

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. Paul Syvret: Our nation has a black and shrivelled soul

The Courier-Mail
Paul Syvret
March 28, 2018 9:00pm

WHEN Peter Dutton intervened directly to prevent the deportation of two young women intending to work in Australia as au pairs (in breach of their tourist visas), presumably our all powerful Home Affairs Minister was thinking of the children.

These would be the children of wealthy families who can afford to provide the room and board, plus a bit of spending money, for a live-in domestic servant who helps with child care duties and other housework. “Polish the Pimms glasses will you dear, and when you’ve put young Archibald Beaumont-Smythe junior to bed, be a pet and see if there’s any of that rather delightful smoked trout left in the main kitchen.”

They certainly wouldn’t be the children of refugee families that our immigration overlord has left rotting in the detention camp in Nauru, or the children of a Sri Lankan family ripped from their beds by Border Force officers, one day after their mother’s protection visa expired.

No. The brand of intervention Dutton and his department apply in such cases is one of brutality and dehumanisation. It is the sort of inhumanity that saw the Home Affairs office fight tooth and nail in the Federal Court this month to prevent the transfer of a suicidal 10- year-old boy — referred to in court documents as AYX18 — from Nauru to Australia for psychiatric care.

The child also has physical issues that his mother does not believe can be dealt with in the hospital on Nauru — a facility that the Government’s own health contractor has ruled as unsafe for surgery.

A psychiatrist’s evidence concluded that the child was “deteriorating significantly with the current care provided on Nauru by (International Health and Medical Services) and the local hospital. I strongly recommend that (AYX18) and his mother are taken to the mainland for reunification with his father and surgical and psychiatric treatment by clinicians specialising in child psychiatry.” (The boy’s father is in immigration detention in Australia.)

This is a child who arrived with his parents as an Iranian asylum seeker in 2013, and was granted refugee status in 2014. He has spent half his life in detention. Suffice to say the judge rejected the Home Affairs argument for a further delay to the case, and ordered the boy be transferred to Australia saying the Government had a “duty of care”.

This would be the same government that raided the family home of Tamil asylum seekers Nadesalingam and Priya and their daughters Dharuniga and Kopiga in Biloela earlier this month. Nadesalingam had been getting ready for his job at the local meatworks, and Priya was warming a baby’s bottle. The parents were handcuffed and loaded into a van for transport to the Broadmeadows detention centre in Melbourne, while the daughters were bundled into another van. They spent a week under guard, and were refused outside contact until they had signed deportation papers.

Only a petition started by local Biloela residents and ultimately signed by tens of thousands of people, and last minute legal intervention, saw them removed from a plane bound for Sri Lanka just minutes before take off. These are the children that Dutton and the increasingly punitive policies of successive governments cast aside as mere collateral damage in the wider war of politics. They are the families, charged with no crime, who are used as human shields to deter other desperate and dispossessed people from seeking asylum on our shores.

This is the “civilised country” that Dutton believes should be giving “special attention” to white South African farmers because of violence in rural communities (affecting both black and whites) in that country. This is the Minister who says that “it concerns me that people are being persecuted at the moment” ... but only in the context of white residents of a nation that for years suffered under a brutal apartheid regime.

No such public compassion for the countless thousands of Rohingya refugees who have been displaced from their homelands in Myanmar, and certainly no such compassion for the hundreds of asylum seekers — most of whom have been determined to be genuine refugees — left abandoned in Australia’s gulags.

No. And don’t dare to call Dutton out for his racist dog whistling and White Australia policy fantasies, because that just means you are a “crazy lefty” who is peddling “fake news”. In fact these critics, Dutton says, “don’t realise how completely dead they are to me.”

Not, though, as dead as the men who have died from lack of care, or taken their own lives in despair on Manus Island or Nauru.

And certainly not as dead as the black and shrivelled soul of a nation that allows this abuse and degradation to continue.

Bring them here.

<http://www.couriermail.com.au/rendezview/our-nation-has-a-black-and-shrivelled-soul/news-story/f2db657f1f04d69b6d5c8780e9cc11f4>

2. Defiance, resistance: The front lines of California's war against the Trump administration

The Washington Post
By Maria Sacchetti
March 11 at 9:58 AM

SAN FRANCISCO — In the nerve center of the Trump resistance, some volunteers staff 24-hour hotlines in case immigration agents appear in the middle of the night. Others flood neighborhoods to film arrests and interview witnesses. Local governments are teaming with donors to hire lawyers for those facing expulsion hearings.

California and the Trump administration are engaged in an all-out war over immigration enforcement, the president's signature issue on the campaign trail and in the White House. It is a deeply personal battle in the nation's most populous and economically powerful state, where 27 percent of the 39 million residents are foreign-born.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions last week filed a lawsuit accusing California and its new slate of laws protecting immigrants of violating the Constitution and endangering federal agents. In blistering remarks in the state capital, the nation's top law enforcement official compared the actions of state and local officials to "secession" and a "radical open-borders agenda."

FULL STORY AT https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/immigration/defiance-resistance-the-front-lines-of-californias-war-against-the-trump-administration/2018/03/11/45e7833e-2309-11e8-86f6-54bfff693d2b_story.html

3. Climate change soon to cause mass movement, World Bank warns

140m people in three regions expected to migrate before 2050 unless environment is improved

The Guardian
Fiona Harvey Environment correspondent
Tue 20 Mar 2018 03.44 AEDT

Climate change will result in a massive movement of people inside countries and across borders, creating "hotspots" where tens of millions pour into already crowded slums, according to the World Bank.

More than 140 million people in just three regions of the developing world are likely to migrate within their native countries between now and 2050, the first report on the subject has found.

The World Bank examined three regions, which between them account for 55% of the developing world's population. In sub-Saharan Africa, 86 million are expected to be internally displaced over the period; in south Asia, about 40 million; and in Latin America, 17 million.

Such flows of people could cause enormous disruption, threatening governance and economic and social development, but the World Bank cautioned that it was still possible to stave off the worst effects.

"Climate change-driven migration will be a reality, but it does not need to be a crisis, provided we take action now and act boldly," said John Roome, a senior director for climate change at the World Bank group.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/19/climate-change-soon-to-cause-mass-movement-world-bank-warns>

4. Ross Gittins: Cheating at cricket just one of the unthinkable things Aussies do now

The Age
By Ross Gittins
27 March 2018 — 3:55pm

I can't see why people are so shocked to discover our cricketers have been cheating. Surely that's only to be expected in a nation that's drifted so far from our earlier commitment to decency, mateship and the fair go.

Such behaviour is unAustralian? We do, or condone, many things that used to be thought of as unAustralian.

There was a time when it would have been unthinkable for Australians to stand by while an elected government physically and psychologically mistreated people whose only crime was to arrive by boat without an invite.

Many of them are fleeing persecution in their own country, but that makes no difference. We even mistreat their children, causing them to have mental illnesses and then refusing them medical treatment.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theage.com.au/national/cheating-at-cricket-just-one-of-the-unthinkable-things-aussies-do-now-20180327-p4z6fc.html>

5. Malcolm Turnbull encourages Aung San Suu Kyi to resettle Rohingya

Amnesty International accuses Australian PM of 'softly softly' approach to humanitarian crisis

The Guardian
Paul Karp
Mon 19 Mar 2018 19.48 AEDT

Malcolm Turnbull has encouraged Aung San Suu Kyi to resettle displaced Rohingya but Amnesty International has criticised Australia for adopting a "softly softly" approach on the humanitarian crisis during the Myanmar leader's visit.

On Monday the state counsellor of Myanmar met Turnbull in Canberra for a bilateral meeting after the Association of South-East Asian Nations meeting in Sydney.

Aung San Suu Kyi then unexpectedly pulled out of a planned appearance at the Lowy Institute on Tuesday, citing illness.

Aid groups have welcomed the fact Aung San Suu Kyi privately addressed the Rohingya crisis at a closed-door meeting of south-east Asian leaders but her visit has prompted backlash including an attempted private prosecution for crimes against humanity.

The Australian prime minister had a detailed, constructive meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi in which the pair discussed the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Rakhine state.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/19/malcolm-turnbull-encourages-aung-san-suu-kyi-to-resettle-rohingya>

6. The Saturday Paper: Dutton uses visas as second criminal sentence

A South Sudanese man who grew up in Australia awaits deportation from Christmas Island, as Peter Dutton uses ministerial powers to punish refugee members of 'Apex'. By Santilla Chingaibe.

The Saturday Paper
Edition No. 198 MARCH 31 – APRIL 6, 2018
By Santilla Chingaibe

I meet Margaret Atem outside a fish and chip shop in Melbourne's south-east. We are ushered into the shop, which is adorned with South Sudanese and Australian flags, and seated in the back room. The owner, of South Sudanese heritage, is wearing a bucket hat with the words "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie" printed on it.

Before we begin our interview, two women interrupt us. Word has spread about the topic of our conversation and these women tell me they are in a similar predicament. They ask for my number so I can speak to them separately.

Soon after they depart, Margaret begins to tell me about her brother, Issac. Lawyer Nyadol Nyoun translates from Dinka to English as Margaret speaks.

Issac Gatkuoth was born in Sudan before moving with this family to Egypt, where they spent time in refugee camps. A few years later, they were granted humanitarian visas for Australia.

Now 20, Issac arrived in Australia along with his older siblings when he was nine years old. Margaret says he applied for Australian citizenship a few years ago, but he was denied and instead remained as a permanent resident. Other members of the family have successfully obtained their Australian citizenship.

Margaret says that about the age of 15, her brother got involved with the "wrong crowds". He engaged in anti-social behaviour and took drugs.

"I was quite surprised when all of this happened," she says. "He was quite normal. He would come home and eat with us and get ready for school. I was quite surprised when I found out about the things he was accused of."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/law-crime/2018/03/31/dutton-uses-visas-second-criminal-sentence/15224148006027>

7. Indrika Ratwatte: 'I am old. I only wanted a small life. I have no hope left'

Despite decades working in humanitarian crises around the world, the suffering I witnessed on Nauru is an immense shock

The Guardian
Indrika Ratwatte
Wed 28 Mar 2018 16.10 AEDT

No one denies that among those who initially supported “offshore processing” were many well-intentioned people. Driven to desperation by the tragedy of global displacement and its consequences, most turned to this policy reluctantly. Noble motivations might have been one reason why some, at first, turned away when confronted with a harsh and cruel reality. Equally true, however, is the fact that Australia’s treatment of these human beings and families has long been unwatchable.

Politicians and spin doctors have sought to convince the Australian public that empathy and common decency are naïve. But the approach taken since 2013 has demonised and punished people we know need help and protection, evidenced by the fact that the vast majority have been recognised as refugees. Their continued suffering, with no end yet in sight for many, is plainly wrong. Worse than this, a policy that knowingly and unrelentingly harms children for political ends is an abomination. There can be no three word slogans to justify it. There are no excuses.

After decades working in humanitarian crises around the world, witnessing Australia’s offshore processing firsthand is deeply confronting. Despite comprehensive evidence of the harm inflicted, meeting the innocent people affected in Nauru this week is nevertheless an immense shock. For over four years, in desperate conditions, they have had to endure. They have held their families together. Some have tried to start small businesses or otherwise further their lives. Human resilience is astounding, but it has its limits. As UNHCR staff, we are shocked each time we return to Nauru by a further deterioration in people’s capacity to cope.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/28/i-am-old-i-only-wanted-a-small-life-i-have-no-hope-left>

8. Immigration warns child abuse redress for temporary visa holders a 'significant' cost

Home affairs department’s submission to Senate inquiry condemned by lawyers

The Guardian
Christopher Knaus
Thu 29 Mar 2018 15.00 AEDT

Immigration authorities have argued that allowing temporary visa holders to apply for compensation under the proposed child abuse redress scheme would “significantly” increase the government’s financial exposure.

Federal parliament is considering how it should best implement one of the child sexual abuse royal commission’s key recommendations: a redress scheme to compensate survivors.

But the scheme’s current design has raised concerns that those in Australia on temporary visas or in offshore detention may be excluded from compensation.

A Senate inquiry’s report, released on Wednesday, found most non-citizens were likely to be eligible, but called on the government to give greater clarity on its intentions.

Lawyers condemned the Department of Home Affairs for telling the inquiry that including temporary visa holders in the redress scheme would leave it financially exposed. The department’s submission was highlighted in the inquiry’s report.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/29/immigration-warns-child-abuse-redress-for-temporary-visa-holders-a-significant-cost>

9. 'New dose of cruelty': up to 7,000 asylum seekers to lose income support

Refugee advocates fear cut to payment could drive people to abandon studies, lose housing and self-harm

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Fri 30 Mar 2018 06.00 AEDT

The federal government has outlined its plan to cut income support from up to 7,000 asylum seekers living in Australia from June, in a move lawyers and refugee support groups say could leave people destitute, hungry and at increased risk of self-harm.

Some of the asylum seekers likely to be affected have been in the country more than five years waiting for the government to make a decision on their application for protection. The Department of Home Affairs has also specifically said asylum seekers studying full-time will have their support cut.

The Guardian is aware of several asylum seekers who came to Australia as children, who have since graduated from high school and won scholarships to Australian universities. Some have said they will be forced to abandon their studies.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/30/new-dose-of-cruelty-up-to-7000-asylum-seekers-to-lose-income-support>

10a. Cuts on 1 April will leave asylum seekers homeless, advocates warn

Ninety-five groups send joint statement warning government risks creating destitution

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Mon 26 Mar 2018 13.17 AEDT

Federal government cuts could mean homelessness and destitution for vulnerable asylum seekers in Australia on temporary visas, refugee advocates are warning.

Ninety-five advocate groups spoke out on Monday to oppose cuts to a program that provides an allowance, casework support, housing assistance and counselling to potential refugees.

“Many still have years before a decision will be known on their status,” said Paul Power, the CEO of the Refugee Council of Australia. “The government needs to take a step back and remember for a second that we are talking about people – people who have escaped war and risked death by travelling the long treacherous journey to Australia.”

The cuts to the Status Resolution Support Service program, announced at the end of last year, will take effect from Sunday.

The government has outlined its rationale that asylum seekers judged to be “work-ready” will be required to be working: those who are seeking work, but are unable to find it, or who are studying for work qualifications or to improve their English, will not be eligible for assistance. Many have received letters informing them they have been cut off.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/26/cuts-on-1-april-will-leave-asylum-seekers-homeless-advocates-warn>

10b. Cuts leave asylum seekers in Australia at risk of destitution, say advocates

Some have had to withdraw from university after their income support was summarily cut

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Fri 9 Mar 2018 17.59 AEDT

Asylum seekers living in the Australian community are having their income support summarily cut, and being left at risk of destitution, refugee advocacy groups have said.

Some of those who have had their status resolution support service (SRSS) cut arrived in Australia as unaccompanied minors, have since graduated from high school here and won scholarships to university. With the withdrawal of financial support, some have since withdrawn from university because they can not survive while studying.

Others who are studying English or training for a work qualification are being forced to choose between continuing their studies or finding immediate work to support themselves.

Changes to the SRSS regime were imposed late last year, when individual asylum seekers – living legally in the Australian community on bridging visas – were told they were being cut off from their support. But details of the breadth of the policy have become clearer over recent weeks, with more and more asylum seekers affected.

The government has outlined its rationale that asylum seekers judged to be “work-ready” will be required to be working: those who are seeking work, but are unable to find it, or who are studying for work qualifications or to improve their English, will not be eligible for assistance. Many have received letters informing them they have been cut off.

Currently, the SRSS payment is 89% of the Newstart allowance – about \$478 a fortnight – and 89% of rent assistance. About 12,000 people currently receive SRSS. Many were banned from working in Australia for years, but have recently had work rights attached to their visa.

It is unclear how many people might be caught up in the changes, but agencies supporting asylum seekers estimate it could affect up to 10,000 people across the country, mainly in Sydney and Melbourne.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/09/cuts-leave-asylum-seekers-in-australia-at-risk-of-destitution-say-advocates>

11. Dutton claims granting visa to au pair at airport in public interest

Canberra Times
Monday March 26 2018

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton claims it was in the "public interest" to grant a visa to a foreign au pair after using his ministerial powers to intervene in her case.

The visa was granted after a young woman's eVisitor visa was cancelled at Brisbane Airport on June 17, 2015, which rendered her an "unlawful non-citizen" under migration laws.

Over the past two years, Mr Dutton's department has been trying to suppress key details of the case and the reasons underpinning the decision. AAP sought access to details surrounding the case under freedom of information laws, but documents supplied were heavily redacted, citing privacy concerns. AAP is now awaiting an outcome from the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

An au pair is a person under 30 who travels abroad for a temporary period and lives with a host family. They generally receive free board, meals and spending money in exchange for childcare and light housework duties. AAP understands the woman made a phone call to a contact while she was detained at the airport and was "quickly" granted a new visa that allowed her to enter Australia lawfully.

A document tabled in Parliament shows the woman was granted a tourist visa (subclass 600) after Mr Dutton used his ministerial discretion to intervene in the case.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/dutton-claims-granting-visa-to-au-pair-at-airport-in-public-interest-20180326-p4z69c.html>

12. Peter Dutton looks to help 'persecuted' white South African farmers

Sydney Morning Herald / AAP
By Daniel McCulloch
14 March 2018 — 10:21pm

Australia is investigating what visas can be offered to white South African farmers who are facing violence and land seizures at home.

Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton believes the farmers deserve "special attention" and need help from a "civilised country" like Australia.

"If you look at the footage and read the stories, you hear the accounts, it's a horrific circumstance they face," Mr Dutton told News Corp on Wednesday.

"We have the potential to help some of these people that are being persecuted."

He has directed the Home Affairs Department to explore whether the farmers can be accepted into Australia through refugee, humanitarian or other visas, including the in-country persecution visa category.

"I do think on the information that I've seen, people do need help, and they need help from a civilised country like ours," Mr Dutton said.

The minister said it was clear the farmers in question wanted to work hard and contribute to countries like Australia.

"We want people who want to come here, abide by our laws, integrate into our society, work hard, not lead a life on welfare," he said. "And I think these people deserve special attention and we're certainly applying that special attention now."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/peter-dutton-looks-to-help-persecuted-white-south-african-farmers-20180314-p4z4el.html>

13. New York Times: Australian Official Calls for Emergency Visas for White South African Farmers

New York Times
By RUSSELL GOLDMAN
MARCH 15, 2018

HONG KONG — A top Australian official said this week that white farmers from South Africa should be granted emergency visas, saying they needed protection in a “civilized country” amid a debate over redistribution of their lands to black citizens.

On Thursday, South Africa’s Foreign Ministry fired back, characterizing the remarks made by Peter Dutton, Australia’s home affairs minister, as regrettable. White farmers are not at risk, the ministry said.

“There is no reason for any government anywhere in the world to suspect that any South African is in danger from their own democratically elected government,” Ndivhuwo Mabaya, a spokesman for South Africa’s Foreign Ministry, said in a statement. “That threat simply does not exist.”

South Africa’s governing party, the African National Congress, has proposed a constitutional amendment to expropriate land without paying the landowners. The majority of South African farmland remains under white ownership more than 25 years after apartheid ended.

Mr. Dutton, who oversees immigration in Australia, said in an interview on Wednesday that the white farmers “deserve special protection.” He proposed offering the farmers expedited visas to resettle in Australia on humanitarian grounds.

“We want people who want to come here, abide by our laws, integrate into our society, work hard, not lead a life on welfare,” Mr. Dutton said. He also cited news reports that white farmers in South Africa were in danger for their lives.

The comments from Mr. Dutton, a member of the center-right governing Liberal Party, also raised eyebrows in Australia, where immigration is a hot-button issue and Liberal Party politicians have been accused of using race as a political tool.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/15/world/australia/south-africa-white-farmers-peter-dutton.html>

14. South Africa demands Peter Dutton retract 'offensive' statement on white farmer plight

Foreign ministry hardens language against Australian minister who offered farmers visa help from his ‘civilised country’

The Guardian
Staff and agencies
Fri 16 Mar 2018 07.49 AEDT

South Africa demanded on Thursday that Australian home affairs minister Peter Dutton retract comments that suggested white farmers were being persecuted and should receive fast-tracked humanitarian visas from a “civilised country”.

Pretoria summoned Canberra’s high commissioner over Dutton’s remarks, which also included a description of white farmers facing “horrific circumstances”, a characterisation South Africa has rejected.

“The South African government is offended by the statements which have been attributed to the Australian home affairs minister and a full retraction is expected,” the foreign ministry said in a statement.

Commenting this week on a documentary about violent rural crime in South Africa, Dutton said the farmers deserved “special attention”. “I do think, on the information that I’ve seen, people do need help and they need help from a civilised country like ours,” Dutton said.

He also pointed to plans by new president Cyril Ramaphosa to allow expropriation of land as a solution to the massive land ownership inequalities that remain more than two decades after the end of apartheid.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/16/south-africa-peter-dutton-offensive-statement-white-farmers>

15. Dutton should prioritise refugees on Nauru, not white South Africans, UNHCR says

The Guardian
Paul Karp
Tue 27 Mar 2018 13.37 AEDT

UNHCR director for Asia and the Pacific says the mental health of those on Nauru is 'very shocking'

The United Nations high commissioner for refugees has rejected Peter Dutton's suggestion that white South African farmers should receive "special attention" for migration to Australia.

At a press conference in Canberra to warn of the "devastating" impact of detention on children, the UNHCR director for Asia and the Pacific, Indrika Ratwatte, said refugees on Nauru should be prioritised and quotas should not be spent on any decision to open migration to South African farmers.

Ratwatte has returned from an inspection of facilities on Nauru, making him the most senior UNHCR official to witness Australia's offshore processing facilities first-hand.

On Tuesday Ratwatte described the mental health of people he saw as "very, very shocking" and said the growing trend to self-harm and children as young as 10 attempting suicide was "symptomatic of the despair and hopelessness prevailing there".

He noted that 40 children on Nauru had spent their entire lives in detention and another 60 had spent half their lives, four years or more, in detention.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/27/dutton-should-prioritise-refugees-on-nauru-not-white-south-africans-unhcr-says>

16. Bruce Haigh: Dutton ventures where fools fear to tread

Canberra Times
March 23 2018 - 12:00AM
Bruce Haigh

The Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, has gratuitously interfered in the internal affairs of South Africa. His comments on what he termed 'the horrific circumstances' relating to white South African farmers, at the urging of white right-wing extremists, has done harm to finely balanced race relations in South Africa and to the relationship between the two countries.

Had he sought a briefing from the Department of Foreign Affairs he would have discovered that the situation relating to the 'persecution' of white farmer's bears no resemblance to his ill-informed remarks. The Australian High Commission in Pretoria keeps DFAT well informed.

I feel qualified to comment. As a young diplomat posted to South Africa at the height of Apartheid, 1976-79, I chose to assist those opposing the regime. There seemed little point in helping it to survive. Apartheid was not something to be observed, like the fundamental evil of Fascism, it had to be destroyed.

For me there was no other option. I sheltered people running from the police in my home, I delivered messages for people who were banned and could not use phones for fear of interception and police brutality and I took people to safety in neighbouring countries under the protection of my diplomatic immunity.

I got to know many activists including Steve Biko, Zwelakhe Sisulu, Dr Nthato Motlana, Dr Mamphela Ramphele and Donald Woods, whom I assisted in leaving South Africa. This escape was portrayed in the Richard Attenborough film, 'Cry Freedom'. Together with my predecessor, Di Johnstone, I helped found Ifa Lethu, which amongst other things assists with the education of youngsters in black townships.

No independent observer will deny that attacks on farm properties have occurred. The reasons vary. South Africa has a population of 56 million; in 2016-17, 19,000 murders were committed of which 74 occurred on farms, of these 60 per cent were white farmers, their families and/or friends, 34 per cent were black workers and 5 per cent were Asian. There were 49 deaths in 2015-16; 72 per cent of agricultural land is owned by white farmers with whites comprising 8 per cent of the population. South Africa ranks tenth in the world in relation to violent deaths. Jamaica ranks sixth and Brazil sixteenth, with a population of 200 million had 65,000 murders in 2012.

Black violence is endemic in South Africa with blacks living in poverty most likely to be affected.

Fatal violence associated with theft also affects whites in the suburbs. Black violence is a sad legacy of Apartheid which relied on the use of state sponsored armed force to exist and maintain the segregation of blacks from whites. The system was cruel and ruthless and the response to it was often violent.

Some white farmers have not accepted change. They continue to support the notion of Apartheid of which they were a primary beneficiary; they are right wing and often treat their black work force badly, showing little respect, with some resorting to violence as a means of enforcing their will.

Some still fly the old South African flag. They live in the past. It is these sad and divisive characters that Dutton has chosen to support.

Land re-distribution was not addressed by the corrupt President Zuma. The new President, Cyril Ramaphosa, has put it back on the agenda much to the annoyance of white farmers who are alleging persecution. Ramaphosa, who I know to be a good person, is seeking to act in the interests of all of South Africans. Reform is overdue, it is 25 years since Apartheid ended and Nelson Mandela became President. As a nation Australia was at the fore in seeking to end Apartheid. Dutton is destroying a legacy which was difficult to achieve and hard to build. Former Prime Minister Abbott, who has joined with Dutton on the issue, did not oppose Apartheid.

The South African government is offended and angry and is disinclined to let the issue rest. It said it was, '...offended by the statement which has been attributed to the Australian Home Affairs Minister and a full retraction is expected.' In offering fast track visas to South African farmers Dutton had the temerity to state that they were being offered protection in a 'civilised country'. The arrogance of that statement has left South Africa gob smacked.

They are saying in what way does Dutton consider Australia civilised in light of his policies toward refugees?

Left unaddressed Dutton's statement will affect trade, business, sporting and educational relationships. There are currently 52 Australian travel agents touring South Africa as guests of SA Tourism, it can be expected that if relations deteriorate these exchanges will end. Last year 10.3 million tourists visited South Africa. Dutton needs to realise he has committed a major diplomatic gaffe. He has brought shame on Australia. Given the mood of the South African government nothing short of an apology is likely to satisfy them.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/dutton-ventures-where-fools-fear-to-tread-20180322-h0xtvj.html>

17. Indian Commonwealth Games 'imposters' detained at Brisbane airport

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Thu 29 Mar 2018 15:19 AEDT

One man charged with people smuggling and falsifying documents after eight claim to be journalists

A group of Indian nationals has been arrested and detained as "imposters" claiming to be journalists covering the Commonwealth Games.

The Australian Border Force (ABF) said one 46-year-old man has been charged with people smuggling and falsifying documents, after the group was questioned at Brisbane airport and eight were found to be carrying fraudulent media accreditation.

The man has been remanded in custody and was due to appear before the Brisbane magistrate's court on Thursday. If convicted, he faces up to 20 years in jail.

The other eight individuals have been sent to immigration detention.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/29/indian-commonwealth-games-imposters-detained-at-brisbane-airport>

18. UN official visiting Nauru detention centre concerned about 'shocking' mental health situation

ABC News
By political reporter Elise Fantin
Updated Tuesday 27 March 2018, 1:06pm

A senior United Nations official has demanded the Federal Government reconsider its offshore processing policy as concerns about detainees' mental health grows.

Indrika Ratwatte, the Asia Pacific director for its refugee agency the UNHCR, recently visited the Nauru detention centre and described the conditions as "shocking". "Looking at the conditions here, particularly the mental health situation, it's very, very shocking," he said. "We must make every effort to get refugees out of this situation."

Mr Ratwatte said family separation was a major issue. "I have seen a little girl of 14 years old and her father in Nauru where the mother and her siblings are in Australia for medical treatment," he said.

"This little girl was in a catatonic state, who hasn't gotten out of her room in months, who has not taken a shower, who is in a state of complete stress and trauma. "These situations need to be avoided."

Mr Ratwatte said solutions were needed to stop incidents of self-harm.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-27/unhcr-says-nauru-refugees-mental-health-situation-shocking/9591846>

19. A letter from Manus Island to be read on Palm Sunday

The Herald Sun
March 23 2018 - 7:00PM
Mohammad Imran

Imran, a refugee on Manus, has written this letter on behalf of the refugees and asylum-seekers on the island to coincide with Palm Sunday rallies across Australia.

Dearest Friends,

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to everyone joining the rally on Palm Sunday, and of course, to those who support us in myriad other ways. It is your solidarity, kindness, generosity and, most importantly, your humanity through which we (the refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru) have found a tiny light of hope to survive in this isolation, which has been covered by darkness and despondence. The entire population of refugees around the world will be forever grateful to you all for standing up for justice and liberty, which is every human's ultimate right on this planet.

It has been nearly five years of trauma, unbearable suffering and unspeakable hardships, but hundreds of lives are still caught in political games, and only God knows if they have any hope of finding relief from this relentless and undefinable long journey. What we have been made to endure and lose all these years is incomprehensible.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/5301925/a-letter-for-palm-sunday-with-love-from-manus-island/>

20. Ai Weiwei on the US-Australia refugee deal: 'It's exactly like slave trading'

Chinese artist brings three confronting works about refugee crisis to Australia – with a message

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Mon 12 Mar 2018 18.31 AEDT

The internationally renowned Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei believes the US and Australia are engaging in a slave trade.

His claim comes amid a discussion of worldwide refugee movements, the impact of globalisation on human suffering and a lack of humanity in the west – which form the context of his contribution to this month's Sydney Biennale exhibition.

Ai is well aware of Australia's refugee policies, including its most recent chapter – a deal with the US to take up to 1,200 refugees languishing in offshore detention centres.

"That is a complete insult to the understanding of refugees," he says. "It's exactly like slave trading. You cannot deal with human beings by violating their [rights]."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/mar/12/ai-weiwei-on-the-us-australia-refugee-deal-its-exactly-like-slave-trading>

21. Chinese dissident artist critiques Australia's treatment of asylum seekers ahead of Sydney Biennale

ABC News
By Philippa McDonald
Updated Monday 12 March 2018

He is one of the world's most famous artists and China's best known dissident, and 60-year-old Ai Weiwei has a message for Australia when it comes to the treatment of asylum seekers.

"I struggle with Australia's record towards refugees," he said.

"Australia is a nation of migrants and its culture accepts and tolerates difference.

"But Australia's refugee record is quite poor internationally. This is a very bad position for a state because people judge states on their acceptance and tolerance of people who need help.

"There is no excuse for any kind of policy which does not consider or protect very basic human rights."

FULL STORY AT <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-12/chinese-artist-ai-weiwei-says-australian-refugee-policy-poor/9539252>

22. Ai Weiwei: The refugee crisis isn't about refugees. It's about us

I was a child refugee, writes the Chinese artist and activist. I know how it feels to live in a camp, robbed of my humanity. Refugees must be seen to be an essential part of our shared humanity

The Guardian
Ai Weiwei
Fri 2 Feb 2018 17.00 AEDT

I was born in 1957, the same year China purged more than 300,000 intellectuals, including writers, teachers, journalists and whoever dared to criticise the newly established communist government. As part of a series of campaigns led by what was known as the anti-rightist movement, these intellectuals were sent to labour camps for "re-education".

Because my father, Ai Qing, was the most renowned poet in China then, the government made a symbolic example of him. In 1958, my family was forced from our home in Beijing and banished to the most remote area of the country – we had no idea that this was the beginning of a very dark, long journey that would last for two decades.

In the years that followed, my father was sentenced to hard labour cleaning latrines in a work camp in north-west China. He was also forced to criticise himself publicly.

From my youth, I experienced inhumane treatment from society. At the camp we had to live in an underground dugout and were subjected to unexplainable hatred, discrimination, unprovoked insults and assaults, all of which aimed to crush the basic human spirit rooted in my father's beliefs. As a result, I remember experiencing what felt like endless injustice. In such circumstances, there is no place to hide and there is no way to escape. You feel like your life is up against a wall, or that life itself is a dimming light, on the verge of being completely extinguished. Coping with the humiliation and suffering became the only way to survive.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/feb/02/refugee-crisis-human-flow-ai-weiwei-china>

23. Australia joins UN condemnation of Cambodia but refugee deal remains

Forty-five members of human rights council warn Hun Sen is presiding over an increasingly authoritarian regime

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thu 22 Mar 2018 13.31 AEDT

Australia has joined 44 other nations at the UN human rights council in condemning growing political violence and repression in Cambodia ahead of elections there this year.

Hun Sen, Cambodia's strongman leader, was in Sydney last weekend for the Australia-Asean summit and met the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull. It is understood the pair discussed human rights issues and the upcoming elections, as well as trade and the region's nuclear threats.

But Australia maintains a controversial and expensive refugee deal where it sends refugees from its Nauru offshore processing centre to Cambodia, despite concerns over widespread human rights abuses in the south-east Asian country.

Hun's presence in Sydney sparked significant demonstrations on the streets of the city, with protesters condemning him as a "thug" with "blood on his hands".

In Geneva on Thursday morning Australian time, the 45 members of the 47-member human rights council said Cambodia had made significant democratic progress since the signing of the Paris peace agreement in 1991 ending the country's civil war. But it had regressed in recent years, growing increasingly violent and authoritarian.

"As we near the elections scheduled for 29 July this year, our previous optimism has been replaced by deep concern about the recent serious decline of civil and political rights in Cambodia. These backward steps include signs of escalating repression of the political opposition, civil society and media," the countries said.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/22/australia-joins-un-condemnation-of-cambodia-but-refugee-deal-remains>

24. Manus Island: PNG wants Australia to put deadline on refugee resettlement

ABC News

By Papua New Guinea correspondent Eric Tlozek

Updated March 21, 2018 09:07:52

The Papua New Guinea Government wants Australia to set a deadline to get refugees from Manus Island out of the country.

PNG has formed a special team to negotiate with Australia's Home Affairs Department to ensure all refugees from Manus Island are resettled in a third country, soon.

So far, only 84 of the roughly 600 refugees on Manus Island have been sent to the United States under the resettlement deal between Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and former US president Barack Obama.

Immigration officials and MPs in PNG fear a large number of Manus refugees will not be included in the US deal.

PNG's Immigration Minister, Petrus Thomas, said attempts to resettle the men in Papua New Guinea had largely failed, and Australia needed to step in.

"We want them out of here as soon as possible because the refugees we have in Manus, they really want to get out and they want us to get them out, but Australia needs to come in and make sure they settle in a third country," he said.

"So it's Australia's responsibility to move them out."

FULL STORY AT <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-21/australia-urged-to-put-deadline-on-manus-refugee-resettlement/9569258>

25. Labor push to adopt Greens policy of lifting refugee intake to 50,000

Canberra Times

March 23 2018 - 12:00AM

Michael Koziol

Labor's policy committee is considering a plan to lift Australia's refugee intake to 50,000, as left-wingers jostle to soften the party's position on asylum seekers at this year's national conference.

Party members, unionists and MPs - including Left co-convenor Andrew Giles - are seeking to get elected as delegates to the triennial conference on a pro-refugee platform, promising to make a "real difference" to the party's policies and to make them "humane".

Fairfax Media has learnt a working group on the powerful National Policy Forum is investigating proposals to increase Australia's annual refugee intake to 50,000 - the same target as the Greens.

It is understood the proposal is in a "maybe pile" of ideas that merit further discussion, although any final recommendation to change the policy would need the backing of the party's leadership.

In a wide-ranging submission to the policy forum, the group Labor for Refugees pitched to move the party to the left by more than doubling the current refugee intake, bringing all refugees on Nauru and Manus Island to Australia and launching a Royal Commission into immigration detention.

It is understood the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre made a similar pitch.

The Turnbull government increased the annual refugee intake to 19,000, and the ALP's current position is to increase it to 27,000 by the year 2025. The Greens want an intake of 50,000, with 10,000 of that to be for "skilled refugees". The Labor for Refugees pitch made no such caveat.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/labor-push-to-adopt-greens-policy-of-lifting-refugee-intake-to-50-000-20180322-p4z5ol.html>

25. Ged Kearney wants more 'humane' policies: 'Getting people off Manus and Nauru needs to be a priority'

Labor's newest MP says constituents 'want to see me argue and work within the party for some change [on asylum policy], and that is what I will do'

The Guardian
Katharine Murphy Political editor
Sat 24 Mar 2018 09.18 AEDT

Labor's newest federal MP, Ged Kearney, says she will play a role in Labor's national conference in the middle of this year arguing for a more "humane" policy on asylum seekers and offshore processing.

In an interview with Guardian Australia before her arrival in Canberra on Monday, Kearney acknowledged that some people in her Melbourne electorate of Batman – the seat the former ACTU president held for the ALP in last weekend's by-election – would be "on watch" as she made the transition from candidate to her new life as a federal parliamentarian.

Kearney said her constituents "will want to see me argue and work within the party for some change [on asylum policy], and that is what I have promised them, and that is what I will do".

"I've been clear to people that I may or may not be successful with that, but we are going to work through priorities, and some of those can be achieved," Kearney said.

"I think getting people off Manus and Nauru needs to be a priority, and hopefully if Labor is elected that is something we can actually deliver on."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/24/ged-kearney-wants-more-humane-policies-getting-people-off-manus-and-nauru-needs-to-be-a-priority>

26. Bill Shorten has 'no interest' in changing asylum boat turnbacks policy

But Labor leader says: 'We don't support the way the government has treated people in detention'

The Guardian
Katharine Murphy Political editor
Tue 27 Mar 2018 14.12 AEDT

Bill Shorten says he has "no interest" in changing Labor's stance on asylum boat turnbacks but acknowledges there will be a debate on the floor of the party's national conference in the middle of the year.

On Tuesday the Labor leader told reporters the party had concerns about the treatment of asylum seekers in offshore detention, and that people were being held effectively in indefinite detention as a consequence of the Turnbull government's punitive deterrence regime.

"I make one thing very clear: we don't support the way the government has treated people in detention," he said. "We don't believe that mandatory [indefinite] detention has to be the necessary result of stopping the boats."

But in a public message to delegates, Shorten said he had no interest in revisiting the boat turnbacks issue at the conference. "We recognise that the boat turnback policy has been effective, and I have no interest in changing that policy."

The last federal Labor conference in 2015 saw an emotional debate on the floor about asylum boat turnbacks. A motion to end turnbacks, supported by a number of current frontbenchers, was defeated.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/27/bill-shorten-has-no-interest-in-revisiting-asylum-boat-turnbacks>

27. John Minns: Being cruel to refugees doesn't strengthen multiculturalism

Brisbane Times
By John Minns
18 March 2018 — 11:00pm

There are now dozens of statements from United Nation bodies, condemning Australia's refugee policies as harsh, inhumane and detrimental to the health and safety of the refugees.

In the face of this criticism, over the last two years, the Australian government has developed a new rationale for this extremely harsh treatment. They now claim that the measures used against boat arrivals – mandatory detention, permanent exclusion and being sent (now for five years for some) to Nauru and Manus Island - are, paradoxically, the very things that reinforce public support for immigration and multiculturalism.

The Prime Minister's website quotes him as saying that: "Strong borders allow the government to maintain public trust in community safety, respect for diversity and support for our immigration and humanitarian programs."

His blog reiterates the message: "Strong borders are the foundation of our high-immigration multicultural success". Peter Dutton made the same point in a speech in London last year.

In fact, government figures have shown few reservations about wading into Pauline Hanson's territory when they have felt it is in their political interest to do so. In November 2016, Dutton claimed that Malcolm Fraser made a mistake in allowing Lebanese Muslims into the country – not fundamentally different to Hanson's call in the election that year for a total ban on Muslim immigration. In the same year he said that "illiterate and innumerate" refugees would take Australian jobs or "languish" on the dole and Medicare. Hanson's 1996 maiden speech said that "immigration must be halted in the short term so that our dole queues are not added to by, in many cases, unskilled migrants not fluent in the English language."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/opinion/being-cruel-to-refugees-doesnt-strengthen-multiculturalism-20180315-h0xhry.html>

28. Court orders that boy, 10, at risk of suicide on Nauru be treated in Australia

Exclusive: Home affairs department argued against move but judge cites 'significant risk' he would die if left on island

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wed 21 Mar 2018 08.19 AEDT

A 10-year-old refugee boy who has made repeated attempts to kill himself while held on Nauru has been ordered moved to Australia for acute psychological care, with a judge saying the boy would be at imminent risk of dying if left in the regional processing centre.

In the federal court this month, lawyers representing the boy – known in court documents as AYX18 – applied for an injunction to have him moved to tertiary-level psychiatric care.

The home affairs department – which controls Australia's offshore processing regime – fought the injunction, arguing that there was sufficient healthcare on the island to treat the boy and asking the court to delay the court hearing a week.

Justice Nye Perram disagreed and ordered that the boy be immediately returned to Australia for treatment: "A delay ... cannot be justified, there is a significant risk the boy would not be alive by that hearing, and I am not prepared to run that risk."

The boy and his mother, represented by the National Justice Project, have been moved to Australia and the boy is receiving treatment.

The 10-year-old also has a long-running physical health issue that requires surgery. The court heard from the government's own health contractor, International Health and Medical Services, that the Nauru hospital was unsafe for surgery and that patients had died during routine operations.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/21/court-orders-that-boy-10-at-risk-of-suicide-on-nauru-be-treated-in-australia>

29. Asylum seeker family removed 'without warning' at dawn in central Queensland, Tamil Refugee Council says

ABC News
By Inga Stunzner and Paul Robinson
Updated March 12, 2018 13:15:12

An asylum seeker couple and their two Australian-born children were taken from their central Queensland home and flown to the Broadmeadows detention centre in Melbourne, the Tamil Refugee Council (TRC) says.

The TRC said Australian Border Force officers, police and Serco guards visited a Biloela home at dawn last week, taking the husband and wife from Sri Lanka and their two Australia-born children into custody.

Nadesalingam and Priya, and their children aged two years and nine months, have lived in Biloela for several years.

Numerous Biloela locals have taken to social media to try and bring the family back, with Nadesalingam reportedly working at the Biloela meatworks.

TRC spokesman Ben Hillier has condemned the early morning visit.

Mr Hillier said the action was heartless.

"To be whisked away like this without any warning beggar's belief that the Australian Government could be so callous in its actions, could be so inhumane in its treatment of a family that is raising their children, who were both born in this country, in such a way," he said

FULL STORY AT <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-12/asylum-seeker-family-removed-at-dawn-biloela-central-qld/9538368>

30. Small town rallies after asylum seeker family carried off in dawn raid

The day after Priya's visa expired, she, her husband and daughters were woken at 5am and forcibly taken 1,500km away

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Mon 12 Mar 2018 04.00 AEDT

The close-knit community of Biloela in central Queensland has been shocked by an early morning Australian Border Force raid on a Sri Lankan asylum seeker family – including two Australian-born children – over a visa expired by a single day.

Husband and wife Nadesalingam and Priya and their Australia-born daughters, nine-month-old Dharuniga and two-year-old Kopiga, were forcibly taken, without warning, into immigration detention in Melbourne, more than 1,500km from their home.

The family has been told they face imminent deportation.

Australian Border Force officials, accompanied by police and Serco guards arrived at the family's home at 5am on Monday 5 March. The family said they were given 10 minutes to pack and driven to Gladstone airport where they were flown to Melbourne.

They remain in immigration detention in Melbourne. They said when they were taken into detention they were told to sign documents assenting to their "voluntary removal" and told if they did not sign them, they would be denied access to a phone, and forcibly deported separately.

On Tuesday afternoon they signed the papers but have said their signatures were not voluntary, but made under unfair duress.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/12/small-town-rallies-after-asylum-seeker-family-carried-off-in-dawn-raid>

31. Clementine Ford: Do not be the person who looks away

Sydney Morning Herald
By Clementine Ford
12 March 2018 — 9:11pm

The Australian government's devotion to its inhumane and racist refugee policies continues, with a Tamil family living in Queensland the latest to be met with unfathomable violence and heavy handed tactics from Border Force officials.

Priya and her husband Nadesalingam, who have been in Australia on bridging visas since 2013 and 2012 respectively, have lived in the Queensland community of Biloela for several years. They have two daughters who were both born here, 2 year old Kopiga and 9 month old Dharuniga. In the early hours of the morning of March 5, the family was raided by police officers, Border Force officials and Serco guards. They were given just ten minutes to pack (an act bereft of compassion at the best of times, but particularly so when there are two infants involved) before being forcibly removed to the Melbourne Immigration Transit Authority (MITA) more than 1500km away.

A statement released by the Tamil Refugee Council reports that Priya and her husband were forced to sign voluntary deportation documents under threat of having not just their access to a phone removed (an essential tool of communication between them and their advocates) but also of being separated from one another and deported individually.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.smh.com.au/lifestyle/life-and-relationships/do-not-be-the-person-who-looks-away-20180312-p4z41g.html>

32. Tamil asylum seekers taken in dawn raid supported by tens of thousands

Petition started by Biloela social worker asks Department of Home Affairs to reassess the family's claim for protection

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Tue 13 Mar 2018 14.20 AEDT

More than 40,000 people have joined a petition asking that a family of Tamil asylum seekers, summarily detained by the Australian Border Force, be allowed to remain in Australia.

The Guardian reported on Monday on the detention of Nadesalingam and Priya, and their Australian-born daughters, nine-month-old Dharuniga and two-year-old Kopiga, who were forcibly taken in a dawn raid on their home in the Queensland town of Biloela, on 5 March, over a visa expired by a single day.

A change.org petition started by Biloela social worker Angela Fredericks has asked the Department of Home Affairs to reassess the family's claim for protection, in view of mistreatment of Tamils involuntarily sent back to Sri Lanka.

A week since the raid, the family remains in immigration detention more than 1,500km from their home, awaiting possible deportation.

They have described their detention as "like house arrest" with guards posted outside their door and limited time, as little as half an hour a day, for their children to play outside.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/13/tamil-asylum-seekers-taken-in-dawn-raid-supported-by-tens-of-thousands>

33. MEDIA RELEASE: Government attempts to remove Biloela Tamil family from Australia

Refugee Action Coalition
Wed March 14, 2018
Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

Although court documents had been lodged in the Federal Circuit Court for the Tamil family, and a directions hearing scheduled for early May, last night (Tuesday) the government attempted to remove the Tamil family of four from Australia.

Concerns escalated in the hours from late Tuesday afternoon, when communication with the family who were being held in family compound of the MITA (Melbourne Immigration Transit Accommodation), was suddenly lost.

A hurried phone call from the plane that was carrying the family alerted lawyers and supporters that the family was being removed from Australia.

The family had been placed on a plane carrying up to 25 other Tamils being removed (some forcibly) to Sri Lanka. The family of four were taken off the plane, once the government understood there were moves to call an urgent court hearing late Tuesday night.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.refugeeaction.org.au/?p=6722>

34. Tamil asylum seeker family remains in Australia after last-minute reprieve

Family taken into detention in dawn raid a week ago reprieved just before take-off to Sri Lanka

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wed 14 Mar 2018 18.36 AEDT

A family of Tamil asylum seekers remains in Australia after a legal intervention saw them pulled off a plane bound for Sri Lanka just minutes before take-off.

The dramatic reprieve at Perth airport on Tuesday night follows a dawn raid a week ago at the home in central Queensland of Nadesalingam and Priya, and their Australian-born daughters, nine-month-old Dharuniga and two-year-old Kopiga.

At 5am on 5 March, Australian Border Force officers took the family into detention and transported them 1,500km from Queensland to Melbourne, one day after Priya's bridging visa had expired.

The family remains in Australia and is safe, according to people in contact with them.

But their treatment has sparked widespread outrage. More than 62,000 people have signed a change.org petition asking the home affairs minister, Peter Dutton, to intervene in the family's case and grant them the right to stay in Australia.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/14/tamil-asylum-seeker-family-remains-in-australia-after-last-minute-reprieve>

35. Tamil asylum seeker deported by Australia 'harassed by Sri Lankan security forces'

Human rights advocates say Shantaruban subjected to 'culture of reprisal' and is too afraid to return home

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thu 1 Mar 2018 04.00 AEDT

The Tamil asylum seeker forcibly deported from Australia last week is at liberty in Sri Lanka, but facing ongoing harassment and intimidation from security forces, human rights advocates have reported.

Shantaruban was handcuffed and forcibly removed from Australia last week, after five years during which he said he was not allowed to properly present his claim for asylum.

He was detained upon arrival at Bandaranaike airport in Colombo last Thursday and questioned by members of Sri Lanka's criminal investigation department for more than four hours.

Since being released he has not felt safe to return home, but has been living in a coastal village north-east of Jaffna where he has family connections.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/01/tamil-asylum-seeker-deported-by-australia-harassed-by-sri-lankan-security-forces>

36. 'Negative status' asylum seekers on Manus Island left hanging in legal limbo, unable to leave or stay

ABC Radio CAF - AM
By Papua New Guinea correspondent Eric Tlozek
Posted March 07, 2018 16:51:29

Rejected asylum seekers from Manus Island are being told it is too dangerous for them to return to their countries of origin, but they are also not allowed to stay in Papua New Guinea.

A number of men who did not submit their refugee claims to Papua New Guinea for processing cannot be deported, because they face too much risk of harm.

Those men do not have any other place to go, but they have no visas to remain in PNG and the country's law prevents any review of their refugee claims.

Iranian engineer Farhad Rahmati is one of the men trapped in legal limbo.

"I'm stuck, I don't know where I am," he said.

"Am I a refugee, am I a non-refugee, am I going to be resettled in a third country, am I going to be resettled in PNG?"

"I have absolutely no rights."

Mr Rahmati said many asylum seekers were scared to submit refugee claims in PNG when they were first asked, and some had received legal advice not to.

"The process actually started after the death of Reza Barati, that was one of the reasons we didn't participate," he said.

"We had a real fear of being resettled in PNG."

Mr Rahmati said he changed his mind and asked PNG authorities to process his claim in 2016, but he was told it was too late, and he was given a "negative" finding for his refugee status determination.

He maintains he cannot return to Iran, and now the PNG Government's own deportation risk assessment has agreed, finding there is a real chance he will be harmed if he is deported.

This means he cannot be forced to leave — but as a negative status asylum seeker, it is also technically illegal for him to stay.

"We are in the dark, after five years, it's unbelievable," he said.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-03-07/asylum-seekers-on-manus-island-left-hanging-in-limbo/9521972>

37. Scathing UN migration report mars Australia's first week on human rights council

UN's special rapporteur on torture blames migrants' plight on states basing policies on 'deterrence, criminalisation and discrimination'

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Fri 2 Mar 2018 04.00 AEDT

Australia's first week on the UN human rights council has been undermined by a scathing report that has implicated its migration policies as part of a global "escalating cycle of repression and deterrence" that has caused "massive abuse" of migrants.

Australia, which campaigned for three years for a seat on the council, has also been a global promoter of its hardline policies designed to deter irregular migration, including boat pushbacks, mandatory and indefinite detention, and offshore processing.

The 20-page report to the human rights council, from the UN's special rapporteur on torture, Nils Melzer, said the major reason migrants were exploited and abused was the policies of states that sought to deter people from migrating and punish those who did.

"The primary cause for the massive abuse suffered by migrants in all regions of the world, including torture, rape, enslavement, trafficking and murder, is neither migration itself, nor organised crime, or the corruption of individual officials, but the growing tendency of states to base their official migration policies and practices on deterrence, criminalisation and discrimination, rather than protection, human rights and non-discrimination," Melzer said.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/02/scathing-un-migration-report-not-ideal-start-to-australias-human-rights-council-tenure>

38. Australia pledges at UN to improve its 'human rights situation'

Australia promises to promote and protect human rights around the world but admits 'no state has a perfect human rights record'

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Fri 9 Mar 2018 11.31 AEDT

Australia has used its first session on the powerful UN human rights council to say it will promote and protect human rights across the globe, while conceding "no state has a perfect human rights record".

Australia campaigned for a seat on the 47-country body, pitching itself as a "pragmatic and principled" candidate and a voice for the Pacific. But it has been consistently criticised by UN human rights agencies over its asylum and refugee policies, in particular indefinite offshore detention, as well as persistent Indigenous disadvantage, juvenile justice and disability rights.

Lachlan Strahan, charge d'affaires of Australia's mission to the UN in Geneva, gave the "incoming members' pledge".

[...]

As incoming members of the human rights council, we are committed to the success and effectiveness of the council, and are convinced that the council plays an invaluable role in promoting and protecting human rights worldwide," he said.

Australia pledged to "engage in the work of the council in a spirit of self-reflection, with a view to improving our own human rights situation, recognising that no state has a perfect human rights record".

It also vowed "to make progress in the promotion, protection and realisation of human rights at the national level, including through implementation of recommendations and resolutions of the council".

Many of the UN recommendations have not been adopted by Australia.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2018/mar/09/australia-pledges-at-un-to-improve-its-human-rights-situation>

39. National Gallery of Victoria dumps Wilson Security over offshore detention

Move follows protests from international artists and activists against the security firm which provides services on Manus Island and Nauru

The Guardian
Steph Harmon
Wed 28 Feb 2018 18:29 AEDT

The National Gallery of Victoria confirmed it has dropped its security contractor, Wilson Security. It follows protests from international artists and activists against the security firm, which provided services at offshore detention facilities on Manus Island and Nauru.

Following Guardian Australia's release of the Nauru Files, Wilson Security has been subject to serious allegations of sexual assault and violence by its employees against refugees and asylum seekers, including children and women, detained at the centres. Wilson's contract with the centres expired on October 2017; it has been under contract with the NGV since July.

The Artists' Committee – a group of arts workers who have been petitioning the gallery to drop Wilsons – said on Wednesday they had received a message from an NGV official saying "SecureCorp has been appointed as the NGV's long-term security provider".

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/feb/28/national-gallery-of-victoria-dumps-wilson-security-over-offshore-detention>

40. Claims of dysfunction inside Border Force as Roman Quaedvlieg saga drags on

ABC-TV 7.30
By defence reporter Andrew Greene
Updated February 28, 2018 20:00:55

A lawyer who spent more than 30 years at the Immigration Department says there has been an exodus of senior staff from the newly formed Home Affairs organisation, and that there are deep problems within Australian Border Force as its Commissioner remains under investigation.

Commissioner Roman Quaedvlieg has accrued about \$500,000 in salary payments since going on leave in May last year, when an external investigation began into his personal conduct.

Greg Phillipson, who resigned as a senior Immigration Department lawyer in June last year, says his former colleagues have described an organisation that is now in crisis.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-02-28/roman-quaedvlieg-saga-claims-of-dysfunction-inside-border-force/9494432>

41. Border Force head was never interviewed in seven months of investigations

Canberra Times
February 28 2018 - 5:46PM
David Wroe

The corruption watchdog never spoke to the Australian Border Force head Roman Quaedvlieg as it investigated claims he abused his power, while a second inquiry communicated with Mr Quaedvlieg only in writing, Fairfax Media understands.

Mr Quaedvlieg's fate is currently in the hands of Attorney-General Christian Porter, who is considering a report on the case provided by the head of the public service and Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Martin Parkinson.

Mr Quaedvlieg was the subject of a complaint from a Border Force employee that he helped his girlfriend get a job with the agency at Sydney Airport. He has protested his innocence.

But the complaint was referred to the corruption watchdog, the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

It delivered its report to Home Affairs Department head Mike Pezzullo in August, a Senate estimates hearing was told this week. Mr Pezzullo told a separate Senate hearing he and Mr Parkinson agreed that the latter should take over the “administrative” side of the inquiry.

But it is understood Mr Parkinson communicated only with Mr Quaedvlieg in writing, in which he requested information several times.

Nearly six months later, Mr Parkinson’s report - along with a full response from Mr Quaedvlieg - was delivered to Mr Porter for a decision on what action should be taken. Mr Porter is now considering that report.

Mr Pezzullo confirmed to the Senate this week that Mr Quaedvlieg had earned about \$500,000 including superannuation while on leave since late May. His annual salary is about \$620,000.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/border-force-head-was-never-interviewed-in-seven-months-of-investigations-20180228-p4z252.html>

42. The Saturday Paper: Trust me: Pezzullo’s mega powers

The Saturday Paper
Edition No. 194 March 3 – 9, 2018
Karen Middleton

On Friday last week, former attorney-general George Brandis went to see Michael Pezzullo, the secretary of the new Department of Home Affairs.

The meeting was a scheduled consultation ahead of Brandis’s departure for London to take up his post as Australia’s new high commissioner. It was cordial, even friendly. But what the soon-to-be diplomat Brandis did not tell Pezzullo during the pre-posting briefing was that he had singled him out in a private farewell speech he had given to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation on the eve of his retirement from parliament two weeks earlier.

As revealed in The Saturday Paper last week, the then senator Brandis used the ASIO speech to raise concerns about the power and scope of the new department and the ambitions of its secretary. Brandis effectively endorsed the private concerns of some within ASIO that the new security structure could expose the domestic spy agency to ministerial or bureaucratic pressure.

In a regular Senate estimates committee hearing this week, Pezzullo described his meeting with Brandis – on the day before The Saturday Paper article appeared – as Opposition senators asked him for assurances that ASIO would retain its statutory independence once it moves from the attorney-general’s portfolio to become part of Home Affairs.

“I had a very good discussion on Friday,” Pezzullo told the committee, of his meeting with Brandis.

“He’s seeking instructions and guidance on performing the role of high commissioner. None of those issues came up, so I find that of interest. If he has concerns, I’m sure that he would himself raise those publicly.”

Labor senator Murray Watt pressed: “So he raised them with ASIO but not with you?”

“I don’t know what he raised with ASIO,” Pezzullo responded. “... You should ask the former attorney-general if he’s willing to state any of those concerns ... He’s a high commissioner now, so he may not choose to edify your question with a response, but that’s a matter for him. As I said, he didn’t raise any of those concerns with me when we met on Friday.”

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2018/03/03/trust-me-pezzullos-mega-powers/15199956005889><https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2018/03/03/trust-me-pezzullos-mega-powers/15199956005889>

43. MEDIA RELEASE: Fifth group of refugees leave Nauru for the US

Refugee Action Coalition
Sunday March 4, 2018
Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

The fifth group of refugees will leave Nauru today to be resettled in the US.

The group of 29 refugees (21 adults and 8 children) comprises four families (two Sri Lankan, one Rohingya and one Afghan), and single men from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

The departure of this group brings the total number of refugees resettled from Nauru to 139, since US resettlement began in September 2017. (Full list below.)

Although Australian Border Force officials have denied that any nationalities are banned from US resettlement, it is remarkable that no Iranian, Somali, or Sudanese have been accepted this year.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.refugeeaction.org.au/?p=6672>

44. Dozens of refugees leave Nauru for resettlement in US

Group of 29 is the fifth cohort to leave Nauru under Australia's resettlement deal with the US

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Sun 4 Mar 2018 14.53 AEDT

Four more families of refugees and a cohort of single men have left immigration camps on Nauru to start new lives in the United States.

The group of 29, including eight children, who flew off the island nation on Sunday, is the fifth cohort to leave Nauru under Australia's refugee resettlement deal with the US.

They included two Sri Lankan families, one Rohingya family, one Afghan family and single men from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Pakistan, refugee advocates said.

Since resettlements under the deal started in September, 139 refugees have left Nauru and 85 from Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.

However, the Refugee Action Coalition said it was remarkable there were no Iranian, Somali or Sudanese refugees among those who have left this year, despite Australian Border Force officials denying any particular nationalities were banned from resettling in the US.

RAC spokesman Ian Rintoul said US officials were expected to remain in Nauru for another couple of weeks but had not yet scheduled any new vetting interviews for another round of refugees.

Under the deal Australia reached with the previous Obama administration – derided by the now US president, Donald Trump – the US agreed to take up to 1,250 refugees from the offshore detention centres.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/mar/04/dozens-of-refugees-leave-nauru-for-resettlement-in-us>

45. Nauru refugee flown with son to Taiwan for critical heart surgery

Exclusive: Iranian woman allowed to bring teenage son after refusing to leave him alone in detention centre

The Guardian
Ben Doherty and Saba Vasefi
Tue 13 Mar 2018 04.00 AEDT

An Iranian refugee who has been waiting 18 months on Nauru for critical heart surgery has been flown to Taiwan for the life-saving operation after the Australian Border Force acquiesced and allowed her teenage son to travel with her.

Fatemeh, 55, has been living in Nauru's regional processing centre at "high and imminent risk of ... heart attack or sudden death", according to doctors. Border Force had approved her medical transfer overseas, but said she could not take her son with her.

Fatemeh refused to leave her son alone and unsupervised on the island. He has suffered from acute mental health issues on Nauru, where unaccompanied minor refugees have faced significant violence.

"Death and separation from my son is the same for me," Fatemeh told Guardian Australia. "I would not go anywhere without him. All we have is each other."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/13/nauru-refugee-flown-with-son-to-taiwan-for-critical-heart-surgery>