," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition

"It does not alter the fact that Manus is unsafe, and settlement in PNG is impossible. The onus is still on the government to provide the safety and security that the refugees and asylum seekers need."

The refugees and asylum seekers have made it clear that they will not leave the detention centre.

"We had no expectation from the court," one refugee told the Refugee Action Coalition

"They were unlawfully transported to PNG; they have been unlawfully held in detention. They must be immediately evacuated," said Ian Rintoul.

"The Turnbull government will never live down what they have done on Manus. The refugee movement will do whatever we can to support and sustain the refugees inside the detention centre, and keepo fighting for the government to bring them here."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

21. PNG court quashes detainees' last-ditch bid to keep Manus centre open

Canberra Times
Tuesday 7 November 2017 - 1:10PM
Fergus Hunter

Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court has rejected an application to restore operations at the now-decommissioned Manus Island processing centre, further increasing pressure on the almost 600 men who have been refusing to relocate to three new "transit centres".

The last-ditch application, filed last week by lawyers representing Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani, sought to re-establish the compound's power, water, food, sanitation and medical services, arguing their termination was in breach of the PNG constitution's human rights protections.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said on Tuesday the new facilities were of a "very high quality" and urged the detainees to move. He also criticised activists and Greens senator Nick McKim, accusing them of encouraging the detainees to defy the wishes of local authorities.

The stand-off, still going a week after the centre was shut down to comply with a 2016 PNG Supreme Court ruling, has been labelled an "unfolding humanitarian emergency" by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The men have been stockpiling rainwater in garbage bins, lost access to medication and authorities have reportedly been turning away PNG locals coming to the centre offering food.

While some have moved, almost 600 men continue to protest, citing fears for their safety closer to the main town of Lorengau, the condition of the new facilities, and their desperation for permanent resettlement in a third country.

Five days ago, United Nations refugee agency UNHCR said many of the men "would not find adequate or sufficient accommodation elsewhere" if all 600 were to relocate, and said one of the new facilities was "incomplete", with no water or services connected.

Mr Turnbull encouraged detainees to "comply with the lawful requests and requirements of the PNG authorities" and said people who have not attained refugee status should return to their countries of origin.

"The residents at Manus, the [regional processing centre], they have been asked to move and they should move," he told ABC radio on Tuesday.

PNG immigration minister Petrus Thomas says it is "no longer possible" to restore services at the Manus compound, and insisted the new facilities were ready and secure.

Mr Thomas also declared the men should feel safe being closer to Lorengau, saying detainees had travelled freely "without any major incident" since April 2016.

Elaine Pearson, Australia director of Human Rights Watch, said Mr Thomas' claim of safe travel was "not true".

"Refugees and asylum seekers have been repeatedly robbed and assaulted in Lorengau town, with little action taken by police. There has been an escalation in violent assaults in recent months, three attacks since June required medical evacuations to Port Moresby or Australia due to inadequate medical care on the island," Ms Pearson said.

Mr Turnbull elaborated on the government's decision to reject New Zealand's offer to resettle 150 refugees, saying it would be marketed by people smugglers as a "backdoor" to Australia.

He said the US resettlement agreement was different "because it's a lot further away".

"As we know from our own intelligence, New Zealand is seen as effectively part of Australia by the people smugglers."

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/png-court-quashes-detainees-lstditch-bid-to-keep-manus-centre-open-20171107-gzqbe3.html>

22. PNG court rejects bid to restore power and water to Manus centre

Papua New Guinea's supreme court will not intervene in standoff between refugees and authorities over shutting down of detention centre

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Tuesday 7 November 2017 13.12 AEDT

Papua New Guinea's supreme court has refused a bid to restore power, water and medical services to the Manus detention centre.

About 600 refugees and asylum seekers have refused to leave the Manus Island detention centre, which was closed last Tuesday.

Electricity was shut off to the final compounds last Wednesday morning, more than 12 hours after the scheduled 5pm shutdown, and the generator was removed. Food, water and other essential services had already been stopped, and all staff left early on Tuesday last week.

The asylum seekers still living in the compound have pleaded for Australia and other nations to come to their aid, saying they are too scared to leave the compound to seek alternative accommodation in the main township out of fear they will be attacked by locals.

The court application, brought by PNG lawyer Ben Lomai and Australian barrister Greg Barns, sought the restoration of food, water and health services to the detention centre, arguing to withdraw those before a safe resettlement option was available for the men was a breach of their constitutionally guaranteed human rights.

But PNG's chief justice said he was satisfied the PNG government had provided alternative accommodation that allowed for free movement and that the services provided were of sufficient standard.

The 600 within the detention centre are running low on food, and are relying, in some cases, on wells they have dug and rubbish bins collecting rainwater, for drinking water. Several men are dangerously low on medicines.

The alternative accommodation the 600 refugees and asylum seekers are being encouraged to move to is not yet ready for habitation according to independent observers. But fundamentally, the men argue, they are not safe living in the Manusian community. Tensions between local people and the transplanted refugee population have been growing in recent months, and marred by several violent incidents.

"Just now, the PNG court rejected our application," Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani said, in the wake of the court's decision.

"It means the government can kill us by depriving us of access to food. We are outside of any law."

Amnesty International has said lives were at risk unless essential services were restored to the detention centre, and that refugees and asylum seekers should not be forcibly relocated until their dignity and safety could be guaranteed.

"If authorities don't act immediately, there is a real risk that the situation will catastrophically deteriorate. The lives of these men, who are only asking for their rights to dignity and safety, are at serious risk," Amnesty International's Pacific researcher, Kate Schuetze, said.

"This is the third time I have visited Manus Island, but what we witnessed there over the past week shocked me to the core. This is a desperate situation on the brink of a catastrophe."

"That the Australian and PNG authorities have created such a crisis, leaving vulnerable refugees who sought Australia's protection in such a desperate situation is callous, cruel and completely disgraceful."

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has dismissed the fears of refugees who say they are too scared to leave the detention centre, instead claiming they were being encouraged to stay there by refugee advocates and the Greens.

He also rejected New Zealand's offer to take 150 refugees from Australia's offshore island centres, saying the Australia-United States resettlement deal should be exhausted before considering that option.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/07/png-court-rejects-bid-to-restore-power-and-water-to-manus-centre>

23. Malcolm Turnbull set to reject Jacinda Ardern's Manus Island refugee offer

Canberra Times
November 4 2017 - 6:19PM
James Massola

Malcolm Turnbull is set to reject a renewed offer from New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to take 150 refugees from Manus Island.

Mr Turnbull and Ms Ardern will meet for the first time in Sydney on Sunday after the Kiwi leader stitched together a deal that saw her form a coalition government with New Zealand First and the Greens.

Ahead of the meeting, Ms Ardern flagged that she would raise the situation on Manus Island and restate the offer to take 150 refugees, which former prime minister John Key first extended to former prime minister Julia Gillard back in 2013.

"I am looking forward to having a conversation directly with the Prime Minister on Sunday about some of those issues, and New Zealand's role in and view on Manus Island in particular," she said on Thursday.

United Nations' human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini has described the situation on Manus Island as an "unfolding humanitarian emergency", criticising the Turnbull government and expressing "serious concerns" over the welfare, safety and wellbeing of asylum seekers on the island.

But government sources confirmed to Fairfax Media that while Mr Turnbull regarded the Kiwi offer as generous, there were still fears that sending some refugees to New Zealand could be a "pull" factor that would be used by people smugglers to tempt would-be asylum seekers into attempting to come to Australia by boat.

They characterised Australia's position as one of "no change", pointing out the Gillard, Rudd and Abbott governments had also declined to take up the NZ offer.

And they dismissed comparisons with the US refugee deal as that arrangement was strictly a one-off, because of President Donald Trump's opposition to it, whereas people smugglers could suggest the New Zealand offer could be repeated.

The deal with the US has seen 54 refugees approved for transfer thus far and potentially more in the future will be approved for transfer to America.

A total of 587 men are in a stand-off on Manus Island with Papua New Guinean authorities at the now-closed Australian processing centre on Manus Island. The men are refusing to leave the centre because of fears for their safety if they do so, and some attempts to bring them food have been blocked.

For its part, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection has said the men have been offered alternative accommodation options, with healthcare and security available at three new centres in the town of Lorengau; this applies both for the 447 men who have been confirmed as refugees and the 140 men who have been classified as non-refugees.

Labor leader Bill Shorten said the United Nations had a point and that "there is something going on at Manus which is deeply disturbing to the Australian people".

"I think the government should take very seriously the invitation on the table from New Zealand. Beyond that, you can discourage the people smugglers but it doesn't mean you treat hundreds of people in an inhumane fashion," he said.

"When [Mr] Turnbull is meeting with President Trump in coming weeks, in Asia, he should raise again the possibility of taking some people."

Mr Turnbull and Ms Ardern will discuss a number of other issues in their first meeting, which comes just days before the pair both fly out to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation leaders' meeting in Vietnam and the East Asia Summit in the Philippines.

Mr Turnbull will raise the importance of the 12-member Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade deal, which has been put on ice because of Mr Trump's opposition to it, but which Australia and Japan have been championing.

Before Ms Ardern's election victory, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop warned Australia would "find it very difficult to build trust" with Ms Ardern following revelations that Australian Labor made contact with a NZ Labour MP over Barnaby Joyce's kiwi citizenship.

Both sides have since played down the matter and Ms Bishop will be in Perth attending other meetings over the weekend.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/malcolm-turnbull-set-to-reject-jacinda-arderns-manus-island-refugee-offer-20171103-gzeskx.html>

24. Malcolm Turnbull not accepting Jacinda Ardern's offer to resettle asylum seekers in NZ 'at this time'

ABC News Online
By political reporter Henry Belot
Sunday 5 November 2017

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull says he will not accept an offer to resettle asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru in New Zealand at this stage.

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern discussed the offer with Mr Turnbull today, as close to 600 men refuse to leave the now closed centre, despite water, food and power being cut off.

Many of the men say they are too afraid to resettle in alternative accommodation and are refusing to leave the detention centre, which is also a Papua New Guinea (PNG) naval base.

Mr Turnbull thanked Ms Ardern for the offer, which was first made by former prime minister John Key, and said his Government remained focused on a refugee resettlement deal with the United States.

"The offer has been restated, we thank New Zealand for making that offer, we are not taking it up at this time," Mr Turnbull said.

But Mr Turnbull did not rule out accepting Ms Ardern's offer at a later stage.

"What we are seeking to do is ensure there are opportunities for resettlement for the people on Manus Island and Nauru," he said.

"We have an arrangement with the United States where a substantial number — 1,250 — can, subject to the US rigours vetting, be resettled in the United States.

"We want to pursue those, conclude those arrangements, and then in the wake of that obviously we can consider other ones."

Ms Ardern said some of the discussions with Mr Turnbull were "challenging" and "frank".

"This is a very genuine offer," she said.

"We of course do not have the circumstances that Australia is operating under, but we also cannot ignore the human face of what Australia is dealing with.

"The offer absolutely remains on the table."

New Zealand has a more compassionate approach: Di Natale

Mr Turnbull's decision not to accept the offer may prolong what Greens leader Richard Di Natale has called a "humanitarian catastrophe" on Manus Island.

The PNG Supreme Court ruled the detention of asylum seekers was illegal and the PNG Government says it is Australia's responsibility to deal with those who do not want to resettle in the country.

The stand-off at the Manus Island detention centre prompted Opposition Leader Bill Shorten to issue a statement on Friday, calling on Mr Turnbull to accept the offer, describing it as not dissimilar to the US deal.

That was dismissed by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, who said Mr Shorten was trying to appease the left of his party with "cheap political stunts and mealy-mouthed words".

He said the statement would be "music to the ears of people smugglers" and that he was making policy on the run.

But this morning, a Government backbencher, former defence minister Kevin Andrews, said the proposal should be seriously considered.

"The reality is, we have an intractable problem at the present time," he told Sky News.

"Yes, the United States are going to accept some of these people but there is still a large number there."

Mr Andrews said any deal would need to ensure people smugglers were not encouraged to restart dangerous voyages to Australia.

Senator Di Natale said New Zealand had a more compassionate approach to refugees.

"It is so important that we bring them here and allow them to make a contribution and our neighbours across the ditch are showing us up," he told ABC Insiders.

"They have said they are prepared to shelter some of these people and they are showing the decency and compassion that this Australian Government is so lacking."

The Greens leader also defended Adam Bandt's description of Mr Dutton as a "terrorist", remarks made during a refugee rally yesterday.

"Amnesty International have said that Peter Dutton presides over a regime that tortures people," Senator Di Natale said.

"We are talking about people who have been attacked and assaulted in these camps, where women who have been raped have been denied terminations."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-05/turnbull-wont-accept-nz-offer-to-resettle-refugees-at-this-time/9120028>

25. Turnbull says he will consider NZ refugee deal only after US resettlements

Australian PM stresses US deal is the priority in meeting with Jacinda Ardern, despite being urged by backbencher Kevin Andrews to accept NZ offer

The Guardian
Michael McGowan and Australian Associated Press
Sunday 5 November 2017 12.53 AEDT

Malcolm Turnbull says he will "consider" New Zealand's offer to take refugees from the Manus Island detention centre, but only once the government has completed its refugee transfer arrangement with the US.

The Australian prime minister met with his New Zealand counterpart at Kirribilli House in Sydney on Sunday, and Jacinda Ardern confirmed she had restated her country's offer to accept 150 refugees from among the almost 600 still holding out on Manus Island.

Turnbull had been expected to reject the offer, and said his government was “not taking it up at this time”.

However he left the door open for a future agreement, saying the government would consider the deal once it had completed the ongoing transfer of refugees to the US.

“What we are seeking to do is to ensure that there are opportunities for resettlement on the people on Manus Island and Nauru. As you know we have an arrangement United States whereby a substantial number of about 1,250 can ... be resettled in the United States.

“We want to pursue those, conclude those arrangements and then in the wake of that obviously we can consider other [resettlement deals].”

Ardern ruled out making the refugee resettlement offer directly to the Papua New Guinean government, saying there was “no need” because the offer was under “active consideration” by Australia.

“I absolutely understand the priority that has been placed around the agreement with the United States,” she said.

“Of course from the New Zealand perspective we want [our] offer to remain on the table so that we can assist as much as we’re able in expediting a resolution on this issue.”

But Turnbull also suggested the government would not look favourably on arrangements that increased the likelihood of asylum seekers arriving by boat.

“I just want to emphasise that we know what the alternative looks like,” he said. “Tens of thousands of unlawful arrivals and over 1,000 men, women and children drowning at sea.

“We have put the people smugglers out of business and we will keep them out of business.”

Sunday was the first face-to-face meeting between Turnbull and Ardern, who became New Zealand’s new Labour prime minister last month.

As well as the Manus deal, in a two-hour meeting they discussed the future of the now 11-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership, and concerns about the stability of the North Korean regime.

Ardern said they did not talk about foreign minister Julie Bishop’s comments before the election in August that the Australian government would find it “very hard to build trust” with a Labour government after an extraordinary diplomatic spat over claims about the then opposition party’s role in Barnaby Joyce’s citizenship saga.

Australia and Japan have been leading the charge to save the controversial trade deal since the US president, Donald Trump, withdrew his country’s support in January.

New Zealand has remained committed to the TPP, but Ardern has raised concerns about investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) clauses which allow private companies to sue signatory governments before an international tribunal if they think the government has introduced or changed laws that significantly hurt their interests.

While acknowledging the benefits of the TPP, Ardern said it would “not stop us from pursuing the ISDS clause as far as we are able”.

“It is something I have made clear domestically and it is something I think the population would like to pursue to make sure we are protecting New Zealand’s domestic best interests,” she said.

Earlier on Sunday, the Liberal backbencher Kevin Andrews broke ranks to lend his support to the idea of sending refugees to New Zealand to help end the standoff on Manus Island.

More than 600 refugees have barricaded themselves in the mothballed detention centre, which closed on Tuesday.

“We should give consideration to what New Zealand is offering,” former immigration minister Kevin Andrews told Sky News on Sunday. “It’s a difficult problem but we should not rule out any particular solution.”

He acknowledged there were concerns about a New Zealand refugee resettlement deal establishing a pull factor for people making boat journeys or becoming a back door to Australia.

But Andrews said if a deal could be crafted to work around those issues it should be given thorough consideration.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/05/kevin-andrews-breaks-ranks-with-coalition-over-new-zealand-refugee-deal>

26. Malcolm Turnbull rejects New Zealand's refugee offer as Kevin Andrews breaks ranks

Canberra Times

Sunday 5 November 2017 - 9:50PM

Adam Gartrell, Judith Ireland

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has put New Zealand's latest offer to resettle some of the refugees languishing on Manus Island on the backburner, as a conservative MP broke ranks to declare the government should reconsider.

As the Manus Island detention centre stand-off entered its fifth day, Mr Turnbull held talks with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in Sydney, where she formally extended to Mr Turnbull the offer to take in 150 people. "The offer is very genuine and remains on the table," she said.

But Mr Turnbull said Australia remained focused on the US refugee resettlement deal, which has so far resulted in 54 people being resettled. The US deal covers up to 1250 people but US President Donald Trump dislikes it and vetting is taking a long time.

"In the wake of that deal obviously we can consider other ones," Mr Turnbull said. "We thank New Zealand for making an offer – we are not taking it up at this time."

New Zealand first made its offer to Julia Gillard's government in 2013 but it has been rejected by both Labor and the Coalition. Opposition Leader Bill Shorten has now called on Mr Turnbull to accept it, saying it is similar to the US deal.

Mr Turnbull's meeting with Ms Ardern came as former Liberal immigration minister Kevin Andrews said the government should reconsider.

"We have an intractable problem at the present time," he told Sky News. "Yes, the United States are going to accept some of these people but there is still a large number there. It's a difficult problem, I know that, but we should not rule out any particular solution to it."

Others in the government fear a deal with NZ could serve as a "pull factor" by helping people smugglers drum up business.

Mr Andrews' intervention came as Immigration Minister Peter Dutton hit back at a Greens MP who branded him a "terrorist" over the government's treatment of the nearly 600 men on Manus Island involved in the tense stand-off with PNG authorities. The men have barricaded themselves in the detention facility, which was officially closed last week, refusing to move into the community because they fear they will be attacked by locals.

Food, water and electricity have been cut off. At a pro-refugee rally on Saturday and then on social media, Greens MP Adam Bandt said Mr Dutton used violence and threatened lives for political purposes: "If terrorism is using violence to threaten lives for political purposes, then yes, Peter Dutton is a terrorist."

Mr Dutton brushed off the "disappointing" comments.

"The Australian government has stopped deaths at sea, we've got every child out of detention. Mr Bandt, when he was in government with Julia Gillard, presided over 50,000 people coming on 800 boats and 1200 people drowned at sea.

"I've not had a single person drown at sea on my watch."

During a TV appearance on Sunday, Greens Leader Richard Di Natale backed his MP, but would not repeat the "terrorist" charge, saying instead: "Amnesty International has said that Peter Dutton presides over a regime that tortures people."

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has said the men have been offered alternative accommodation options, with healthcare and security available at three new centres in the town of Lorengau; this applies both for the 447 men who have been confirmed as refugees and the 140 men who have been classified as non-refugees.

On Thursday, the UN Refugee Agency said one of the new centres did not have electricity or water connected.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/kevin-andrews-breaks-ranks-on-manus-as-peter-dutton-hits-back-at-terrorist-comment-20171104-gzf0pe.html>

27. Adam Bandt calls Immigration Minister Peter Dutton 'a terrorist'

ABC News Online
Saturday November 4, 2017

Federal Greens MP Adam Bandt has labelled Immigration Minister Peter Dutton a "terrorist" at a rally in Melbourne protesting against the treatment of men who remain on Manus Island.

More than 1,000 people gathered at the State Library to show their support for 600 refugees and asylum seekers who remain at the Manus Island detention centre in Papua New Guinea, despite its official closure on Tuesday.

The men say they do not feel safe in the replacement accommodation provided for them in the community.

Mr Bandt told the crowd the men had been "thrown in prison" by the Australian Government.

"These people have committed no crime other than to do what every single one of us would do if we thought our lives, or our family's lives, were at risk," he said.

Mr Bandt likened the Immigration Minister to a "terrorist" for "threatening people's lives".

"If the definition of terror is to use violence and threaten people's lives for political purposes, then Peter Dutton is a terrorist," he said.

"To look at the face of Peter Dutton is to stare into the eyes of someone who is prepared to kill people for political gain, and it's time he was held to account for this crime against humanity."

He also criticised Labor for reopening the offshore processing centre while in government, and urged them to join the Greens in their push to bring the men to Australia.

The crowd later moved down to Flinders Street Station and Federation Square, where they staged a mass sit-in.

Trams and traffic were brought to a standstill, while access to the train station was disrupted.

Hundreds also gathered at a similar rally in Sydney.

The UN has said the Federal Government should provide immediate protection, food, water and other basic services to men, calling in an "unfolding humanitarian crisis".

The UN said there were serious concerns about the safety and wellbeing of the men, and both Australia and PNG were responsible under international human rights law to protect them.

Mr Dutton's office said it would not comment on the UN's statement but has previously said there would be no change in government policy to allow the men entry to mainland Australia.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten, who has urged the Federal Government to consider New Zealand's offer to help resettle 150 of the men, said the UN "had a point".

"We don't want to see the people smugglers back in business, but I think there is something going on at Manus which is deeply disturbing to the Australian people," he said.

"Where you have got 600 people without food and water for days, the Government needs to take an active interest in their welfare."

Meanwhile, Papua New Guinean soldiers have been instructed not to allow anyone to bring food to the refugees inside the detention centre.

Food, power and water supplies to the centre were cut when the site was officially closed.

A soldier at the gate to the Lombrum naval base, in which the centre is located, says a church group with food for the refugees was turned away on Thursday.

On Friday, soldiers prevented a locals from landing a boat carrying food near the centre.

The 600 men inside say conditions are worsening but they remain determined to stay.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-04/adam-bandt-calls-immigration-minister-peter-dutton-a-terrorist/9118662>

28. Peter Dutton rejects MP's attack comparing him to 'a terrorist'

Immigration minister says Adam Bandt's comments say more about him and the Greens 'than it does about me'

The Guardian

Guardian staff

Sunday 5 November 2017 08.26 AEDT

Peter Dutton has brushed off an attack by a Greens MP that labelled him "a terrorist", saying "it says more about Mr Adam Bandt and the Greens than it does about me".

Bandt, a federal Greens MP, told a Melbourne rally of asylum seeker supporters on Saturday that the immigration minister was inflicting terror for political gain.

"What is happening between Canberra and Manus has ceased to be government and has become terror," Bandt said. "If the definition of terror is to use violence and threaten people's lives for political purposes, then Peter Dutton is a terrorist."

Bandt said the immigration minister must be held to account for the standoff on Manus Island, where 600 asylum seekers and refugees are refusing to leave the former detention centre. Dutton, however, accused the Greens of stoking tensions on the island.

"I think that says more about Mr Adam Bandt and the Greens than it does about me," he said of Bandt's comments. "The Australian government has stopped deaths at sea. We've got every child out of detention. Adam Bandt, when he was in government with Julia Gillard, presided over 1,200 people drowning at sea.

"If we allow people who sought to our country by boat to reside in Australia permanently, that will mean that the people smugglers are back in business."

Dutton has accused the Greens of using the remaining asylum seekers on Manus Island for their own political ends.

"It's quite distressing to see the Greens ramping up the tempo on Manus Island because I don't want to see any incident there," he told ABC radio. "It's clear the Greens do."

As the Manus Island standoff enters its sixth day, pressure is mounting on the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, to accept a long-standing New Zealand offer to resettle 150 refugees.

The prime minister is having his first sit down with New Zealand's newly elected leader Jacinda Ardern in Sydney on Sunday.

About 600 asylum seekers without food and water have pleaded for Australians to come to their aid. The men have barricaded themselves in the mothballed detention centre, which closed on Tuesday.

The group is too scared to move to alternative accommodation in the main township out of fear they will be attacked by locals. The last food packs were distributed last Sunday and the group has been digging holes to find water.

The United Nations human rights office has called on Australia to restore food, water and health services to the group on Manus Island.

Ardern has reiterated the NZ offer, first made under John Key's government to the Gillard government in 2013 and rejected many times since.

The opposition leader, Bill Shorten, has U-turned on Labor's stance, saying the plan had similarities to the US resettlement deal to take 1,250 people.

"[The prime minister] should have the conversation and see if we can make this proposal work," Shorten said. "If it's not a viable option, then Turnbull should explain why. Doing nothing is not an option."

Turnbull has previously stated it would be a marketing opportunity for people smugglers.

On Saturday hundreds of concerned supporters gathered at rallies in Melbourne and Sydney to call for an end to the standoff.

Two men who remain inside the closed detention centre have pleaded with Australians to help them.

"We are forgotten people who have been tortured ... even though we have committed no crime," one man said in a recorded message played at a rally on Saturday.

The other man said: "Our situation is getting worse and we need your help ... Will Australians stand up and speak for humanity if you think refugees are humans?"

Federal Labor says Turnbull must also ask the US president, Donald Trump, to speed up the resettling of refugees in the US.

"Turnbull is meeting with President Trump in coming weeks, in Asia, he should raise again the possibility of taking some people," Shorten said. "There is something going on at Manus which is deeply disturbing to the Australian people."

Dutton said this week that the three alternative locations for the detainees were much better facilities than the closed centre, despite claims at least one of the sites is still under construction.

"The advocates who are here telling them not to move, they are not doing those people any favours," he told the Nine Network on Thursday.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/05/manus-island-peter-dutton-rejects-mps-attack-comparing-him-to-a-terrorist>

29. Manus authorities 'turn away food aid' as humanitarian crisis deepens

Canberra Times
November 3 2017
Nicole Hasham

Good Samaritans on Manus Island trying to deliver food to hungry refugees are being turned away by the military, lawyers say, warning that the men are "starving" and a full-blown humanitarian crisis is unfolding.

It comes as New Zealand's new Labour government confirmed that nation's long-standing offer to accept 150 refugees from Manus Island was "still on the table", and Opposition Leader Bill Shorten urged Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to accept the proposal.

More than 600 hungry, exhausted, mosquito-ravaged men continued their stand-off with authorities at the now-closed Australian-funded regional processing centre on Manus Island on Friday, refusing to leave for fears over their safety on the outside.

An injunction application is before Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court chief justice that, in the short-term, would force PNG to reopen the facility and provide food, water and electricity, and eventually transfer the men to a safe third country. It will be heard on Monday morning.

Greg Barns, an Australian lawyer acting for the men, said lawyers would now add to that claim a submission the men's constitutional "right to life" had been breached by authorities who refused to allow food aid into the centre.

"As we understand it, Good Samaritans are trying to deliver food and water to the men in the centre. They are being refused access [by PNG military guarding the centre]. This is an egregious breach of the rights of these men under the PNG constitution," Mr Barns told Fairfax Media.

"There are serious levels of starvation. Some people haven't eaten for days."

Mr Barns described the situation as a "full-blown humanitarian crisis".

"You have 600 vulnerable people who have been left without any food, water, medication or sanitation, and inadequate alternatives being provided," he said.

Refugee advocates say new camps to house the men, which would be open to the community, are unsafe and, in some cases, incomplete. Broader community and medical services to support the men are also inadequate, critics say. Many of the claims are backed by the United Nations refugee agency.

Refugee Behrouz Boochani tweeted on Friday: "At the moment hundreds of naked men are lying around me. They are starving and their bodies are getting weak".

Mr Boochani said refugees were boiling rainwater and drinking it with sugar. Photographs uploaded to social media also showed the men have dug makeshift wells to access water, and were showering in the rain or under overflowing gutters.

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul confirmed food donors had been barred access to the centre, but some food was making its way inside.

"People are hungry but some food has got in. It's very basic – rice, noodles, lentils – cheap but filling, and as much as we can get in," he said.

New Zealand Immigration Minister Iain Lees-Galloway told Radio NZ the Australian government must quickly find a compassionate solution, and "our offer to take 150 of the refugees is still on the table".

He said New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern would restate the offer to Mr Turnbull during her visit to Australia this weekend.

The Turnbull government argues that resettlement in New Zealand may provide refugees with a back door entry to Australia, and could restart the people smuggling trade.

Mr Shorten on Friday said Labor was deeply concerned about the "desperate" Manus Island situation.

"[Mr] Turnbull should take Prime Minister Ardern's constructive offer seriously," he said.

"If it's not a viable option, then [Mr] Turnbull should explain why. Doing nothing is not an option."

In a statement, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said the centre's closure and "management" of the men were "matters for PNG".

"Alternative accommodation options for refugees and failed asylum seekers are ready. Some refugees and failed asylum seekers have already moved and they are comfortably accessing services and supports there," it said.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/starvation-manus-authorities-turn-away-food-aid-as-humanitarian-crisis-deepens-20171103-gze7nm.html>

30. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights demands services be restored to centre

ABC News Online
Saturday November 4, 2017

Australia should restore food, water and health services to 600 men inside the Manus Island immigration processing centre and end the "unfolding humanitarian emergency", the UN human rights office says.

Hundreds of men remain in the centre on the Papua New Guinea island that officially closed on Tuesday, saying they do not feel safe in the replacement accommodation at Lorengau. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights spokesman Rupert Colville said it shared wider UN concerns about the stand off. "We have serious concerns about the welfare, safety and wellbeing of the roughly 600 men who remain in the accommodation compound, who are too frightened to leave," he said.

"We call on the Australian Government, as the party who interned the men in the first place, to immediately provide protection, food, water and other basic services. The men have said they fear they will be subjected to violence at the hands of locals if they leave the compound — and, given there have been violent incidents in the past, we believe these fears should be respected and satisfactorily addressed."

Mr Colville said both Australia and PNG were responsible under international human rights law and the 1951 Refugee Convention, to protect the men from harm and ensure they had access to shelter, water, food and sanitation. He repeated previous UN concerns about Australia's offshore processing centres, saying they "are unsustainable, inhumane and contrary to its human rights obligations. We urge the Australia Government to transfer the men to mainland Australia where their claims can be processed," Mr Colville said.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's office declined to comment on the statement but earlier this week flagged there would be no change in Government policy to allow the men entry to mainland Australia.

"The Illegal Maritime Arrivals [IMAs] who are refusing to leave the RPC have been aware since May this year that the PNG authorities would close the RPC [regional processing centre]," he said.

"The constant claims of IMAs and advocates about their situation in Manus are nothing more than subterfuge. "They have long claimed the Manus RPC was a 'hellhole' but the moment it was to be closed they demanded it be kept open."

New Zealand's offer still on the table

On Friday, New Zealand's new Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, renewed her predecessor John Key's offer to resettle 150 asylum seekers currently in Australia's offshore detention centres. Opposition Leader Bill Shorten said Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull should seriously consider New Zealand's offer.

"Australia is not and must not be a resettlement option but it is [Prime Minister Malcolm] Turnbull's responsibility to work with other nations on resettlement options," Mr Shorten told the ABC. "There are strong similarities between this plan and the deal with the United States."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-03/manus-island-un-calls-on-australia-to-end-centre-stand-off/9117996>

31. UN attacks Australia's 'inhumane' refugee-processing system

Detainees on Nauru demand investigation into circumstances that led to death of asylum seeker in road accident

The Guardian

Calla Wahlquist

Saturday 4 November 2017 12.27 AEDT

The United Nations human rights commission has denounced the Australian government for withdrawing support to former Manus Island detainees as the stand-off over the provision of services to more than 600 men enters its fifth day.

It comes as detainees on Nauru call for an investigation into the death of a 29-year-old asylum seeker, who was killed in a road accident on the island nation on Thursday.

In a statement, Rupert Colville, spokesman for high commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, said the UN's human rights committee had "serious concerns about the welfare, safety and wellbeing" of the men who remained at the centre in Papua New Guinea, which was formally decommissioned on Tuesday.

Water to the centre and essential medical services were also cut off on Tuesday, while electricity was disconnected on Wednesday morning. The men have been digging for water.

Colville said the men were "too frightened to leave".

"We call on the Australian government, as the party who interned the men in the first place, to immediately provide protection, food, water and other basic services which have been cut off since authorities shuttered the facility on 31 October," he said.

The commission repeated its criticism that Australia's offshore refugee processing regime was "unsustainable, inhumane and contrary to its human rights obligations" and said asylum seekers and refugees should be immediately transferred to Australia for processing.

Rallies in support of the Manus refugees were held in Canberra and Brisbane on Friday and planned for Melbourne and Sydney on Saturday.

Colville said Australia and PNG had responsibilities under the 1951 Refugee Convention to protect and provide for the men.

"The men have said they fear they will be subjected to violence at the hands of locals if they leave the compound – and, given there have been violent incidents in the past, we believe these fears should be respected and satisfactorily addressed," he said.

"All migrants, including refugees and asylum-seekers, are human beings. Like all of us, they have a right to a safe and secure environment, a right to an adequate standard of living and to participate in the decision-making process that is affecting their future.

"Human dignity should be ensured throughout the entire processing of their asylum claims. We urge the governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea to fully respect their human rights, including their specific rights under international refugee law, and to enter into a dialogue with the men to ensure these rights are duly respected, protected and fulfilled."

The Australian government has rejected claims it abandoned the detainees, saying water, power and medical services are available at three alternative accommodation facilities that can be "accessed at any time," and that comfortable and secure transport to take them to those facilities is also "standing by".

The government has not addressed a report made by the UN high commissioner for refugees, which inspected the alternative accommodation this week and said one of the units was not ready for occupation.

On Nauru, police reportedly arrested a man connected to a fatal crash that resulted in the death of a 29-year-old asylum seeker from Bangladesh, but detainees at the Nauru regional processing centre were concerned about the circumstances of the accident.

The man, who has been in Nauru for more than three years, died in a collision between the motorcycle he was riding and another vehicle on the road to Fly Camp, the detention centre for single men, about 2pm local time on Thursday.

Guardian Australia has attempted to contact the Nauruan government and the Australian immigration department to confirm the arrest.

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul has called for a full investigation to determine the circumstances of the crash.

“There is a lot of suspicion about what has happened,” Rintoul told Guardian Australia. “The fact that refugees are routinely hated just heightens their concerns even more.”

The government of Nauru released a statement on Thursday saying “reports on social media alleging this was more than an accident are false”.

“Police are investigating the accident and no other details are yet available,” the statement said. “The Government of Nauru extends its sincere sympathy to the family and friends of the deceased.”

On Friday, opposition leader Bill Shorten urged prime minister Malcolm Turnbull to accept a renewed offer from New Zealand to take 150 refugees from Australia’s offshore processing camps, saying it was similar to the US resettlement deal brokered with former US president Barack Obama.

Australia rejected the offer when it was first made by former New Zealand prime minister John Key in 2013, saying people smugglers would see it as a way to provide backdoor entry to Australia.

Turnbull is scheduled to meet New Zealand’s new prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, this weekend.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/04/un-attacks-australias-inhumane-refugee-processing-system>