

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Sunday, 10 December 2017

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1. UN warns racism on rise in Australia, calls for section 18C to be strengthened

Sydney Morning Herald
December 9 2017 - 7:15PM
Michael Koziol

The United Nations has issued a scathing report on racism in Australia, warning discrimination is "on the rise", including in the political sphere and in the media.

But the assessment and its recommendations have drawn a fierce response from the Turnbull government's Multicultural Affairs Minister, Zed Seselja, who lashed out at its "bizarre criticism"

The periodic review documented 16 areas of concern including the welfare and status of Indigenous Australians, asylum seekers and migrant workers.

The UN committee proposed a range of radical changes to combat racism, including beefing up section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act and effectively censoring aspects of the media and public commentary.

It suggested racist incidents were often "treated with impunity" and said section 18C should be better policed by "law enforcement officials". UN officials were concerned too few racial discrimination complaints made it to court because the costs and the burden of proof were too high.

Free speech advocates consider section 18C – which makes it unlawful (but not criminal) to offend, insult or humiliate someone on the basis of race – a blight on free expression. The Turnbull government earlier this year tried to water down the section's wording but was blocked by the Senate.

In its report released overnight in Geneva, the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination declared "expressions of racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia, including in the public sphere and political debates as well as in the media, are on the rise" in Australia.

The report's conclusions are based largely on submissions and testimony from non-government organisations, communities and Australian governments.

Hate speech and violence particularly affected Arabs and Muslims, asylum seekers and refugees, Africans, South Asians and Indigenous people, the committee noted.

It recommended ditching the anti-terrorism and national security clauses of the Multicultural Australia statement – announced by the Turnbull government in March – which it warned could lead to racial profiling of Muslims and Arabs by police.

Senator Seselja said the Turnbull government "completely rejects this bizarre criticism" and that a successful multicultural Australia "is only possible, if at the same time, our borders are secure and our nation is safe".

The UN committee also turned on politicians, saying Australia needed to combat xenophobia in political discourse by ensuring public officials "not only refrain from such speech but also formally reject and condemn hate speech".

Furthermore, the media should "put an end to racist hate speech" in print and online, and adopt a "code of good conduct" with provisions banning racism.

Alina Leikin, lawyer at the Human Rights Law Centre, said the UN report was a clear call to arms for the government to "act both urgently and effectively" in tackling racism.

Of particular resonance were concerns about Aboriginal land rights and the failure of the Closing the Gap strategy to improve the welfare of Indigenous Australians.

The UN said a "paradigm shift" was necessary in how governments deal with Indigenous people, calling on the state to "demonstrate the necessary political will to ensure that aspirational plans and programs become a reality".

Several of the concerns raised in this year's evaluation were already flagged in the UN's previous report on Australia in 2010. However, the document released overnight was significantly more critical than the one seven years ago.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/un-warns-racism-on-rise-in-australia-calls-for-section-18c-to-be-strengthened-20171208-h01qi0.html>

2. Martin McKenzie-Murray: The human toll of Manus

The politicised push to eliminate asylum seeker deaths at sea has tragically failed to calculate greater humanitarian costs and the deaths of 11 people

Martin McKenzie-Murray
The Saturday Paper
Edition No. 185 December 2 – 8, 2017

After the partisan euphoria of Kevin O’Rourke, things began to unfurl quickly for the Mandarin priest. Rudd became the first Labor prime minister to fail to fulfil a first term. A decade later, we’re still experiencing the political ramifications of that fact.

By the evening of June 23, 2010, a majority of Labor’s caucus had assembled around Julia Gillard. His removal was now inevitable, but late that night a bitterly defiant Rudd gave a press conference in which he listed his achievements, invoked the trust of the people, and stated his intention to contest a leadership ballot the next morning.

“If I am returned as the leader of the party and the government and as prime minister, then I will be very clear about one thing – this party and government will not be lurching to the right on the question of asylum seekers, as some have counselled us to do,” Rudd said.

Later in the media conference, taking questions from stunned reporters, Rudd reaffirmed this position: “I’ve been very plain about what I said before and you’ve heard me say things about asylum seeker policy recently. I believe it is absolutely wrong for this country to, and absolutely wrong in terms of the values which we hold dear, to get engaged in some sort of race to the right in this country on the question of asylum seekers. I don’t think that’s the right thing to do. That’s the direction the Liberal Party would like to take us. Under my leadership, we will not be going in that direction.”

The numbers were unassailable. By morning Rudd was resigned to them – there would be no ballot. But while he was wrong about his prospects, he was right to anticipate a “lurch to the right” on asylum seeker policy. Under Gillard, it happened almost immediately. Rudd’s immigration minister, Chris Evans, once acknowledged that the issue of “boat people” was “killing the government”. Gillard’s immigration minister, Chris Bowen, was similarly concerned that a failure to mitigate Tony Abbott’s “stop the boat” mantra – and repeated accusations of Labor’s weakness on national security – was bludgeoning their electoral prospects in Western Australia, Queensland and western Sydney.

In one of her first speeches as prime minister, Gillard declared her desire to establish a processing centre in East Timor. By March, the country’s chief diplomat dismissed the idea, citing reasons that might have reasonably applied to eventual clients Nauru and Papua New Guinea. “Timor-Leste is a new country,” Dr Alberto Carlos told The Age. “We have lots of problems to deal with. Our priority is to find the best way to solve our problems. We have to improve the living conditions here. At this stage, we don’t see any urgency to discuss this matter.”

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2017/12/02/the-human-toll-manus/15121332005587>

3. Don Watson in The Monthly: We are all diminished

Australian politics is full of contradictions, double standards and gaping voids

The Monthly
DECEMBER 2017 – JANUARY 2018
By Don Watson

My mother is 98. As the responsible authorities accept only current passports and licences as photographic proof of identity, when hers expired she lost, as a continuing human being, a certain amount of purchase with them. In the absence of the vital documents, the authorities demanded her birth certificate; alas, when he registered her birth in 1919, her father – a decent citizen in every way, but absent-minded – wrote down the wrong date. He was just a day out, but with these things it may as well have been a decade.

It took 98 years for the authorities to spot the anomaly. Unaware that her father had written the 7th on her birth certificate, all her life on every form she ever filled in my mother had written the 6th. Now they’ve sprung her, and unless we can find a way to satisfy the powers that she is for them as she is for us, and the same person whose existence has been officially accepted for nearly a hundred years, her bed in the aged-care centre will be near as dammit terra nullius.

I suppose we could hire a couple of silks and take it to the High Court, as those parliamentarians were forced to do when, like Grandpa, they slipped up with their forms. But we don’t have the money, and even if we did, we might have to take my mother too – as proof, you know – and she doesn’t travel so well these days. Besides, while we think we have common sense and justice on our side, long experience and our very natures incline us to doubt that the court would so hold, even if Malcolm Turnbull directed the judges. Especially if he directed them.

[...]

Australia's little gulags on Manus Island and Nauru, like all gulags large and small, are the hidden void made concrete. Mad as the parliament thing seems, it's not as mad as Manus Island, and if only we were not groaning with the weight of our compassion for the MPs caught up in it, we'd love to have some sympathy left over for the people confined there. They, like the MPs, are guilty of nothing but hope and ambition and failing to fill in the forms, but have ended up incarcerated for years. Poor Barnaby Joyce, poor John Alexander, poor all of them, sure: but they know that nothing a fraction as bad is going to happen to them. And that is why, by his recent admission, Joyce continued to serve in the cabinet and to be paid for doing it, expecting all the while to be found ineligible.

The honest way to deal with the people on Manus Island and Nauru would have been to put some in cages on permanent display in city squares, and others in cattle trucks travelling the country with extended stays in provincial malls. Thus the Australian people in whose name the guiltless have been imprisoned could face them squarely, and weep or taunt as their feelings incline them. The cowards' way is to put them out of sight, and then invent a convenient narrative and new words – such as “illegals” – to satisfy themselves that Australians continue to be good. It is by this process, surely, that a cabinet minister who with good reason finds it “absurd” that he should be punished because his family were refugees does not find it just as absurd for his government to punish refugees on Manus Island and Nauru – or if he does, judges it impolitic to say so.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2017/december/1512046800/don-watson/we-are-all-diminished>

4. Australia's counter-terror measures 'fuelling racism': UN committee

Canberra Times
Wednesday 29 November 2017
Nick Miller

London: Hate speech and counter-terrorism measures may be fuelling a general rise in racism, xenophobia and discrimination in Australia, a UN committee says.

Australian government officials were grilled in Geneva on Tuesday by the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, over a periodic report on our country's progress in tackling racism and disadvantage

It was Australia's first appearance before the committee since 2010.

Verene Shepherd, the committee's rapporteur for Australia, welcomed our progress in adopting an anti-racism strategy, appointing a race discrimination commissioner and bringing in new health and justice programs for indigenous people.

However she "voiced concern that hate speech and counter-terrorism measures were fuelling racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and ethnic-based discrimination in the country", according to notes on the meeting released by the committee on Tuesday evening.

Shepherd said the Australian government needed to target the minority of Australians who do not want multiculturalism.

Tim Soutphommasane, the Race Discrimination Commissioner, told the committee there were "clear indications that racial intolerance and racial discrimination are on the rise" in Australia.

"It is especially concerning that, as in many other countries, extreme nationalist organisations have grown in prominence within public debates about race and immigration".

Another committee expert, Gun Kut, asked what Australia was doing to counter "negative trends" such as "racism in political discourse and targeting of migrants by far-right groups".

Adrienne Walters, from Australia's Human Rights Law Centre, was at the hearing in Geneva and said the UN committee had made it clear that Australia has considerable work to do to eliminate racism from our institutions, laws and public debate.

"The Committee was particularly concerned about Australia's increasingly cruel treatment of refugees and people seeking asylum and demanded to know why the Australian Government has not evacuated all the men, women and children on Manus Island and Nauru to safety in Australia," Walters said.

The committee also homed in on the pace at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being drawn into the quicksand of child protection and criminal justice systems.

Walters said the Australian Government's response to the committee on the asylum issue "was typically obtuse".

And she said the Committee's frustration with Australia's inadequate responses to questions was clear, with Australia pointedly asked twice about whether it will implement the recommendations of the landmark Northern Territory Royal Commission in the Northern Territory and beyond.

Walters said she shared the committee's grave concerns about the deterioration of political discourse in Australia and the rise of xenophobia and nationalism.

"While the Australian Government claims a strong commitment to multiculturalism, attempts to weaken vital racial vilification laws and to make citizenship harder for migrants in the last few years, together with the cynical linking of multicultural policy with terrorism and national security, create a dangerous authorising environment for racism and xenophobia," she said.

Lachlan Strahan, the Department of Foreign Affairs first assistant secretary, told the committee that "unfortunately, some Australians said repulsive things about racial issues, but the majority rejected such ugly discourse", according to the committee notes.

He said far-right parties were thankfully small and splintered "even though sometimes they could be very loud".

Racist language was "called out" and political leaders and courts were willing to take "the right kind of action to defend diversity and tolerance", he said.

The enemies of diversity were the enemies of democracy, he said.

Shepherd noted that the previous president of Australian Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs, had been "vilified by senior officials and undermined financially".

She was concerned by recent changes to the AHRC including the reduction of the timeframe for people to make complaints.

She also highlighted the increasing percentage of indigenous women in prison, and expressed concern about the harsh living conditions in offshore detention centres.

Shepherd urged Australia to end its boat turnback policy and offshore detention of asylum seekers.

The Australian delegation defended Australia's policy on asylum seekers who arrived by boat, saying our tough stance on people smuggling had decreased criminal activities, and people intercepted at sea would not be settled in Australia because the government wanted to "send a clear message to people smugglers".

The committee also complained that plans for an English language test for would-be citizens seemed discriminatory.

Strahan said the citizenship legislation was "in the hands of politicians", according to the committee notes.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/world/australias-counterterrorism-measures-fuelling-racism-un-committee-20171128-gzur1b.html>

5. The Saturday Paper Editorial: The man with no face

The Saturday Paper
Edition No. 184
November 25 – December 1, 2017

In the nightmare he has no face. He is sitting on a couch, leaning forward as if to adjust something on a coffee table. When he looks up, he is the dead man from the photograph. He is Hamed Shamshirpour.

He is wearing the same pink polo shirt, the same loose blue trousers. His arms are thin almost to wasting and his head is shaved bald. His empty eyes, from the last photograph ever taken of him, eclipse what would otherwise have been his features. Unmistakably, he is dead.

I have been having this nightmare since August, when Hamed killed himself. At the time, we chose not to publish this photograph. His family found it too distressing.

We wrote that it looked like the scene of a lynching, and that it was. We wrote that his shoulders hung as if responding to a question for which there was no answer. We wrote that the Australian government was responsible for his death.

Hamed killed himself after he had been assessed as a refugee. He killed himself after Border Force's chief medical officer had been made aware of his dire mental state. He killed himself after Australia had refused to honour his wishes to be returned to the country he was fleeing.

Hamed Shamshirpour killed himself because he could not escape the hell Australia had made for him. He killed himself because he was trapped in the evil of our politics and no one in power cared enough to know he was there.

There is no more "in spite of". There is no longer any way a humane person could vote for the Labor or Liberal parties without giving thought to their position on refugees. This policy is bipartisan. The torture that killed Hamed Shamshirpour is the work of successive governments, elected by voters able to overlook their cruelty.

The men on Manus Island have been abandoned. That did not start this month, when power and sanitation was cut at the detention centre where they have been marooned. It didn't start this week, when soldiers began pulling apart what is left of the structure.

It started in 1992, when the concept of mandatory detention criminalised the legal act of seeking asylum. It started in 2001, with the Tampa and children overboard, when John Howard decided elections could be won on a fear of "boat people". It started with Kim Beazley's cowardice and Kevin Rudd's ambition and Julia Gillard's fecklessness, with Tony Abbott's cruelty and Malcolm Turnbull's impotence. It started a hundred different times and has been played out over and over.

What is happening on Manus Island is the real cost of the cynicism of our politics. The lives of these men have been traded for votes. They represent the comfort of this country and its fear.

The abandonment of these men is transactional. Their torture no longer serves a purpose. Voters do not blame them for traffic congestion and hospital waiting queues, as they once did, and so the government has lost interest in them. They are being killed with indifference.

Politics in this country has created a moral vacuum. It is not until we start voting on the issue of refugees, instead of voting despite it, that this will change.

The government is unmoved by the crisis on Manus. It is unconcerned by deaths such as Hamed's, by the broken defiance of his final moments. It has already forgotten the men left behind.

When the country votes, it has to remember this. It has to wake up from the nightmare.

Malcolm Turnbull

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<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2017/11/25/the-man-with-no-face/15115284005538>

6. TRANSLATED from DUTCH: Please let 'Manus' be an eye-opener

Immigration policy must never be at the expense of human rights

Manus - Image: ANP / EPA / EPA / Refugee Action Coalition

Paul Geraedts
hpdetijd.nl

November 30, 2017 4:05 PM

With the establishment of camps in remote locations far outside the Australian territory, the government of the country hoped to discourage the influx of refugees by boat. The two locations, on the remote island state of Nauro and the island of Manus (part of Papua New Guinea) caused a lot of controversy internationally. 'Manus' is now synonymous with violations of human rights, and the situation only seems to be deteriorating.

What seemed to be the perfect policy of discouragement for the conservative Australian government, unfolds like a hot potato where everyone likes to subtract his hands. 'Manus' became an example of how deep a modern democracy can sink.

Australia paid the poverty-stricken Papua New Guinea for years for the reception of the refugees. Recently it was decided to close the camp, on the orders of the government. Not that of Australia, by the way, but the Supreme Court in Port Moresby declared Manus Island unconstitutional.

Humanitarian disaster

And since then, the refugees at the camp have been outlawed and surrendered to the local population of a poor and unstable country, where armed militias and police units plundered the camp and poisoned the water sources. And the Australians? They have long since gone away.

Journalists are also not welcome at Manus, as a result of which the messages coming out of the refugees themselves. Shocking images of men with iron bars that mistreat the refugees do not lie. A humanitarian disaster unfolds on Manus, and the Australian government looks away.

The last sad development is that the application of a team of Australian medical doctors to travel to Papua New Guinea was rejected by the government of Australia and also Médecins sans Frontières was denied access to the site by the local authorities.

A day or two ago it became clear that the 387 remaining refugee from the closed detention center were transferred to a new center, on the same island in the city of Lorengau. The refugees are now back again, and it is waiting for the next humanitarian crisis.

Criticism

Meanwhile, the criticism of the Australian government's policy is getting louder, Minister of Immigration Peter Dutton tries to save himself from the situation by selling lies and denying mistreatment and human rights violations. Increasing protests are taking place in cities such as Melbourne and Sydney.

However, the government maintains its no-nonsense policy, which was made very clear in the following video campaign from 2014. " No way. You will not make Australia home " is the message to boat refugees. For the time being, the government of the country prefers to deal with corrupt regimes like Cambodia to include interned refugees.

Well, Australia is about 16,000 kilometers from the Netherlands, on the other side of the world. But here, too, the voice to 'harder searchers' is getting louder. Here too, human rights violations take place. Maybe not directly with us, but on the Greek islands or on the borders of the European Union incidents take place almost daily.

Incidents that do not belong in the EU. And we also close our eyes, just like Australia. And like Australia, we prefer to do business with dubious figures, in our case the Turkish president Erdogan.

This week showed how a group of refugees were arrested in 'Brandpunt'.

Australian policy is a disgusting example of how quickly a country can slide and throw all its democratic principles overboard. And no, this piece is not about whether to 'siss' or not, not about left-wing breast beating or crying right. It is also not about letting everyone else enter our country.

No, it is something that should be ingrained in both Australia and Europe: the basic principle called human civilization . Let Manus therefore be a lesson for European governments about how it should not be done. A strict immigration policy must never be at the expense of human rights.

Rights for which we have also bled in Europe, not too long ago.

<http://www.hpdetijd.nl/2017-11-30/laat-manus-alsieblieft-een-eye-opener-zijn/>

7. Not gay enough: the bizarre hoops asylum seekers have to leap through

Asylum seekers fleeing persecution in their homelands on the basis of their sexuality can face troubling stereotypes when asked to prove their bona fides in Australia.

Sydney Morning Herald
December 9 2017 - 12:00AM
Robert Burton-Bradley

It's just past 6pm on an average weeknight in Kings Cross but already the streets are filling up with backpackers and kids from Sydney's western suburbs, hungry to party. Bored strip club spruikers are trying to drum up the first wave of dwindling, post-lockout law business, while in side streets, seagulls and ibises raid the bins and the odd junkie communes with a dealer.

This wouldn't be my first choice of setting in which to interview a vulnerable young refugee, one who has been tortured and humiliated because of his homosexuality, one who lives more than 20 kilometres away in Sydney's sprawling south-west. But it was Farhad's idea to meet here. "No one will know me here," explains the 27-year-old, surveying the scene before taking a seat in an outdoor cafe.

At first glance, you could mistake Farhad*, with his handsome, aquiline features and tall, lean physique, as a refugee from central casting. Sporting cut-off jeans and a black T-shirt, Farhad has honey-brown skin and tattoos curling up and down his defined arms and shoulders. It's only when I take a closer look, and absorb the details of his astonishing survival story, that I notice the numerous scars poking out from under his tattoos, the pockmarks sprinkled over his arms and hands, and a couple of missing teeth: all the legacy of his torture in Iran four years ago. He hands me a sheaf of papers, including affidavits and immigration documents, to support his account.

It's taken a battery of reassurances on my part, including an ironclad guarantee that he won't be identified in any story, to convince Farhad to take part in this conversation. I'd been hearing disturbing reports about the way gay refugees seeking asylum on the basis of their sexuality are assessed: from laughable, stereotyped questions designed to establish whether they're gay or not, to wafer-thin research into persecution within the refugees' country of origin, to excruciatingly long delays in granting them a hearing. I'd spent the better part of a year phoning, emailing and interviewing migration agents and lawyers, and sourcing documents via freedom of information.

But such is the climate of fear among those at risk of being sent back to countries where they've suffered terrible persecution, no one is willing to talk, paranoid that any kind of publicity might stymie their case to stay in Australia. After the phone cut out on what seemed like the hundredth call seeking an interview, I was about to give up. Then Farhad phoned, asking me whether I was looking for a "gay refugee still". In fragmented English, he explained that he was willing to share his story in the hope others may understand what it's like to be gay and in fear for your life.

So here we are in this Kings Cross cafe, where Farhad is recounting his story of growing up in Tehran with his parents and older brother. His father part-owned a barber shop, which Farhad managed. "I was very happy about my life," he says in a deep voice. The only dark cloud was living with his homosexuality, which in Iran is outlawed and carries the death penalty. Almost no one comes out in Iran, even to members of their own family, as this is the most common way LGBTQI people are reported to the "morality police" and thrown into prison.

Although Farhad had a good relationship with his parents, he never deluded himself that they would accept having a gay son, particularly as his father was a respected local mullah and his grandfather an ayatollah. He'd known since his early teens that he was a hamjens-bazi, the derogatory term the government and state media use to describe someone who "plays" with the same sex (the closest English translation is faggot). Any openness would bring shame to the family, and social ostracism.

Keeping his sexuality secret was relatively easy for Farhad, as he wasn't someone, in voice or manner, you'd read as being gay. But then, maybe this emboldened him to take risks, especially after his brother revealed his secret to their father, who immediately went into denial. "My brother was jealous of me because he thought my father liked me better than himself," Farhad explains. "He told my father that I was gay – very bad – and had a boyfriend."

FULL STORY AT <http://www.smh.com.au/good-weekend/not-gay-enough-the-bizarre-hoops-asylum-seekers-have-to-leap-through-20171127-gzu1vq.html>

8. Q&A: detention regime is designed to break refugees, says Gillian Triggs

The human rights commissioner provokes fiery debate on ABC show with Eric Abetz calling her claim 'preposterous'

The Guardian
Christopher Knaus
Tuesday 5 December 2017 07.24 AEDT

Former human rights commissioner Gillian Triggs has described Australia's offshore detention regime as designed to "break" refugees, warning the inhumanity on Manus Island had reached such a point that "as a nation, we have to respond".

The plight of the hundreds of men on Manus Island provoked a fiery debate on ABC's Q&A on Monday night, after a question from Sudanese refugee Abdul Aziz Adam.

Labor senator Lisa Singh, whose party reopened offshore detention centres in 2012, said they may not have done so if they had known the situation would reach this point.

"I think if we were to reflect on where we are now, that this is not the point we would have agreed to have been at," Singh said. "And I don't think that ever was the intention."

She said the government's refusal to accept New Zealand's offer to take 150 men suggested they wanted people to suffer or die.

That provoked outrage from Liberal senator Eric Abetz, who labelled the comment as "highly offensive".

The Institute of Public Affairs director of policy Simon Breheny also dismissed any notion that the government was intentionally mistreating or inflicting cruelty on those in offshore detention.

But Triggs, a vocal critic of the policy, said the evidence suggested otherwise.

"This program is designed to break these people. And to send them back," she said.

Abetz labelled the proposition as "preposterous". He asked why Australia could not at least celebrate stopping the boats and stopping drownings at sea.

Triggs said offshore detention regime had now become Australia's shame.

"It's a difficult decision for both political parties," Triggs said. "But I think the inhumanity has reached a level where we, as a nation, we have to respond."

Earlier, a young Muslim woman became emotional while telling the panellists of the the far-reaching impacts of Donald Trump's retweeting of far-right group Britain First, which had tweeted inflammatory anti-Islamic content.

"It's definitely a struggle when you're living in a society where you think you're welcomed and you think the people around you are going to be there," she said.

Breheny, of the IPA, dismissed the discussion about Trump's tweets, as "extraordinary" and lacking substance. He wanted to talk about Trump's proposed corporate tax cuts instead.

Singh, the Labor senator, attacked him for what she described as flippancy.

"That the president of the US, the leader of the free world is targeting a certain group within our society and that's having effects on the women here that have shared that experience with us tonight here in Australia," Singh said. "That's outrageous. It's terrible. And we can't be flippant about it."

Singh was later asked whether Australians should be concerned about creeping foreign influence in the political system, given the recent revelations about Labor senator Sam Dastyari and Chinese donor Huang Xiangmo.

The panel questioned the timing of the stories about Dastyari, given the many months that have passed since his meeting with Huang Xiangmo.

Singh suggested Australia's intelligence agencies may have been "politicised".

"If our intelligence agencies are being politicised in some way by, willingly or unwillingly by the government, that is a huge concern, a huge concern," she said.

Earlier, Triggs was confronted by Calum Thwaites, one of the students involved in the infamous racial discrimination case at the Queensland University of Technology.

Triggs said she thought the commission handled the complaint excellently, and was constrained by a lack of contact details for the students and the university's insistence that they not be contacted, among other things.

But Thwaites said: "I can't understand Professor Triggs, how you think the commission acted excellently when seven students weren't told about the complaint for 14 months, regardless of what the university may or may not have said, when it wasn't their responsibility, statute or otherwise, to inform us," he said,

"As a result of this seven students almost had their lives ruined."

Triggs said she deeply regretted that the case was not settled. She said the commission's role was to deal with such complaints before they made it to court, which had failed in this instance.

"But had we not made that, played that role of trying to achieve a conciliation between the parties, the complainant would have gone to the federal court in any event," she said.

"So the role of the commission is really to provide an access to social justice, a way of solving a problem that avoids going to court... that failed in this case."

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/dec/05/qa-detention-regime-is-designed-to-break-refugees-says-gillian-triggs>

9. Q&A: Eric Abetz and Lisa Singh go head to head over Manus Island crisis

ABC Online News
Monday 6 December, 10:07pm

A question from a Manus Island detainee to Monday night's Q&A panel about his fate in detention sparked a clash between two Liberal and Labor senators with each blaming the others' government for the current crisis.

The program heated up after Aziz Muhamat, who has been stuck on Manus Island for more than four years, asked the panel via video: "How long will Australia keep us here in danger?"

Tasmanian Liberal Senator Eric Abetz reiterated the Government's catchcry that it had stopped the boats.

"People said it couldn't happen. We did stop the drownings at sea and the deaths at sea and it was because of the determined action of the Government, which I am very pleased to be part of," he said.

But Tasmanian Labor Senator Lisa Singh said the Government had other options to send detainees to New Zealand, but refused to take the country up on its offer.

Addressing Mr Muhamat, she said: "It is shameful the Australian Government has treated you this way."

"That you have been left languishing for years on end indefinitely in detention on Manus Island. And we're talking about not just you, but some 2,000 men, women and children that have been treated appallingly by this Australian Government," she said.

Senator Abetz then interrupted, saying the Labor government had started it.

Senator Singh went on to say Manus Island detainees were suffering from mental illness and Australia was known as a country that treated refugees badly.

"That's just false," Senator Abetz responded.

Host Tony Jones asked Senator Singh if she was ashamed of the Labor government that began the offshore detention system in the first place.

She said the current situation was not the intention, and there were plans to process detainees, which the Liberal Government was not doing.

"Let's face it. You have options on the table and the government is refusing to take them up. What does that say about our government?" Senator Singh said.

"Do they want people to die? Do they want people to continue to suffer? Because it looks like it."

Senator Abetz said such a statement was "highly offensive" and that no government wanted this type of situation.

Former president of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs, said it was time to evacuate the detainees because it was becoming unsafe and Australia needed to "bring these men home".

"In my view, we need to bring them to Australia," she said.

"It's a difficult decision for both political parties, but I think the inhumanity has reached a level where we, as a nation, we have to respond. We're ashamed of this policy. It's not Australian, it's in serious breach of our international obligations."

Woman brought to tears after panellist ignores question

Audience member Zahra Bilal was brought to tears when one of the panellists refused to acknowledge her question about US President Donald Trump's tweets and how they could promote hate crimes against Muslims.

Her question comes after Mr Trump was criticised for retweeting videos posted by far-right group British First, which the group said showed a "Muslim migrant" beating up a "Dutch boy".

Dutch police said two teens were arrested in relation to the incident but there was no indication that the arrested teenagers were immigrants, or Muslims.

Senator Abetz said he had a problem with how Mr Trump tweeted and investigative reporter at the Sydney Morning Herald, Kate McClymont, said it was shocking Mr Trump had not checked his facts.

But director of policy at the Institute of Public Affairs, Simon Breheny, said he did not understand why the panel was bothering to talk about Mr Trump's tweets.

"Frankly, I would much rather talk about the \$1.5 trillion tax package that's passed the US Senate that's being debated," he said.

Jones pointed out that was not the question asked and Mr Breheny said: "I'm saying it's extraordinary the one thing we're plucking out of the US when it comes to news and current affairs is what [Mr Trump] is tweeting."

FULL STORY AT <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-05/q&a-panel-clashes-over-manus-human-rights-crisis/9225302>

10. Martin McKenzie-Murray: Manus Island, Inside the brutal end game

As the government turns its back, the detention centre on Manus Island is smashed apart and the men there are brutalised.
By Martin McKenzie-Murray.

Martin McKenzie-Murray
The Saturday Paper
Edition No. 184 November 25 – December 1, 2017

Initially, the messages came in an anxiously rapid stream – local police and a paramilitary squad had entered the former camp on Manus Island, finally enforcing the long-passed eviction deadline and dismantling what was, by now, a predominately makeshift infrastructure. One photo showed a local man with a large knife, seemingly preparing to slash an asylum seeker's painting. "One of them is holding knife and telling us in worst behaviour to leave or you will regret."

Other photos showed Papua New Guinean authorities tearing apart furniture and emptying plastic crates containing personal possessions. The almost month-long standoff was ending. One asylum seeker, Samad Abdul, wrote: "They are having hard sticks on their hands, and making us scared with loud and unacceptable voices."

Journalist and refugee Behrouz Boochani wrote: "They are destroying everything. Shelters, tanks, beds and all our belongings. They are very aggressive and put our belongings in the rubbish bins. The refugees still are silent are watching them so scared."

The men didn't remain silent. Soon, streams of video arrived depicting agitated crowds chanting: "They want to kill us! Human rights, help us please!"

Boochani has served as something of a leader in the camp for years, and has written prolifically about life there. Last month, he received an Amnesty International media award for articles written for this paper and Guardian Australia. A film he secretly made with his phone – and edited with a documentarian in the Netherlands – has been shown at international film festivals.

About 12.30pm on Thursday, Boochani was arrested by local police. Footage shows him being led away from the camp by two men in grey fatigues. At time of writing, I could not ascertain the charge – if any. There were unconfirmed reports that other refugee leadership members were also arrested.

Later in the afternoon, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance issued this statement on his arrest: "MEAA, the union for Australian media workers, stands in solidarity with Iranian-Kurdish journalist and regular contributor to Australian publications, Behrouz Boochani, who has reportedly been arrested today on Manus Island.

"... MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy said Boochani appeared to have been deliberately targeted by Papua New Guinea police in today's crackdown because of his high-profile as a journalist reporting from inside the detention centre."

The Papua New Guinean government gave assurances that no violence would be used against the men in effecting their transfer to the new accommodation. But there were scenes of panic and chaos. One disturbing photo purportedly showed an epileptic man who had collapsed, and another man worriedly bent over him, offering water. It was alleged that police had struck him on the head or chest, but this could not be corroborated.

The human rights director of GetUp!, Shen Narayanasamy, was smuggled into the camp almost a fortnight ago. She told me that three men were in need of urgent medical attention. "It's an incredibly volatile situation," she said. "There are no medical facilities here. Some men have been without medication for days, or even weeks. PNG officials are left with a mess not of their own making, but there's a history of violence from them against their own people. It's desperate. It's a situation in which death, even inadvertent, is possible."

For years, men on Manus have become desperate documentarians, sending journalists photos, footage, written accounts – even poetry and illustrations. But by lunchtime Thursday, contact began slowing. Phones were being confiscated. Sources fell offline. "The noose is being tightened," Tim Costello, chief advocate of World Vision Australia, told me.

Costello arrived on Manus on Wednesday – the same day the "mobile squad" were given orders to end the standoff the following morning. When I spoke with Costello, he was near the perimeter of the camp, where a police cordon was assembled. "Every time I get close, they push me back," he said. "The mobile squad are there, but I'm not sure of their terms of engagement. There has been a promise of no force, but that's not what I've been hearing – but I cannot confirm that. I think there are two things to consider. The first is that authorities are showing them that they are serious by roughing up the property ... The well the men dug has been destroyed, and water supplies are now a crisis point.

"The second thing to consider is that the PNG government believes the world is watching. It's concerned about its reputation. It doesn't want to confirm suspicions, sometimes unfair, that it's lawless. And we must remember that we contracted out our problem to one of the world's poorest countries."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2017/11/25/manus-island-inside-the-brutal-end-game/15115284005557>

11. Turnbull government scrambles after losing vote on New Zealand refugee offer

Greens motion passes 73 to 72 in an upset before two missing MPs return to chamber, allowing Coalition to force a rerun

The Guardian
Katherine Murphy Political editor
Monday 4 December 2017 19.04 AEDT

The Turnbull government has briefly lost control of the lower house, losing a vote on the floor of the House of Representatives, with the chamber passing a motion calling for asylum seekers on Manus Island to be sent to New Zealand.

The Greens motion, calling on the government to accept New Zealand's offer to resettle 150 refugees and negotiate conditions similar to the US refugee resettlement agreement, initially passed the house 73 votes to 72 in an upset vote late on Monday afternoon.

The Liberal MP Warren Entsch missed the division because he was being interviewed on television, as did the frontbencher Steve Ciobo, who later told the house he was "unfortunately detained" – an explanation that prompted howls of derision from across the chamber.

The manager of government business, Christopher Pyne, scrambled shortly after the defeat to recommit the vote, ignoring voluble protests from the Labor party.

The manager of opposition business, Tony Burke, declared the vote had been lost because "[government MPs] can't turn up for work". Burke said the vote had been entirely anticipated so there could be no valid claims of misadventure requiring a rerun of the vote.

Once the missing MPs returned to the chamber, the government was able to force a rerun and it eventually won the division, successfully seeing off the Greens motion.

The motion, which had passed the Senate, was always going to be a close-run vote, because it had the support of the ALP and all of the lower house crossbenchers, apart from Queensland's Bob Katter.

As the chamber descended into a procedural skirmish before the vote was recommitted, the journalist Behrouz Boochani, who is one of the refugees on Manus Island, took to Twitter to express hope that Australia could ultimately turn to New Zealand.

The Greens lower house MP Adam Bandt also took to Twitter to declare supporters of the men on Manus would keep fighting to try to secure a transfer to New Zealand.

The government enters the final sitting week for 2017 vulnerable because it is down two MPs in the lower house. The Liberal John Alexander is fighting to hold his seat of Bennelong at a byelection, and the National Barnaby Joyce prevailed in the New England byelection at the weekend but is not yet back in the chamber.

The lost vote on Monday afternoon followed separate disruption to government business in the Senate, with the government pulling superannuation legislation and reordering business because it lacked the numbers to steer the bill through the chamber.

The government was, however, spared one embarrassment, with a decision by the outspoken Queensland MP George Christensen to backflip on an earlier suggestion he could go against government policy and support amended legislation restoring lost penalty rates.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/dec/04/turnbull-government-scrambles-after-losing-vote-on-new-zealand-refugee-offer>

12. At least 70 refugees held on Nauru reportedly accepted for resettlement in US

Up to 90 refugees held by Australia likely to be accepted but at least three families and nine single refugees rejected

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 29 November 2017 12.46 AEDT

At least 70 – and possibly up to 90 – refugees held by Australia on Nauru have been accepted for resettlement in the United States, sources on the island say.

Staff from the US state department-funded Resettlement Support Centre, currently on Nauru, have told about 70 refugees – mainly single men from Pakistan and Afghanistan but also some single women – they can resettle in America.

More meetings are scheduled for coming days and up to 90 refugees are expected to be accepted in this round of resettlement offers.

If and when those refugees leave the island, they will bring the number resettled under the controversial US deal to about 140 from both of Australia's offshore islands, Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.

But at least three refugee families and nine single refugees on Nauru have also been told they have been rejected by the US and their futures remain in limbo. They have been told they have up to three months to lodge an appeal but this process is unclear.

The Nauru government has been adamant that no refugees will permanently resettle in that country. It is unclear where they will be able to resettle, despite being legally owed protection by Australia.

Some of the refugees accepted for resettlement had their medical assessments completed several months ago, so they have now expired. They will need to be redone before people can move to the US. But induction courses, to introduce people to living in America, will commence in coming days.

It is understood the next cohort of refugees will leave for the US in late January.

Resettlement Support Centre officers are also on the island to commence the interview process for those refugees who have previously expressed an interest in going to the US but who have not had an initial interview.

Ian Rintoul, from the Refugee Action Coalition, said the latest round of resettlement offers confirmed all of the existing concerns around the US deal.

"It's fantastically slow and completely lacking in transparency," he said. "All of the anxieties on Nauru are back now, people are asking, 'Why this person and not that person? Why so few families?'"

"But it's also quite obvious that, at this rate, we are looking at a very, very long time for the people on Nauru to know exactly how many are going to be selected and the time to resettle them."

Refugees on Nauru said they had mixed feelings about the latest announcement.

"We will get happy for the people who will get out of this hell," one refugee told the Guardian. "But many people are still concerned for their own case ... People think, 'What will happen to us?'"

The US deal has been mired in controversy since it was announced in November 2016. So far, only 54 refugees have been resettled and faith in the deal is fading with its sclerotic progress.

In a phone call in January with the US president, Donald Trump, the Australian prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, said America was not obliged under the deal to accept any refugees for resettlement.

"It does not require you to take any," he said. "The obligation is to only go through the process."

Turnbull said of the refugees "they are basically economic refugees".

"Economic refugee" is not a term that has any meaning in domestic or international law.

Trump, who reluctantly agreed to honour the deal, struck by his predecessor, told Turnbull: "You are worse than I am ... maybe you should let them out of prison."

On the offshore islands, there is scepticism the US deal will resettle more than a few dozen of the 2,000 refugees still held offshore.

But within the Australian government, there is a belief that the US will take close to the 1,250 refugees it posited and will do so by next October, when its annual humanitarian intake quota resets.

About 410 people are currently in Australia, having been moved "onshore" from offshore detention for medical treatment.

They have been unable to "progress" their application for resettlement in the US while they are in Australia, the department says. And they face having to return to offshore, even if they have been physically attacked or sexually assaulted there, in order to apply for US resettlement.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/29/at-least-70-refugees-held-on-nauru-by-australia-accepted-for-resettlement-in-us>

13. Manus Island: 60 refugees to be moved to Port Moresby for US interviews

Group of men will be screened for resettlement in the US under swap deal, while on Manus the new accommodation facilities still lack basic services

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 8 December 2017 08.01 AEDT

About 60 refugees held by Australia on Manus Island will be moved to Port Moresby next week for further interviews towards resettlement in the US.

But none of those who have been told they are leaving are from the countries proscribed by Donald Trump's newly upheld travel ban.

Refugees and asylum seekers on Manus are being held in new Australian-built accommodation centres on the island after the forcible and violent clearance of the decommissioned detention centre.

The new facilities have been plagued by problems: large parts of the centres are not yet built, and there have been insufficient rooms and beds for the number of men there.

There remains a lack of water, food has been stolen, and the owners of the land on which the centres are built have protested against their presence, cutting electricity, blocking access roads and threatening staff.

Water supplies have failed at the East Lorengau centre – pictures and videos show refugees filling buckets from a water truck brought into the camp at night. Another accommodation block, Hillside Haus, has been without power.

Refugees have been forced to wait up to seven hours for food, and, in some cases, only half have been fed, the Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani has said.

A notice posted in the new Manus accommodation centres said representatives from the US Resettlement Support Centre would visit Port Moresby from 14 December, and that some refugees would be required to travel to the capital for appointments.

“Further resettlement progress is expected in coming months. Your patience is appreciated.”

About 60 refugees – understood to be mainly Afghans, Pakistanis and Rohingya – have been told they will be travelling to Port Moresby next week.

None are from Iran or Somalia – countries proscribed by Trump's “travel ban” that was this week upheld by a majority of justices on the supreme court.

It remains unclear exactly what impact the executive order will have on the US resettlement deal brokered between Australia and the US before Trump came into office. The order suspends the entry into the US of nationals from Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, North Korea and Venezuela

There is a clause in the order which would allow for nationals of those countries to be admitted to “enable the United States to conform its conduct to a pre-existing international agreement or arrangement”, but it is not known whether the US will seek to take only refugees from countries other than those proscribed. Iranians make up the largest cohort of refugees on both Manus and Nauru.

There are already more than 100 refugees and asylum seekers from Australian-run offshore camps held in Port Moresby, most for medical care. Some hotels have been entirely booked out for months by the Australian Border Force to house refugees. Many of the refugees have been in the Papua New Guinean capital for months – suffering serious health problems – but have had either one or no medical appointments.

Boochani said the refugees and asylum seekers still held on Manus – most have been there since 2013 – were frustrated “because every day we have to struggle with suffering created by this system”. Boochani said the refugees' health had deteriorated.

“The medical condition is much worse than before because so many people are traumatised by the last incident, when police beat the refugees. Also, some people who had a long history of psychological illness cannot get medicine. The main medical issue with those who have psychological issues, there are no facilities on Manus for them.”

The Sudanese refugee Abdul Aziz Adam said refugees were tired and hungry, and remained uncertain about their futures.

“There is lots of pressure on the refugees in the new prison camps, there's a lack (of) water, food and power in the three different camps.”

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, said this week he expected more refugees from Nauru and Manus to be resettled in the US soon, but that progress of the process was a matter for US authorities.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/dec/08/manus-island-50-refugees-to-be-moved-to-port-moresby-for-us-interviews>

14. Border Force tells Nauru refugees to separate from family if they want to settle in US

Phone conversations and email chain show ABF is contravening international law and using separation as a coercive measure

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 6 December 2017 06.47 AEDT

Australian Border Force officials are telling refugees on Nauru they must separate from their wives and children – and face never seeing them again – in order to apply for resettlement in the US.

Recordings of phone conversations and an email chain confirm the ABF is encouraging permanent family separation, in contravention of international law, and directly contradicting evidence given to the the Senate by the department secretary, Mike Pezzullo.

In September, the Guardian reported on the case of Arash Shirmohamadi, who has never seen his Australia-born baby girl, Yusra, now nearly nine months old, and whom he has been told he must abandon in order to apply for resettlement.

A formally recognised refugee who fled persecution in Iran, Shirmohamadi has been held on Nauru, while his wife and child are in held detention in Sydney.

He has been told by the ABF that he has two choices: either separate from his wife and relinquish all rights to his child in order to apply for resettlement in the US as a single man; or bring his family, including his Australian-born child, to Nauru to apply for a chance – but with no guarantee – of American resettlement together.

The US has, so far, preferred to take single people rather than families for its resettlement places and Shirmohamadi's wife has been advised by doctors not to return to Nauru because of ongoing complex health issues.

Shirmohamadi says he faces an impossible choice and the government's policy might keep him from ever seeing his daughter.

"I was not allowed to be with my wife for our child's birth and now they are saying to me, 'You must abandon your family'," he told the Guardian from Nauru. "And they do it just to be cruel, just to cause pain to me and my family. To be heartless.

"My wife cannot come back because of a lack of medical support. And my innocent baby, there is no future for her in this hell."

Several department sources, and sources on Nauru, have confirmed to the Guardian that it is "unofficial policy" to use family separation as a coercive measure to encourage refugees to agree to return to Nauru, or even to abandon their protection claims altogether. The department has said in public statements that families are separated to keep the number of people being brought to Australia as low as possible.

The relinquishment of child custody being promoted by the ABF is permanent.

On 31 March – four days after the birth of his daughter – an ABF status resolution officer emailed Shirmohamadi with an attached release of custody agreement document, to be signed by a biological parent.

The document, if completed, would have meant Shirmohamadi had given up all parental rights over his daughter, including, potentially, the right to ever see her.

The form says: "I hereby agree to relinquish custody of my minor child.

"I understand that by signing this agreement the non-custodial parent will not automatically be able to seek reunification with my child and that this may mean permanent separation."

Shirmohamadi refused to sign the document.

In a subsequent recorded phone call obtained by the Guardian, a different ABF status resolution officer advocates for Shirmohamadi to accept the separation of his family in order to be resettled.

“If you want to keep your case together, your wife would need to be on Nauru,” the ABF official tells Arash in the recording. “I can’t comment on the custody side of things, but if you wanted to progress in the US process without your family, it would be a matter of splitting your cases.”

In Senate estimates the Greens senator Nick McKim asked about the Australian government’s policy of advocating permanent family separation. Pezzullo said: “I don’t believe that’s occurred at all ... I can’t imagine that that’s occurred at all.”

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/06/border-force-tells-nauru-refugees-to-separate-from-family-if-they-want-to-settle-in-us>

15. Peter Dutton defends Nauru policy after refugees told to separate from family

Department sources, and sources on Nauru, say it is ‘unofficial policy’ to use family separation as a coercive measure

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Thursday 7 December 2017 13.27 AEDT

The Australian government has defended a policy encouraging refugees held on Nauru to sever ties with their families – including relinquishing all rights to ever see their children – in order to be considered for resettlement in the US.

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, said on Wednesday that Australia’s policy would not change but the UN children’s agency and parliamentarians have all urged Australia to uphold international law and the unity of families.

Several hundred refugees have been brought to Australia from offshore processing centres for medical treatment not available in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

In dozens of cases, their immediate family members have been left on offshore islands and told that, if they want to be considered for resettlement under the US deal, they must abandon their families, or encourage their families to return to offshore processing, even in defiance of doctors’ advice.

Dutton said the government’s policy was that nobody brought to Australia from offshore for medical treatment could be considered for resettlement in the United States.

“We have been clear on people who have received medical advice here: it was the reality for people on Nauru that if people left and came to Australia then consideration of their file would be suspended until they returned back to Nauru.”

Unicef Australia director Amy Lamoin said the UN’s children’s agency had consistently provided advice to the federal government on the importance of, and legal protections for, family unity.

“Placing people in a position where they have to make an impossible decision – one that may have lifelong ramifications – to choose between their families and an option to live in a safe country with a feasible future is unacceptable.”

Lamoin said Australia’s offshore processing policy had caused “severe physical and psychological harm, and ... deliberately split vulnerable families”.

“Unicef Australia urges the Australian government to consider the plight of children who have already suffered so much and to take steps to ensure that the identified vulnerable families, including children, can be reunited in an appropriate country such as Australia with adequate and ongoing support.”

Several department sources, and sources on Nauru, have confirmed to the Guardian that it is “unofficial policy” to use family separation as a coercive measure to encourage refugees to agree to return to Nauru, or even to abandon their protection claims altogether. The department has said in public statements that families are separated to keep the number of people being brought to Australia as low as possible.

On Wednesday, the Guardian reported on the case of Iranian refugee Arash Shirmohamadi, who has never seen nor held his nine-month-old daughter, Yusra, after his pregnant wife was flown from Nauru to Australia because of health complications during her pregnancy.

In March, four days after Yusra was born, an Australian Border Force official emailed Shirmohamadi a “release of custody” form that would have severed all of his parental rights to his child, potentially forever.

The ABF told Shirmohamadi he had two choices if he wanted to seek resettlement: either separate from his wife and relinquish all rights to his child in order to apply to go to the US as a single man; or bring his family, including his Australian-born child, to Nauru to apply for a chance – but with no guarantee – of American resettlement together.

The US has, so far, preferred to take single people rather than families for its resettlement places and Shirmohamadi's wife has been advised by doctors not to return to Nauru because of ongoing complex health issues, and there is a court-ordered injunction preventing her return.

The Guardian has obtained copies of the email, the release of custody document and recordings of a phone call with an ABF official in which the official tells Shirmohamadi "if you want to keep your case together, your wife would need to be on Nauru ... but if you wanted to progress in the US process without your family, it would be a matter of splitting your cases".

Shirmohamadi told the Guardian he faced an impossible choice and the government's policy might keep him from ever seeing his daughter.

"I was not allowed to be with my wife for our child's birth and now they are saying to me, 'You must abandon your family,'" he said. "And they do it just to be cruel, just to cause pain to me and my family. To be heartless."

The immigration department declined to comment for the Guardian's story but issued a statement after it was published. It confirmed the Guardian's story that Shirmohamadi had been sent a release of custody form and was told that, in order to apply for the US, while his wife and child was in Australia, he would need to separate from them.

The department said: "No family units in Nauru have ever been forcibly separated by the department or the ABF. Claims it is 'unofficial policy to use family separation as a coercive measure' are also false."

The Guardian did not report that families were forcibly separated. In response to the statement, department staff again contacted the Guardian to state that family separation was deliberately, if unofficially, used to encourage refugees to return offshore, or to abandon protection claims.

It is understood up to six refugees are in similar situations to Shirmohamadi, split from their immediate family members – including pregnant wives and Australian-born children they have never met.

The Greens leader, Richard Di Natale, accused the Turnbull government of flouting international law.

"We're talking about tearing apart families here," he said.

Family unity is a fundamental principle of international and Australian domestic law. Australia is a party to the convention on the rights of the child, which states that children have a right to know and be cared for by their parents, and should grow up in a family environment wherever possible. It is also a party to the international covenant on civil and political rights, which says the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/dec/07/peter-dutton-defends-nauru-policy-after-refugees-told-to-separate-from-family>

16. Fast-track assessment fundamentally unfair to refugees, high court told

Legal Aid Victoria argues those who arrive by boat are treated as second-class in first high court challenge to new regime

The Guardian
Calla Wahlquist
Thursday 7 December 2017 17.08 AEDT

Legal Aid Victoria has challenged the "fundamental unfairness" of the fast-tracked refugee assessment process in the high court, arguing that it treats those who arrived by boat as second class.

The one-day hearing on Thursday focused on the case of an Iranian asylum seeker in his mid-20s whose application for a temporary protection visa was rejected by the Department of Immigration, in a decision reviewed by the immigration assessment authority (IAA).

It's the first time the fairness of the fast-track process has been challenged in the high court.

The man, known in court documents as M174, arrived in Australia by boat in October 2012 and made an application for a temporary protection visa in September 2015 on the grounds that he had converted to Christianity and would face persecution if he returned to Iran.

He said that he had regularly attended a church in suburban Melbourne since arriving in Australia.

A department official rejected the visa application in April 2016 after speaking to the reverend of the church, who said the man did not attend church as often as he had claimed.

In their reasoning, the official said they did not accept the man had genuinely converted to Christianity or would be perceived as having genuinely converted to Christianity by Iranian authorities in the event he returned. They suggested the man had attended church “in order to falsely strengthen his claim for protection”.

That decision was reviewed and approved by the IAA in May 2016.

Joel Townsend, the migration program manager at Legal Aid Victoria, said his client was not given the opportunity to explain why he had attended church less frequently in the years between his arrival in Melbourne and his visa application.

Townsend said the man had moved to another suburb, which made it more difficult to travel to the church, but could provide letters of support from other Christians confirming his commitment to Christianity.

“He never had a chance through that review process to answer the concerns that had arisen as a result of that telephone call between the [department official] and the minister,” Townsend told Guardian Australia.

The IAA was established as part of a suite of immigration reforms approved by parliament in late 2014 to deal with the backlog of 30,000 undetermined cases of people who arrived in Australia by boat in the first half of the decade, against a backdrop of the Abbott government promising to release all children from offshore detention centres.

It was intended to fast-track the lengthy process of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, which still applies to immigration matters of people who arrived in Australia by plane.

Unlike the tribunal, the IAA does not have the ability to consider new material when conducting a review, except in exceptional circumstances. An applicant must present all information and documentation supporting his or her case at the point where it is being assessed by a department official.

Townsend said that cases such as M174, where new information arose in the course of that assessment, the process was fundamentally unfair.

“It’s not just about this decision, it’s about a process that has the potential to leave people in a position where their cases are unfairly dealt with,” he said.

Lawyers for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection argued that the department official was not obliged to tell the man about the substance of their conversation with the reverend because it was “not relevant” under section 57(1) of the Migration Act 1958, which sets out what should be considered adverse information for the purposes of due process. They also argued that parliament in establishing the IAA did not intend that the fast-track process could not apply in circumstances where there was adverse information.

Dr Maria O’Sullivan, a migration law expert with the Castan Centre at Monash University, said that limiting procedural rights was a trade-off made by parliament in order to clear the backlog of immigration cases.

“In the interests of getting people through, you limit your procedural rights,” O’Sullivan said.

Concerns were raised when the IAA was established that the requirement for asylum seekers, who could have poor English skills and often do not have legal assistance, to provide all possible relevant documentation and evidence upfront would lead to unfairness.

Similar cases before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal usually have a half-day hearing, which O’Sullivan said was more “robust” process but could lead to delays.

The difference, she said, was “emblematic of having a second-class system for people who come by a boat.”

“There is an argument that when you have a vulnerable cohort who may have difficulty with English there should be an oral hearing,” O’Sullivan said. “That’s the more robust system for people who come by a plane.”

The high court is expected to reserve its decision.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/dec/07/fast-track-assessment-fundamentally-unfair-to-refugees-high-court-told>

17. New centre at Manus still a construction site, says Tim Costello

Group of 40 Rhodes scholars sends letter to Turnbull, expressing ‘disapproval, horror and shame’ at treatment of detainees

The Guardian

Anne Davies

Saturday 25 November 2017 13.44 AEDT

Fifty-seven men formerly detained on Manus Island have spent the night on mattresses in a classroom because they could not be housed in the new but unfinished Lorengau centre, despite claims to the contrary by the immigration minister, Peter Dutton.

“The West House, which is meant to accommodate 300 is clearly unfinished and has no kitchen facilities and is still a construction site,” Reverend Tim Costello told the Guardian.

“The bathroom in the unfinished wing only has squat toilets and the shower block is currently under an inch of water,” he said, having been shown photos taken by men at the centre.

“It clearly requires more than just polishing the tiles as Peter Dutton has suggested,” he said.

Costello is in the Manus township for the Australian Council for International Development, which is funded by World Vision, where he is chief advocate.

He told the Guardian he had met refugees on Friday night and again on Saturday morning, and had seen photographs they had taken of the facilities. He was not permitted to enter.

More than 300 refugees and asylum seekers – who had been living without running water, electricity, or regular food supplies for three weeks in the old detention centre – were moved on Friday to alternative accommodation at Lorengau township.

Costello said he had been shown pictures of people with lumps, bruises and scratches where refugees were allegedly hit with iron bars, but as far as he was aware there were no cases of broken bones.

Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish journalist and detainee on Manus, said the biggest immediate issue was the trauma that many men had experienced as a result of the beatings.

“After four and a half years here, someone beat them. They are traumatised and humiliated,” he said by phone from Manus.

“The big issue is there are no psychological facilities on Manus. They need people to talk to,” he said.

Despite completion of the relocation by the PNG police, the atmosphere on the island remains tense.

Costello said local police and immigration authorities had told the men they were looking for alternative accommodation for the 57 but it was not clear what would happen. There was also resentment among the local population about Australia's actions.

“Most people are friendly but there are elements who resent what's going on, including one community leader who expressed to me the view that Australia had just walked away from its responsibilities.

“Even the police commissioner feels that way: that the Australian government has just left,” he said.

In an effort to sway the Australian prime minister on refugee policy, a group of Rhodes scholars has written to their fellow Oxford alumnus, Malcolm Turnbull, expressing “disapproval, horror and shame” at the treatment of detainees being held on Manus and Nauru.

The tight-knit global community counts Turnbull and former prime minister Tony Abbott among its members and is made up of former international students from around the world who have studied at Oxford on scholarships from the Rhodes Trust, set up by Sir Cecil Rhodes.

Forty scholars have signed the letter. While most are from Australia, there are several from South Africa, Pakistan, Canada, the US and New Zealand who have put their names to the open letter.

The letter does not reflect the views of the trust itself.

“It has been over two weeks since your government decided to cut off electricity and stop providing food and water to the 600 men detained on Manus. The situation is now a humanitarian crisis,” the group wrote.

“Australia must finally take responsibility for the welfare of those it has detained and left languishing offshore. The fate of those men is in your hands - as is Australia's international reputation,” they say.

“We are extremely disappointed that you, as a Rhodes Scholar, have failed to act to prevent the crisis on Manus. Your lack of leadership and compassion in this instance is at odds with the values of the Rhodes community.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/25/new-centre-at-manus-still-a-construction-site-says-tim-costello>

18. First look inside refugees' new home allegedly shows unfinished site, no power

ABC News Online

By Clare Blumer and Jean Kennedy

Sunday 26 November 2017, 4:01pm

Protests about the treatment of refugees on Manus Island were held in cities on Sunday as first footage out of the refugees' new home appears to show unfinished accommodation and no power.

On Friday, men who remained in the decommissioned detention centre on the Papua New Guinea island were forcibly removed and taken to their new accommodation. The Government organised three new sites for the men: non-refugees could relocate to Hillside Haus, refugees could move to the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre or West Lorengau Haus.

Ezathullah Kakar was one of the men transported on Friday, and he filmed from inside the gates of his new home — which appears to be West Lorengau Haus — on Saturday.

Mr Kakar's vision shows an unfinished site with construction workers still pouring concrete, demountable buildings, dirty bathrooms and unmoving fans — which he said was because the power was not connected.

"People are sleeping without aircon, without electricity," he said.

He pointed out a bathroom where the floor was covered in mud and there were objects in the sinks, and said there were no cleaners on site.

"So, this is our new life after four-and-a-half years in the prison camp," he said.

Mr Kakar films a group of men gathered outside demountable buildings. "People are still homeless and looking for their rooms," he said.

Calls for men to be brought to Australia

The footage was provided to the ABC by GetUp, and in protests organised by the same group hundreds of people gathered in capital cities to demonstrate against the Federal Government's treatment of the asylum seekers on Manus Island.

The protesters called for the men to be brought to Australia.

Lines of riot police kept order at the protest in Melbourne, while hundreds gathered out the front of Parliament House in Canberra to have their message heard.

Hundreds of protesters gathered in Sydney at Circular Quay, with the demonstrators making the sign that is now common to the activists protesting the treatment of the people at Manus Island — sitting down, with their arms crossed over their heads.

Christian pastor Jarrod McKenna told the Sydney rally he had seen conditions on Manus Island after being smuggled into the detention centre during the past week.

"Twenty-five hours being there with them took a mental toll on me. I'm not sure that I could last there one week," he said.

"Now, stretch that over not one week, not one month, but four-and-a-half, coming on five, years and that's what these men are facing."

Power was vandalised: Government

The Immigration Minister's Office was contacted for comment about their plans for the men on Manus and the state of the accommodation.

The ABC was referred to Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's comments and media releases from Friday which said East Lorengau was finished but that "PNG continues to add capacity to West Lorengau Haus to cater for the return of those currently transferred to Port Moresby for medical treatment".

Some water infrastructure had been vandalised and "some equipment had been sabotaged at the alternative accommodation centres, including damage to backup generators" the statement said.

"The equipment is being repaired or replaced ... these matters are under investigation."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-26/first-look-inside-manus-island-refugees-new-home-shows-no-power/9194880>

19. 'We've tried to get information from the department': AMA's Anne Trimmer on health of Manus refugees

Brisbane Times

By Mark Dapin

24 November 2017 - 11:15pm

Last weekend, the condition of refugees on Manus Island became too much to tolerate for the Australian Medical Association. Its members had lost the ability to gauge and monitor the health of the asylum seekers, let alone intervene to give them medical care.

"The situation on Manus Island appears to be becoming quite desperate," says AMA secretary-general Anne Trimmer. "But until two or three months ago, the AMA worked quite closely with a chief medical officer in the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Dr Brayley. He's no longer with the department, and so we no longer have that ability to understand what's happening with individual refugees, or more broadly what's happening with the men in the closed centre, so federal council unanimously passed a resolution really asking the government to answer questions to reassure that the men's health was being appropriately looked after, and offering to provide a group of independent doctors to make an assessment of the health situation."

Dr John Brayley was appointed chief medical officer and surgeon-general of the Australian Border Force in September 2015 and resigned in September 2017. He has not been replaced.

"We've tried to get information from the department since," says Trimmer, "but with no real outcome. The benefit we'd had with Dr Brayley was, often information would be brought to the AMA about the particular circumstances of an individual asylum seeker or refugee, and we were able to act as interveners to get appropriate care for the people. Often, they were circumstances where the individual had to be brought off the island – either Nauru or Manus – because their particular condition required more treatment than was available on the island. It was very much a behind-the-scenes attention to the health needs of these people, without it being a media production. But we were able to assist individuals on quite a number of occasions, going back quite a few years."

Trimmer describes her designation as secretary-general as "just a rather grand title for CEO". She looks after finance, governance, strategy and risk, acts as an adviser to the elected AMA president, and chairs the federal council.

She is four years into her five-year contract, and says she "lives" in Sydney but works in Canberra. She joins me for lunch at Lilotang, a Japanese restaurant that's eight minutes' walk from her office in Barton but a 3½-hour drive from her house in Elizabeth Bay.

"I have this kind of bifurcated life," she says. "Home is Sydney, which is weekends. Canberra is work, during the week. When I'm here, I don't have social distractions. We often have evening phone-call meetings, teleconferences or video conferences, because that's when doctors are available. So I really, literally, come here and work."

Polished and poised in Armani and Hugo Boss, Trimmer does not look like she lives out of a suitcase. In fact, when she took the AMA job in 2013, she bought a unit one street away from its federal headquarters.

"My work wardrobe is here in Canberra and my weekend wardrobe is in Sydney," she says. "But all the things I use in the bathroom I've got exactly the same in both places. What's in my kitchen for cooking is all very similar. In Sydney, I tend to cook a lot more, with access to fresh seafood which you don't really have here. In Canberra, I'll make something quick for myself at night."

She would not normally have lunch in a place like Lilotang, which recently retained its chef's hat in The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide. She usually makes something at her unit and eats at her desk. In winter, it tends to be a soup, in summer a salad.

To my surprise, the chef at Lilotang has prepared a feast for us. If I mentioned every dish, there would be no space left to talk about the AMA. But the chargrilled wagyu has won a special place in my heart (somewhere between my pulmonary valve and right atrium, I think).

Trimmer was born in Launceston, Tasmania, where her father was an executive with a household goods company. The family moved around Australia as her father was promoted through different roles, until they reached Sydney "which is where I did my growing up", says Trimmer. She went to St Ives High School and became head prefect, house captain, an A-grade hockey player, state-level sprinter, and won a scholarship to study law at the Australian National University.

Her success was all the more remarkable considering her age.

"I started school in Hobart and there was no preliminary year," she says, "so I went straight into grade 1 at five, and I never had to repeat a year. I just kept moving through the system being a year younger than my cohort, so I finished when I'd just turned 17."

ANU was "a big shift", she says. "It meant that I left home quite young. I think, in retrospect, it would've been hugely advantageous to have had a growing-up year between school and university. It would have improved my engagement with my studies. I was not a diligent student at university. I did a lot of other things."

She was heavily involved in student radio, and says if she hadn't entered the law, she would have gone into media. She did commercial legal work for many years, and in 1995 became the first woman to be elected president of the Law Society of the ACT, a position she held until 1997. In 2000, she was voted in as president of the national Law Council (the second woman to hold the role).

It was at the Law Council that she first dealt publicly with refugee issues. In response to the 2001 MV Tampa crisis, when the Australian government refused to allow a boatload of rescued asylum seekers to land on Christmas Island and instead sent elite troops from the SAS to persuade the Norwegian-registered vessel to leave Australian territorial waters, the council declared that "any person within the territory of Australia, whether an unauthorised arrival or not, must have a right of access to the courts".

"We as lawyers don't look at it in terms of the political issue about protecting our borders," she says. "These are people in need. They are fleeing circumstances that they need to be protected from. We have an obligation under our international treaties to do that."

When she returned to full-time legal practice, she felt "unchallenged", she says. She had become interested in influencing, lobbying, using argument to affect the decisions of government. (Her husband, Jeff Townsend, is a prominent corporate lobbyist with Endeavour Consulting.) Trimmer became chief executive of the Medical Technology Association of Australia in 2006, and moved into her role at the AMA in August 2013.

Isn't it nerve-racking to represent such a vociferous, diverse, wealthy, articulate and educated sector of society as doctors and medical students?

"They might be highly opinionated," says Trimmer, carefully, "but they're also clear thinkers, generally, about the issues they're dealing with, and they generally can be articulate in expressing their views about those issues. So, you're clear on where you stand with them. And – don't forget – I had that experience of leading lawyers. I was president of the lawyers, now I'm CEO of the doctors. One prepared me for the other."

Which is the easier job?

Trimmer, diplomatically, refuses to be drawn.

<https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/healthcare/weve-tried-to-get-information-from-the-department-amas-anne-trimmer-on-health-of-manus-refugees-20171120-gzp4rn.html>

20. Health experts push for right to assess refugees and asylum seekers

Clinicians 'deeply concerned' about physical and mental health of men removed from former detention centre

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Monday 27 November 2017 04.00 AEDT

A group of Australia's most senior clinicians has offered to conduct free health assessments of the refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island to ensure they are not being deprived their human rights.

In an open letter signed by 18 current and former heads of peak medical bodies and royal colleges of medicine, the clinicians said they were "deeply concerned" about the ongoing physical and mental health of the men who were removed from the decommissioned detention centre last week.

They also expressed concern over the damage being done to Australia's reputation.

"We believe that the humanitarian issues take precedence over politics," the letter said. "This is a matter beyond immigration and border control but one that affects the health of people and others' perceptions of our great nation."

The senior clinicians, who said they wrote in their individual capacities, said the reported poor hygiene and sanitation, limited electricity and inadequate living conditions would all exacerbate disease and ill health.

They said they were not aware of any accurate information on the health of the former detainees and offered to assist in an "immediate, independent review" of those still on Manus.

“We are willing to conduct this review pro-bono, arranging the appropriate mix of clinical specialties,” they said. “We would require the Australian government to negotiate the diplomatic permissions and officially sanction travel to and within PNG, as well as agree to clinical assessment of willing individuals.”

A standoff lasting more than three weeks came to an end on Thursday and Friday after Papua New Guinea police and immigration officials forcibly removed all remaining men who had refused to leave over concerns for their safety in the Lorengau community.

Officers used metal batons against the men to get them on to busses. Many have since reported injuries and alleged further beatings, including the Kurdish Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani, who was targeted for arrest on Thursday.

Monday’s letter said the men had a universal right to health and wellbeing enshrined in the UN charter, which should not be affected by their political and citizenship status.

“All politicians regardless of their political party should respect the human right to health and themselves be strong advocates of ‘health for all’ without discrimination.”

Signatories included four past presidents of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, and the current and immediate past president of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, as well as a former head of the Australian Medical Association, and mental health expert Prof Patrick McGorry.

McGorry, who is president of the Schizophrenia International Research Society and the International Association for Youth Mental Health, is also a former Australian of the year who signed another open letter on the refugee issue last week.

That letter, from 12 former Australians of the year, condemned the crisis on Manus and called for the Australian Medical Association to be allowed access to assess and treat the refugees and asylum seekers.

“The AMA has made many representations on this matter, both publicly and in private but, with a worsening and more dangerous situation emerging on Manus, the federal council strongly believes that urgent action and answers are needed,” the AMA president, Michael Gannon, said.

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, suggested the prominent Australians should write a thank you letter to Australian Border Force and the navy instead for stopping deaths at sea when people sought asylum by boat in large numbers.

Criticism continues to mount over the Manus Island situation but the Australian government has remained steadfast.

On Sunday Médecins Sans Frontières revealed it was also being denied access to the men. MSF had arrived on Manus on Wednesday with approval from the PNG immigration department but were denied entry to the centre. After the men were removed and taken to the transit centre MSF was still denied access to the accommodation and the medical clinic.

The president of MSF Australia, Stewart Condon, told Guardian Australia they were particularly concerned about the health of men with psychiatric conditions and whose supply of medication likely ran out more than 10 days ago, based on earlier reports they were given extra doses to see through the transition of the centre’s closure.

Last week the UNHCR said the humanitarian crisis was human-made and entirely preventable, and a “damning indictment of a policy meant to avoid Australia’s international obligations”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/27/manus-island-health-experts-push-for-right-to-assess-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

21. MSF denied access to refugees as thousands rally in Australia

Despite approval from Papua New Guinea immigration, humanitarian organisation blocked from seeing sick and injured men

The Guardian

Helen Davidson

Sunday 26 November 2017 14.58 AEDT

Médecins Sans Frontières has been denied access to asylum seekers and refugees on Manus Island in order to assess their health and wellbeing, despite having been granted approval earlier in the week.

It comes as thousands of people attended snap rallies across Australia, calling for the men to be evacuated to Australia.

On Friday Papua New Guinea authorities forcibly removed the remaining refugees from the decommissioned detention centre after an almost four-week standoff during which hundreds of refugees refused to leave, citing fears for their safety in the Lorengau community.

Dr Stewart Condon, the president of MSF Australia and a member of the team sent to Manus Island, told Guardian Australia the humanitarian organisation had been trying to get access to the men since Wednesday, and called for authorities to let them in as an independent humanitarian observer.

“Every day since Wednesday we have been trying to get into the regional processing centre ... or the transit centres and we’re not able to get past the gate,” said Condon.

Two doctors and a water and sanitation specialist arrived on Manus Island prior to the police operation, with approval from PNG immigration, but were denied entry to the centre.

“It’s quite clear – we had something in writing – that we were approved to get inside. We’ve been trying every day, and talking to as many people as we could to get that further approval. But we’re talking about possibly two governments, police, a private security firm, and we don’t have any read on why we haven’t been given any approval.”

On Friday authorities took the men to the East Lorengau transit centre, but about 60 were forced to sleep on the floor of a classroom because there wasn’t enough space for them.

Other alternative accommodation units remain construction sites, according to multiple independent agencies and observers. The Australian government has verbally disputed these claims.

Many asylum seekers and refugees in the decommissioned detention centre claimed they had been beaten by officers during the removal operation, including Kurdish Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani who was specifically targeted for arrest on Thursday.

MSF was concerned about the health of the men who, after more than four years in detention, had eaten and drunk little for the last few weeks while living in unsanitary conditions. The men were also hit with bars by authorities during the removal operation, resulting in some minor injuries, and they alleged further beatings.

On Sunday MSF was able to see some of the men at the Lorengau hospital, according to refugees, but still not granted access inside the accommodation centres.

Condon said MSF had heard of some of the sick and injured men had been unable to access healthcare or were too afraid to leave their bed, and MSF called for access to visit them.

He said psychiatric concerns might be a “very significant” issue now given that prior to the standoff the men were believed to have been given a month’s worth of medication to see them through the transition.

Condon said he was concerned patients – particularly those with heart conditions and psychiatric illnesses – had now run out of medication.

MSF had also tried to access the health clinic set up for the refugees once they moved to Lorengau, but was again prevented.

“[Health clinic staff] came to the gate one day, but that’s the only meeting.”

He said he understood the clinic was only operational for limited hours during the day.

There have also been repeated claims of poor facilities and sanitation in the new accommodation units, which organisations such as MSF and the Australian Council for International Development have been prevented from accessing and verifying.

MSF rarely speaks out publicly, but Condon said the situation called for it after the organisation had exhausted other options.

“We’ve come to the conclusion that we’re even more concerned about the medical state of these people, and it reached a point we were prepared to say we’ve done all the right things,” said Condon.

MSF has joined the UNHCR, the Australian Council for International Development, Amnesty International, Oxfam and other human rights groups in criticising the “humanitarian crisis” on Manus Island.

Despite pleas from the organisations and other governments including New Zealand, the Australian government has insisted the alternative accommodation is complete and refugees are simply trying to pressure it into bringing them to Australia.

The Turnbull government has rejected offers from New Zealand to resettle 150 refugees, saying it wanted to see out a previously struck deal with the US, and that New Zealand resettlement would help restart the people-smuggling trade.

On Sunday at the Bennelong byelection in Sydney, the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, attacked Labor’s candidate Kristina Keneally for once writing an article for Guardian Australia advocating Australia take the Manus Island refugees.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/26/manus-island-msf-denied-access-to-refugees-as-thousands-rally-in-australia>

22. Manus detention centre cleared of all refugees and asylum seekers

Up to 60 men left without a place to stay, sources say, because new accommodation is either not ready or overfull

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 24 November 2017 16.40 AEDT

The decommissioned Manus Island detention centre has been cleared of all refugees and asylum seekers, the Papua New Guinean police and the Australian government have said.

But up to 60 men have been left without a place to stay, because alternative accommodation is either not ready, or already overfull, official sources on the island have told the Guardian.

On the second day of Operation Helpim Friend, PNG mobile squad officers raided the detention centre using metal batons against refugees and asylum seekers and forcing them on to buses.

Mobile phone footage shot in the centre on Friday morning showed PNG officers threatening and hitting refugees as they dragged men out of the centre.

Further footage shows mobile squad officers throwing rocks at the fences behind which refugees are sheltering, in an apparent attempt to intimidate them. An officer yells at a refugee, "Turn the fucking camera off," before a rock is thrown at him.

Other pictures show immigration officials manhandling refugees out of the centre. Refugees reported being beaten with sticks, having their phones seized, medicines destroyed, and other property stolen.

More than 300 refugees and asylum seekers – who had been living without running water, electricity, or regular food supplies for three weeks – have been moved to alternative accommodation at Lorengau township.

There were some minor injuries reported in the forced removal.

At a press conference in Brisbane, the Australian immigration minister, Peter Dutton, said that as far as he knew three people were injured: one was dehydrated, one tripped and had grazings, and the third "has an ankle issue which I think relates to an insect bite".

Asked about the footage, Dutton said he would "like to see [it]" but dismissed "claims made on social media" by arguing that "there are clips taken but a lot of this doesn't add up to the facts on the ground".

Two men who collapsed on Thursday, when police first entered the compound, were reported to be safe and recovering.

The effort to physically clear the camp began on Thursday with about 50 refugees and asylum seekers taken from the detention centre to other accommodation on Manus Island – most of which is not yet fully built, without running water, electricity or security fences.

Reports from Manus say there are not enough beds at the new accommodation blocks to house all of the refugees removed from the detention centre. The Sudanese refugee Abdul Aziz Adam told the Guardian dozens of men left at the East Lorengau centre had no place to stay, and nowhere else they could go.

The Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani said busloads of refugees were left outside the East Lorengau centre and told there was no room for them.

The detention centre, where most of the refugees and asylum seekers have been held for more than four years, was officially closed on 31 October.

The men who remained there resisted being moved because of a series of violent attacks against refugees in Lorengau and because of a lack of services, especially for health, in the new centres.

PNG police said the clearance of the detention centre had been completed without force and that nobody had been handcuffed.

Australia has paid to build the new accommodation centres – known as East Lorengau, West Lorengau and Hillside Haus – and remains legally responsible for the welfare of the men. Australian Border Force maintains a significant presence in PNG, and retains effective control of all offshore operations. The Australian government has earmarked between \$150m and \$250m to be spent on Manus over the next year.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/24/manus-detention-centre-cleared-of-all-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

23. 'I'm not sure what they're going to do with me': Uncertainty awaits after month-long Manus Island standoff ends

Canberra Times

Friday 24 November 2017 - 8:04PM

Michael Koziol

The month-long standoff on Manus Island came to a violent end on Friday after Papua New Guinea police carrying batons raided the decommissioned processing centre and forced out about 330 remaining refugees and asylum seekers.

The men had subsisted on stockpiled food and rainwater for 24 days since the facility officially closed on October 31, having refused to leave citing fears for their safety and an unwillingness to move "from one prison to another".

PNG police entered the site for the second day in a row in Friday's early hours, and by midday all the remaining men had boarded buses for the nearby town of Lorengau, saying they could no longer resist police willing to use force.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull welcomed the men's capitulation, telling reporters in Canberra: "That's as they should. That is precisely what you should do if you're in a foreign country: you should comply with the laws of that other country."

But the altercation was rough, with video seen by Fairfax Media showing local police appearing to wield long batons against refugees, and several of the men posting on social photographs showing cuts and bruises they said were sustained on Friday.

"They hit me on my hand," Pakistani refugee Samad Abdul said during the raid. "The police are so aggressive. They are telling us 'you should go back to your country'. They are swearing at us. Everyone is scared, everyone is just terrified.

"We don't have any option to stay here. All of us, we all are going."

Another Pakistani man, Ezatullah Kakar, said the men were "crying" as they left the camp. He boarded the last bus and said the men spent Friday afternoon arranging transfers to one of three alternative accommodation sites in Lorengau.

Manus Island police commander David Yapu denied his officers used force and said the operation had proceeded "smoothly", but noted there had been "some resistance".

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said three people had sustained very minor injuries and claims of violence were exaggerated by Australian activists. He urged advocates to stop the "cruel hoax" of suggesting refugees might be allowed to come to Australia if they kept up their protest.

"You are offering out false hope to people who are in a difficult situation. You have compounded their problems," Mr Dutton said. "Under no circumstance will people be coming to Australia. We will provide whatever support we can to see people resettle elsewhere."

The minister also said backup power generators and water infrastructure at the new sites had been sabotaged, in what he called "an organised attempt to provoke trouble and disrupt the new facilities". Repairs were under way and the matter was being investigated, he said.

Labor's immigration spokesman Shayne Neumann said reports of force by PNG police were of "deep concern", and demanded the Turnbull government agree to a refugee resettlement deal with New Zealand "immediately".

Mr Dutton dismissed that as "not an option that's on the table for us now" and said intelligence reports suggested it would mean the boats would restart.

Hundreds of refugees on Manus Island are awaiting possible resettlement in the US under a deal struck between Mr Turnbull and former president Barack Obama, which has been slow to get off the ground under President Donald Trump.

Only 54 refugees have gone to the US from both Manus Island and Nauru so far. Most have been on the islands for more than four years and many, such as Mr Abdul, are yet to be interviewed by US authorities.

"I'm not sure what they're going to do with me, how much time they will take, how long I will be detained again and how long I will be in prison camp," Mr Abdul told Fairfax Media on Friday.

With the standoff over, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees issued a statement declaring it was "deeply disturbed" by the refugees' removal, describing the footage it had seen as "shocking and inexcusable".

"The situation still unfolding on Manus Island presents a grave risk of further deterioration, and of further damage to extremely vulnerable human beings," said regional UNHCR representative Thomas Albrecht.

The standoff, and Australia's offshore processing regime more generally, has attracted condemnation from the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and other charities and NGOs.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop on Friday said she did not believe the incident had damaged Australia's standing in the region, telling the ABC: "Nations respect our stand against people smuggling".

Meanwhile, the Victorian Supreme Court cleared the way for \$70 million in payments to 1700 current and former Manus Island detainees, resulting from a class action lawsuit settled by the Turnbull government earlier this year.

with Fergus Hunter

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/im-not-sure-what-theyre-going-to-do-with-me-uncertainty-awaits-after-monthlong-manus-island-standoff-ends-20171124-gzs5tf.html>

24. 'We all are going': Manus Island standoff ends as police re-enter in second day of force

Canberra Times

Friday 24 November 2017 - 1:58PM

Michael Koziol & Fergus Hunter

The standoff on Manus Island came to a violent end on Friday as Papua New Guinea police re-entered the camp and appeared to forcibly remove refugees and asylum seekers.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, a PNG police spokesman, and several refugees separately confirmed all the men left the decommissioned site on Friday.

The men, who had refused to leave the decommissioned detention centre for more than three weeks, capitulated and boarded buses for alternative accommodation in the nearby town of Lorengau.

"We don't have any option to stay here. All of us, we all are going," Pakistani refugee Samad Abdul told Fairfax Media from inside the camp, where he was preparing to leave once buses returned.

"The police are so aggressive. They are telling us 'you should go back to your country'. They are swearing at us. They are using unacceptable words. Everyone is scared, everyone is just terrified."

Mr Abdul said about half the men left the camp on buses Friday morning and the remainder would also depart once the buses returned. The ABC reported six buses arrived in Lorengau at 9am.

Video sent to Fairfax Media by one man inside the camp showed chaotic scenes on Friday morning as police officers appeared to use long batons to cow the men into submission.

One man tweeting from inside the camp on Friday morning, Ezatullah Kakar, indicated many of the men were complying with police demands to leave.

"We are all crying leaving the camp to another camp," he wrote. "PNG Police are pushing my friends, and they are beating us by sticks please help us. Remember you will never settle us by force in PNG."

Another video distributed by activist group GetUp! on Friday was taken by a man hiding inside one of the decommissioned compounds saying: "Please help us."

It is the second day of action against the resisting refugees after an operation on Thursday resulted in 50 men departing the decommissioned site on buses, leaving about 325 men who remained overnight.

PNG police have denied using force, but photos taken by refugees inside the camp show men being led away by immigration officers, and yesterday at least one man – Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani – was removed from the site in handcuffs.

The Australian-run centre was closed on October 31 following a PNG Supreme Court decision last year, which ruled it unconstitutional. Alternative accommodation has been provided, and paid for, by the Australian government in the nearby town of Lorengau.

However, the resisting refugees and asylum seekers have said they fear for their safety in the Manusian community.

Reports from two of the alternative accommodation facilities, Hillside Haus and West Lorengau Haus, have also indicated those facilities are still under construction.

World Vision chief advocate Tim Costello, who is on Manus Island, said Australia had started a "geopolitics game of chicken" that meant PNG was scared to take New Zealand up on its offer to resettle 150 refugees for fear of accepting responsibility for the entire situation.

Other countries were reluctant to take refugees for fear of jeopardising Australia's agreement with the United States to see up to 1250 refugees resettled from Manus Island and Nauru, Mr Costello said.

"I am scared that this tinderbox actually could explode but I'm not critical of the PNG authorities at all," he told ABC radio, expressing sympathy for the local police.

Mr Costello said the Turnbull government should send a special envoy up to Manus.

"Get a special envoy in here and get a solution because it's doing damage to our reputation in New Guinea, our reputation internationally, and there are solutions," he said.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/we-are-all-crying-police-reenter-manus-island-camp-in-second-day-of-force-against-refugees-20171123-gzrx0j.html>

25. Manus Island police use long metal poles to beat refugees and asylum seekers

Video shows officers hitting refugees with metal poles as they drag men out of decommissioned camp

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Friday 24 November 2017 10.17 AEDT

Papua New Guinean police have used batons to beat refugees and asylum seekers in the Manus Island detention centre, as they continue their operation to clear the decommissioned camp.

Video shot within the centre on Friday morning showed officers from PNG's mobile squad threatening and hitting refugees with long metal poles as they dragged men out of the centre.

Other pictures showed immigration officials – in marked yellow T-shirts – physically moving refugees out of the centre.

The effort to physically clear the camp – codenamed Operation Helpim Friends - began on Thursday with about 50 refugees and asylum seekers taken from the detention centre to other accommodation on Manus Island – most of which is not yet fully built, without running water, electricity or security fences.

The detention centre, where most of the refugees and asylum seekers have been held for more than four years was officially closed on 31 October.

The men who remained there, living without running water, food, and electricity for three weeks, have resisted going to other accommodation because they do not feel safe in Lorengau, after a series of violent attacks against refugees in the township, and because of a lack of services, especially health services, in the new centre.

Iranian journalist and refugee Behrouz Boochani, who was targeted and arrested by police on Thursday, and taken to Lorengau before being released without charge, continued to report from the island.

"This morning police attacked the prison camp and the refugees are saying that they beat them. The refugees are going to leave the prison camp. So many are in the buses and are on the way to the new camps.

"Immigration and police broke many phones of ppl (sic) trying to take photos. The refugees are gathering in Oscar compound, police and immigration are around them. Some officers destroying Delta compound. The ppl (sic) are waiting for buses to take them, four buses are full and on way to new camps."

Walid Zazai, who remains in the camp, said refugees and asylum seekers were not resisting or using violence.

In Canberra, Malcolm Turnbull said the decommissioned detention centre was being cleared.

"I am pleased to say in terms of Manus is that the reports we have is that busloads of people are leaving Manus and complying with the directions of the PNG authorities and moving to the alternative facilities available to them," the prime minister said. "That's as they should."

The Australian government's claims that alternative accommodation units are ready and suitable for habitation have been consistently refuted by independent observers. Videos and photos have been published of blocked toilets, bathrooms without water and buildings still under construction. Electricity was cut to one accommodation centre during a dispute with local landowners, and detainees have repeatedly claimed they are not safe in the new housing in Lorengau, citing frequent violent attacks and a lack of security.

The United Nations Refugee Agency said it was troubled by reports of force being used to remove refugees and asylum seekers from the former regional processing centre.

The UNHCR said it had been given assurances excessive force had not been and would not be used, but it could not independently confirm what was happening as staff had not been granted full access to the facility.

"UNHCR reminds Australia of its obligation to take full responsibility and provide effective protection, safety and lasting solutions for all refugees and asylum seekers in cooperation with the Papua New Guinean authorities," the UNHCR's assistant high commissioner for protection, Volker Türk, said.

"We urge both governments to engage in constructive dialogue, to de-escalate the tensions and work on urgent lasting solutions to their plight," he said.

The four-year history of the camp has been marked by violence. In February 2014, during riots when police and other outsiders stormed the detention centre, more than 70 asylum seekers were seriously injured, including having their throats slits with knives, as well as being shot with police weapons. Reza Barati was murdered by contractors who beat him with a nail-spiked stick and dropped a rock on his head.

In 2015, a mass hunger-strike ended with mobile squad police raiding the centre.

On Good Friday this year, drunken soldiers tried to crash a vehicle through the detention centre fence, and fired over 100 shots, including from an M16 assault rifle, at refugees inside.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/24/manus-island-police-use-long-metal-poles-to-beat-refugees-and-asylum-seekers>

25. PNG authorities say they have cleared detention centre, all men bused out

ABC News Online

By Pacific affairs reporter Liam Fox on Manus Island

and political correspondent Louise Yaxley

Friday 24 November 2017

Papua New Guinea authorities say they have moved all of the remaining 328 men at the decommissioned Manus Island detention centre to new camps, after police and immigration officials re-entered the site on Friday morning.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton also confirmed the centre was now clear, a day after around 50 men were removed from the centre in a similar operation, sparking tension between police and the refugees.

The ABC saw at least 12 buses turning into the East Lorengau transit centre on Friday.

However, it was unclear how many of the 328 men were on board and whether they all had passengers or just belongings.

"Four buses are full and on way to the new camps," refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani tweeted earlier, adding that other vehicles were carrying belongings.

"The refugees are saying that they are leaving the prison camp because police are using violence and very angry."

Mr Boochani said he had seen PNG police beat several asylum seekers and refugees during the operation to clear the centre.

"[On Friday] they beat some of the refugees, so that was not peaceful," he told the ABC.

Images uploaded to social media show men with angry welts on their backs and arms that they say came from those beatings.

The United Nations' refugee agency said it had received reports several men had been severely injured and medical treatment was paramount.

"The situation still unfolding on Manus Island presents a grave risk of further deterioration, and of further damage to extremely vulnerable human beings," said Thomas Albrecht, the UNHCR's regional representative in Canberra.

However, PNG Police Commissioner Gari Baki said the relocations were done "peacefully and without the use of force".

Mr Dutton accused activists of making inaccurate and exaggerated claims of violence and injuries, and said they had failed to produce any evidence to prove the allegations.

"What is clear is that there has been an organised attempt to provoke trouble and disrupt the new facilities," he said in a statement.

Conflicting reports on whether new sites up to standard

Mr Baki said the current situation should be a "walk in the park" for asylum seekers, compared to their past lives in their home countries.

"Manus is a peaceful island and I am sure it is a walk in the park compared to what they left behind in their respective countries," he said in a statement last night.

"We are doing the best we can and the refugees cannot continue to be stubborn and defiant.

"The fact is that we are not moving them into the jungle ... they are being relocated to two centres where there is water, electricity, food and medical services."

Mr Dutton said alternative accommodation had been available to house all inhabitants of the former detention centre since October 31.

"Food services, cleaning, security and the ELRTC-medical clinic are all operational and have been available since October 31," he said in a statement.

But Tim Costello, the chief advocate for World Vision Australia, said some of the new sites were not up to standard.

Mr Costello and members of his organisation have been on the island and had the opportunity to look at the facilities being offered to the men there.

"I got into West Haus and I can tell you this is a construction site, this is not finished," Mr Costello told RN Breakfast.

"There is earth-moving equipment, there are open drains."

Mr Dutton said the Government had been advised that some equipment had been sabotaged and water infrastructure had been vandalised.

"The equipment is being repaired or replaced and the Government understands these matters are under investigation," Mr Dutton said.

Bishop says 'nations respect our stand'

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said the situation on Manus Island is not undermining Australia's international reputation.

"I do not believe so at all," Ms Bishop said.

"In fact nations respect our stand on people smuggling and we are working very closely with countries including Indonesia to ensure that the people smuggling trade is not revived."

Labor's immigration spokesman Shayne Neumann called on the Government to do more to find other options for the men.

He said the Prime Minister should "immediately accept New Zealand's offer to resettle refugees from Manus Island and Nauru and negotiate conditions similar to the United States refugee resettlement agreement to ensure people smugglers do not exploit vulnerable people".

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-24/png-authorities-urge-men-to-leave-manus-island-centre/9187406>

26. Peter Dutton confirms PNG police have arrested 'small number' of asylum seekers

ABC News Online

By political reporter Henry Belot

Thursday 23 November 2017 - 9:35pm

A "small number" of asylum seekers on Manus Island were arrested by Papua New Guinea police today as they tried to clear the closed immigration detention centre, Peter Dutton has confirmed.

The centre closed last month with food, water and electricity cut off and asylum seekers asked to move to new accommodation facilities nearby.

But more than 300 men remain holed up there, saying the new accommodation doesn't have adequate facilities and they fear for their safety.

This morning Papua New Guinea police entered the facility in an attempt to remove the men.

"A number of people have been moved and we would expect the number, which up until this morning had been about 370 people, would drop obviously below that," the Immigration Minister told Sky News.

"There is a lot of work that is ongoing and the operation is still underway."

Mr Dutton said a small number of asylum seekers have been arrested by local police, including the Iranian refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani.

Mr Boochani later tweeted that he had since been released after being handcuffed for two hours.

A police spokesman said Boochani was not arrested but was removed and taken to the East Lorengau Transit Centre because he was influencing the other men not to leave the detention centre.

Mr Boochani had earlier been tweeting details of the police raid and said police were searching rooms, telling people they had an hour to leave the facility.

"Like with any of these sorts of events, you will have key people of influence and I think there are some people that wanted to volunteer to leave but felt they were required to stay," the police spokesman said.

"There seems to be this view that if there can be a clash with the police, somehow that footage being played in Australia will change the Australian Government's resolve."

The ABC has seen four buses carrying asylum seekers leaving the detention centre this afternoon, with local police confirming 35 men left voluntarily shortly after the police operation started.

PNG Police Commissioner Gari Baki later said a total of 50 people were peacefully relocated.

Earlier today, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull called for the men to peacefully leave the closed detention centre.

"They think this is some way they can pressure the Australian Government to let them come to Australia," he said.

"We will not be pressured."

Greens immigration spokesman Nick McKim said up to 100 PNG police officers were inside the centre and had been confiscating people's phones.

But PNG police spokesman Dominic Kakas told the ABC the operation was being conducted by 10 PNG Immigration officials and around 40 police personnel.

He said around 35 non-refugees had decided to voluntarily leave the centre following the operation, and would move to the new facilities being provided.

"Immigration officials went in and explained to them that they really had no legal standing... voluntarily they packed their bags and moved across," he said.

"Police and immigration officials are still in the centre and they are basically talking to [the refugees and asylum seekers] and trying to reason with them."

"There is a great degree of fear from the detainees there that violence will be perpetrated against them, they are determined to remain peaceful," Senator McKim said.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten called on the Government to accept a long-standing offer from New Zealand that would see them take 150 refugees from Australia's offshore detention centres.

"The Government has allowed this pressure-cooker to build over four years. And I just ask Malcolm Turnbull, please do the deal with New Zealand," he said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-23/small-number-of-asylum-seekers-arrested-on-manus-dutton/9185922>

27. More than 300 men still in Manus detention centre after PNG attempt to move them

Police have destroyed property and food, seized phones and made arrests, including of refugee journalist Behrouz Boochani

The Guardian

Ben Doherty and Helen Davidson

Thursday 23 November 2017 17.18 AEDT

Papua New Guinea police have spent Thursday attempting to forcibly clear the Manus Island detention centre, corralling refugees and asylum seekers on to buses, destroying property and food, seizing phones and arresting those communicating with the outside world.

But the operation – which a day before had been codenamed in pidgin “Helpim Friends” with the promise of no force used – did not clear the centre: more than 300 men remained inside on Thursday evening, refusing to move.

Kurdish Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani, a journalist by profession, was specifically targeted by police, who arrested him before most of the forcible removals began.

Mobile phone footage from inside the centre shows Boochani being led away, held by two men wearing the uniform of PNG police’s Mobile Squad. Boochani is surrounded by several other uniformed officers. He does not physically resist.

Other refugees said police told them they were looking for him.

Boochani tweeted late in the day that he had been released after being held for more than two hours near the camp. A source on Manus Island said Boochani had not been charged with any offence.

Boochani has been the most outspoken advocate for the refugees held on Manus Island, filing reports regularly for the Guardian and other news outlets and giving interviews with media across the world.

At least 50 refugees and asylum seekers were moved out of the centre over the course of the day, taken on buses to a new, partially-built accommodation block called Hillside Haus in the town of Lorengau.

Boochani tweeted that he had met some of them and seen their injuries on Thursday night.

Refugees and asylum seekers have refused to move because they say they are not safe in Lorengau – they have been subject to violent attacks in the town – and are asking for a permanent resettlement solution after four-and-a-half years in detention.

Police entered the decommissioned detention centre early on Thursday morning, sweeping through the now-derelict compounds and telling refugees and asylum seekers they had one hour to move.

Two refugees collapsed, according to refugee Walid Zazai, who filmed the men apparently unconscious. One was feared to have had a heart attack, the other suffers from epilepsy.

Neither could receive medical treatment inside the centre, but regained consciousness and remained in the centre into the afternoon.

Zazai said police were using sticks to control refugees and coerce them into leaving.

“They are beating guys, and putting them by force on buses and trucks. They have big rods and sticks in hands. Police and immigration are doing it together.

“We can’t take pictures or video. Whole area surrounded by them. When they see anyone filming they catch him, beat him and take him.”

Before he was arrested, Boochani tweeted that police were ransacking the detention centre.

“They are destroying everything. Shelters, tanks, beds and all of our belongings. They are very aggressive and put our belongings in the rubbish bins,” Boochani wrote on Twitter.

“We are blockading right now. So many police and immigration officers are around us at this moment. They destroyed everything and our belongings and right now are shouting at us to leave the prison camp.”

Video from inside the compound showed police overturning furniture in the men’s rooms, destroying property, standing on and destroying food, and befouling wells by pushing rubbish into them. The officers reportedly confiscated phones and told refugees they must leave immediately.

“We are on high alert right now. We are under attack,” Boochani said.

Detainees chanted “human rights, help us, they want to kill us”, holding their arms above their heads. Some fled to the centre’s roof to escape the officers.

The operation was led by PNG police and immigration officials. The PNG navy – which operates the base in which the detention centre is housed – had no involvement other than cordoning off the area, its commanding officer, Begsy Karaki, told the Guardian. Karaki said he had hoped the operation would be carried out “smoothly and safely”.

Pakistani refugee Ezatullah Kakar appealed on social media for a peaceful solution.

“Australia govt you brought us here by force, now PNG immigration police ... they are beating my friends front of me.

“We are peaceful people and PNG police ... they beaten very bad my friends [in] front of us, we are still respect PNG govt, but we don’t want PNG and we didn’t come for PNG.”

In Australia the government took no responsibility for the operation, declaring it to be PNG-led. However, the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, lashed out at the refugees, accusing them of trashing the centre and “living in squalor” while refusing to move to facilities which “Australian taxpayers have paid about \$10m for”.

Malcolm Turnbull echoed his minister.

“They should obey the law and the lawful authorities of Papua New Guinea,” the prime minister said. “There are alternative facilities that have been made available with food, water, security, and medical services.”

Turnbull also said those inside the centre were hoping to force the Australian government into bringing them all to Australia. “We will not be pressured,” he said. “Our border security, the integrity of our borders, is maintained by my government and we will not outsource our migration policy to people smugglers.”

The Australian government claims that the alternative accommodation units are ready and suitable for detainees have been consistently debunked by independent observers – including the United Nations – and videos and photos of blocked toilets, bathrooms without water, and buildings still under construction have been published.

Labor’s immigration spokesperson, Shayne Neumann, said the men at the decommissioned detention centre should accept the PNG and Australian government’s demands that they move to other Australian-built accommodation centres “to access security, health and welfare services”.

But he said Australia needed to take responsibility for finding a resettlement solution for the men.

“It’s time Turnbull showed some leadership and immediately secured other third-country resettlement options for eligible refugees, including accepting New Zealand’s offer and negotiating appropriate conditions – similar to those in the United States refugee resettlement agreement – to ensure people smugglers do not exploit vulnerable people.”

The Greens senator Nick McKim said the forcible removal of men was a “sad, dark day in Australia’s national history”. “It’s a foul and now-bloodied stain on our national conscience.”

McKim said the situation on Manus “stands on a knife edge” and called for the men to be brought to Australia.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/nov/23/more-than-300-men-still-in-manus-detention-centre-after-png-attempt-to-move-them>

28. PNG authorities enter Manus Island processing centre, amid reports of violence

Canberra Times
Thursday 23 November 2017
Michael Koziol & Fergus Hunter

Papua New Guinea authorities have entered the decommissioned Manus Island detention centre and given some 400 men still in the facility an ultimatum to leave.

There are unconfirmed reports authorities have been aggressive, and one detainee claimed two men had been “beaten up”. One man was said to be unconscious.

PNG police told Fairfax Media they would not use force against the refugees but confirmed they were in the camp talking to the men, hoping to convince them to leave.

The early morning action follows repeated deadlines issued – but not enforced – by the PNG government over the three weeks since the centre was shut down.

Iranian-Kurdish refugee and journalist Behrouz Boochani told Fairfax Media the police had entered the camp about 6.50am and were numbered in their hundreds.

"We are in high alert condition right now. We are under attack," he said. "Immigration and police started searching the rooms and are saying, 'Move move, you only have an hour to move'.

"They are destroying everything. Shelters, [water] tanks, beds and all of our belongings. They are very aggressive and put our belongings in the rubbish bins."

Mr Boochani said some refugees had exited their rooms and gathered at one of the compounds in the camp, while others had scaled the building's roof.

Video and audio circulated by activist group GetUp! appeared to show police inside the camp and men shouting.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton confirmed there was an active police operation at the centre.

"We're very keen for people to move out of the Manus regional processing centre. I think it's outrageous that people are still there and they have trashed the facility, they are living in squalor, and the Australian taxpayers have paid about \$10 million for a new facility and we want people to move," he told radio station 2GB.

"And obviously, it's in the end an issue for PNG police and the authorities up there but there is an operation involving police in the centre this morning."

Mr Dutton warned any footage of violence between refugees and PNG police would not "twist our arm" into resettling the refugees in Australia.

"Under no circumstance will these people be coming to Australia," he said.

PNG police spokesman Dominic Kakas said about 40 officers and 10 immigration staff were inside the camp "just talking to the people and getting them to move out to the new locations".

He confirmed police were destroying the refugees' rainwater tanks because "there is danger of an outbreak of typhoid, dysentery or cholera", but denied police were destroying the men's belongings.

"We just don't understand why they are refusing to move. The longer they stay, people might get sick and die," Mr Kakas told Fairfax Media.

"At the end of the day, their health should be a big consideration in their moving. Hopefully they will see sense. It's like we're coming up against a brick wall."

Amid reports of Australian Federal Police participation in the operation, a spokesperson said the AFP had a liaison officer currently stationed on the island in an advisory role but emphasised there was "no involvement in today's actions".

About 400 men remain in the centre and have been refusing to relocate to three new "transit centres", citing fears for their safety, the adequacy of the new facilities, and their desire for permanent resettlement in a third country.

The apparent spike in tensions three weeks after the facility was shut down came as former Australians of the Year penned an open letter to Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten urging them to address the "human disaster" unfolding on the island.

In recent days, shocking new footage and testimony from inside the centre has shown filthy blocked toilets, makeshift rainwater collection and men consuming 20 to 30 cups of coffee a day in an attempt to replicate the effects of their anti-depressant medication.

Meanwhile, a lawyer acting for the men, Ben Lomai, said the full bench of the PNG Supreme Court would hear an appeal against the centre's closure on December 15. The court has previously rejected a bid to reopen the centre.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/png-authorities-enter-manus-island-processing-centre-amid-reports-of-escalating-tensions-20171122-gzr3pl.html>

29. PTSD claim pits former soldier against Immigration Department, security firm

ABC News Online

By David Chen

Updated December 01, 2017 06:58:52

A former security guard who developed post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) working at Manus Island detention centre is locked in a fight with Wilson Security and the Australian Immigration Department after his insurance claim was rejected.

Ricky Morse, 54, says he has been suffering from symptoms, including paranoia, ever since he left the troubled Papua New Guinea (PNG) detention centre two years ago.

The Australian Government-run centre has since closed.

Violence and unrest flared at the detention centre last weekend when PNG officials moved the 328 men remaining in the decommissioned facility to new camps.

Social media posts showed men with injuries on their bodies they say came from beatings by PNG police wielding long sticks.

Case management staff working with refugees have also been forced to leave the island by angry landowners.

Mr Morse said he developed PTSD in 2015 after what he described as threats on social media, sparked by a scuffle with asylum seekers.

"I was getting harassed, threatened and my wife was being threatened and Wilson's ended up sending me off the island feeling a little bit sick," he said.

Mr Morse said he lodged an insurance claim with Wilson Security's insurer Southern Cross Assurance Limited, based in Port Moresby.

But the insurer rejected his claim, arguing Mr Morse had a pre-existing condition.

In a letter to Mr Morse, Southern Cross Assurance said his mental illness "did not commence during the period of employment but prior to it, and also he was aware of the illness but failed to disclose it".

But Mr Morse said he and his psychiatrist both disagreed with the company's assessment.

"Because I've had PTSD before they classed it as a pre-existing injury — I'm ex-military, I'm ex-copper, so I've had mental issues. Then I had the incident which caused me to relapse.

"When I went to see my psychiatrist, he said 'no, it's not a relapse, it's a new injury caused by the incident over there'.

"It's like breaking your leg, you break it, it heals — you break your leg again it's another injury. So that's what he said.

"That's why the claim ... it's been denied."

Mr Morse said it had taken a heavy toll on him and his family.

"I just want to get well and I can't get well until this fight is over," he said.

"At the end of the day, we've got people on an Australian contract, an Australian company with a contract with a PNG company that is not registered to Australia and we have no appeal."

The ABC has spoken to other former security guards who worked with Mr Morse and they said he had been treated disgracefully by Wilson Security.

"Trying to talk to Wilson's and garner some support from hierarchy was always hard, especially when you were looking at something like a PTSD claim," one former worker said.

"They pretty much just shut the door on you, so it's very difficult to communicate with Wilson's about issues you do have."

'It's very unfair'

Former security guards want the company to treat its former employees fairly and provide support.

"Talk to [the workers] would be the first thing and see what their issues are, and then work together to reach an agreement or something that helps everyone move forward," one former worker said.

"Whether that's retraining and or employment in Australia.

"All the people that I worked with over there were fantastic guys, they were wonderful security guards, and they did take pride in their work and they're all great people — they all need to be looked after."

Alison Barrett from law firm Maurice Blackburn said it had been involved in a number of other cases where workers had been injured on Manus Island.

She said many of those workers also had their insurance claims rejected.

"It's very unfair and quite often the enquiries we're talking to — all they want is some money to reimburse them for their time off work, to pay for their much-needed medical treatment," she said.

"Being unable to access financial assistance ... prolongs their injury and their rehabilitation, makes it very difficult for them to get back to work and then puts a lot of pressure on their families."

Ms Barrett said Wilson Security needed to take responsibility for the situation.

"All Australian workers should be entitled to coverage for workers compensation and what we've seen is Wilson has gone through a process of finger-pointing and blame-shifting," she said.

Wilson Security referred the ABC to the Immigration Department when it was contacted for comment.

The Immigration Department said service providers were responsible for ensuring any sub-contractor complied with strict clauses on insurance cover.

It said support provided to staff employed by sub-contractors was a matter for those organisations.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-01/ptsd-former-manus-security-guard-fights-wilson-claim-rejection/9185610>