

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Sunday, 19 April 2015

Subscribe and become a member here: <http://www.safecom.org.au/ref-member.htm>

1. Refugees don't need our tears. They need us to stop making them refugees
2. Greece throws open immigration detention centres
3. Australians Still Confused About Proportion Of Asylum Seekers Who Are 'Genuine' Refugees
4. Australia violating rights of refugee children by sending them to Cambodia, says Unicef
5. Michael Bradley: Depths of detention centre secrecy revealed
6. Hundreds gather in Sydney protesting against refugee and asylum seeker policy
7. Australia reportedly uses navy ship to return asylum seekers to Vietnam
8. Navy in secret asylum seeker mission
9. Australian Navy to hand 50 asylum seekers back to Vietnam
10. Abbott government under fire for secret bid to hand back asylum seekers to Vietnam
11. New immigration powers would let guards 'beat asylum seekers to death'
12. New law will increase violence against asylum seekers: former judge
13. Bill easing liability for using 'reasonable force' against detainees condemned
14. Former judge says new powers will allow asylum seekers to be beaten to death
15. Detention centre interpreters need more training for 'hazardous' work – report
16. Australia prepares to send first refugees from Nauru to Cambodia within days
17. Safe and inexpensive: Government spruiks relocation from Nauru to Cambodia in fact sheet to asylum seekers
18. Charter flight scheduled for first group of Nauru refugees to be transferred to Cambodia
19. MEDIA RELEASE: Nauru protest rejects Cambodia as refugee destination
20. MEDIA RELEASE: Wickham Point stand-off to prevent Nauru transfer
21. Fear of being sent to Manus or Nauru cause of asylum seeker self-harm
22. Police respond to disturbance at Darwin's Wickham Point immigration detention centre
23. Police called to immigration detention centre in Darwin amid reports of protest
24. Reports of self-harming at Darwin detention centre disturbing: Greens
25. Advocate says Immigration Minister was wrong on roof claims, injuries at Wickham Point detention centre
26. Activist group leads rally, says Nauru, Manus Island detention centres must be closed
27. Protest at Immigration Minister's office over offshore detention
28. Michael Franti joins call to 'stop the plane' of asylum seekers to Nauru
29. Fresh protests over Nauru transfers reported at Darwin detention centre
30. MEDIA RELEASE: New babies returned from Darwin to Nauru
31. Up to 20 detainees removed from Wickham Point detention centre overnight, refugee advocates say
32. Darwin detention centre families taken to Nauru in early hours, say advocates
33. Iranians in Australia beg Government to abandon forced repatriation deal with Tehran
34. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop opens asylum seeker talks with Iran
35. Iranian ambassador plays down Julie Bishop's chances of striking deal to repatriate asylum seekers
36. Refused asylum seekers face personal data disclosure by immigration department
37. Manus Island guard stood down after posts endorsing Reclaim Australia and anti-halal views
37. Detention centre guards suspended over photo with Pauline Hanson at rally
38. Eight Nauru guards suspended over racist posts on social media
39. MEDIA RELEASE: Refugee shot with air gun, then beaten by locals
40. Asylum seeker who died at detention centre was properly cared for – coroner
41. Peter Dutton defends asylum seeker work rights process amid backlog of applicants
42. Government's council of asylum-seeker advisers has stood empty for five months
43. Adelaide Hills Mayor questions push to turn Inverbrackie detention site into retirement village

1. Refugees don't need our tears. They need us to stop making them refugees

The EU's de facto policy is to let migrants drown to stop others coming. How many more deaths can we stomach?

The Guardian

Anders Lustgarten

Saturday 18 April 2015 03.33 AEST

In the desert, the smugglers lace their water with petrol so the smuggled won't gulp it down and cost more. Sometimes the trucks they're packed into stall crossing the Sahara; they have to jump out to push, and some are left behind when the trucks drive off again. In transit camps in Libya before the perilous venture across the Blue Desert, they play football, fight, and pool their scanty resources so an even poorer friend can pay his way. One man says his tiny wooden boat was flanked by dolphins as they made the journey, three on each side, like guardian angels, and this was what gave him hope.

These are the people we are allowing to die in the Mediterranean. The EU's de facto policy is to let migrants drown to stop others coming. Last year nearly four thousand bodies were recovered from the Med. Those are just the ones we found. The total number of arrivals in Italy in 2014 went up over 300% from the year before, to more than 170,000. And the EU's response, driven by the cruellest British government in living memory, was to cut the main rescue operation, Mare Nostrum.

The inevitable result is that 500 people have already died this year. The figure for the equivalent period in 2014 was 15. There are half a million people in Libya waiting to make the crossing. How many more deaths can we stomach?

Migration illustrates one of the signal features of modern life, which is malice by proxy. Like drones and derivatives, migration policy allows the powerful to inflict horrors on the powerless without getting their hands dirty. James Brokenshire, the minister who defended cutting Mare Nostrum on the nauseatingly hypocritical grounds that it encouraged migration, never has to let the deaths his decision helped to cause spoil his expensive lunch with lobbyists. It doesn't affect him.

But it does affect us. Right now we are a diminished and reduced society, bristling with suspicion and distrust of others even as we perversely struggle with loneliness and alienation. We breathe the toxic smog of hatred towards immigrants pumped out by Nigel Farage and Katie Hopkins, and it makes us lesser people.

Forget the fact that this society wouldn't work without migrants, that nobody else will pick your vegetables and make your latte and get up at 4am to clean your office. Forget the massive tax contribution made by migrants to the Treasury. This is not about economics. Far too often, even the positive takes on migration are driven by numbers and finance, by "What can they do for us?". This is about two things: compassion and responsibility.

Lampedusa, my play currently running at the Soho Theatre, focuses on two people at the sharp end of austerity Europe. Stefano is a coastguard whose job is to fish dead migrants out of the sea. Denise is a collector for a payday loan company. They're not liberals. They don't like the people they deal with. They can't afford to. As Stefano says: "You try to keep them at arm's length. There's too many of them. And it makes you think, about the randomness of I get to walk these streets, and he doesn't. The ground becomes ocean under your

But eventually, the human impact of what they do breaks through. And in their consequent struggles, both Stefano and Denise are aided by a friendship, reluctant and questioning, with someone they formerly thought of as a burden. This is compassion not as a lofty feeling for someone beneath you, but as the raw reciprocal necessity of human beings who have nothing but each other. This is where we are in the utterly corrupted, co-opted politics of the early 21st century. The powerful don't give a shit. All we have is us.

But equally important is responsibility. In all the rage about migration, one thing is never discussed: what we do to cause it. A report published this week by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists reveals that the World Bank displaced a staggering 3.4 million people in the last five years. By funding privatisations, land grabs and dams, by backing companies and governments accused of rape, murder and torture, and by putting \$50bn into projects graded highest risk for "irreversible and unprecedented" social impacts, the World Bank has massively contributed to the flow of impoverished people across the globe. The single biggest thing we could do to stop migration is to abolish the development mafia: the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

A very close second is to stop bombing the Middle East. The west destroyed the infrastructure of Libya without any clue as to what would replace it. What has is a vacuum state run by warlords that is now the centre of Mediterranean people-smuggling. We're right behind the Sisi regime in Egypt that is eradicating the Arab spring, cracking down on Muslims and privatising infrastructure at a rate of knots, all of which pushes huge numbers of people on to the boats. Our past work in Somalia, Syria and Iraq means those nationalities are top of the migrant list.

Not all migration is caused by the west, of course. But let's have a real conversation about the part that is. Let's have a real conversation about our ageing demographic and the massive skills shortage here, what it means for overstretched public services if we let migrants in (we'd need to raise money to meet increased demand, and the clearest and fairest way is a rise in taxes on the rich), the ethics of taking the cream of the crop from poor countries. Migration is a complex subject. But let's not be cowards and pretend the migrants will stop coming. Because they won't. This will never stop.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/apr/17/refugees-eu-policy-migrants-how-many-deaths>

2. Greece throws open immigration detention centres

By Darren Mara

17 Apr 2015 - 4:24 PM

UPDATED 17 Apr 2015 - 7:44 PM

Greece's left-wing government, elected in January, is releasing detainees from immigration centres and allowing them to move freely around the country.

The government says they were being held in horrendous conditions, and their continued incarceration is unaffordable.

Like other European countries on the Mediterranean, Greece has seen a huge increase in the number of people trying to enter the EU in boats from Africa.

Many also enter Greece on land via its porous eastern borderlands.

Those detected by Greek authorities are usually locked up in one of seven detention centres.

In all, around 3,500 people are in detention, including children.

Greece has already faced a one million euro fine from the E-U over the squalid state of those centres, and the government has now taken the step of releasing people into communities.

Greece's immigration minister Tasia Christodouloupoulou says it was not just the EU fine that prompted the mass release.

"The people that were there, were living an indescribable barbarity," she said.

"The centres did not meet basic needs, and moreover most of those that were being held were being held illegally."

The government has not set up any alternative provision for the people once they're released.

But Ms Christodouloupoulou argues the government has little choice because holding them for indefinite periods is illegal.

"It's true the infrastructure does not exist but it's not the fault of those being held, and nor can they face this agony for the rest of their lives," she said.

Greece's economic woes are well-chronicled.

The debt crisis smashed the nation's finances and left scant funds in the budget to tackle immigration issues.

Greece initially turned to the EU for funding, but that stream has now dried up.

Greek immigration officials are now seeking abandoned hotels and state residential buildings to house the former detainees.

Many have nowhere to go once they are released and gather in city squares with their belongings.

Pakistani migrant Ramzan Nazeer Ahmet was held in the Amygdaleza detention centre outside Athens before his recent release.

Like many others, he doesn't have the proper documentation to find a job.

The 25-year-old says conditions in the detention centre are deplorable, the rooms would flood and the food is inadequate.

"This was like a prison, this was not a centre, at centres you can go outside, you can play ball, this was like a prison," he said.

"Each room had four people in it and the door was locked."

Ramzan Ahmet also alleges he was beaten by guards.

"I just want a decent life," he said.

"If police said I had to stay in there for 18 months then that was fine, if police said I had to stay for two years that was fine, but no one said anything about being beaten up."

"I don't like to be beaten, I don't want free food if you have to get beaten up."

The former conservative government of Antonis Samaras launched a sweep operation in 2012, arresting thousands of undocumented immigrants and sending them to detention centres.

In the last few years the situation has aided the extreme far-right in Greece to rise to third in the most recent general elections.

Residents in Athens and other cities, fearing crime and disease, have complained about uncontrolled migrant ghettos forming in neighbourhoods.

The United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner's European representative Jan Jarab has met Greek officials during a visit to Athens at the end of March and toured the Amygdaleza detention camp.

He says the UN supports the government's moves to release the migrants but demanded it be coupled with an assistance program.

"It is not just to replace detention by destitution, by leaving persons destitute in the streets," he said.

"There has to be facilities of a non-prison type character and it is clear that to create all this will require a kind of redirection of government's energies, redirection of government financing. So, we are ready to accompany the Greek government in this process."

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/04/17/greece-throws-open-immigration-detention-centres>

3. Australians Still Confused About Proportion Of Asylum Seekers Who Are 'Genuine' Refugees

The majority of people who come by boat to Australia are found to be refugees needing protection. Only a minority of the Australian public realise that. Max Chalmers reports.

New Matilda
16 Apr 2015
By Max Chalmers

A new poll on the public perception of asylum seekers has found less than one third of Australians believe those who come by boat are "genuine" refugees, despite the fact the overwhelming majority continue to receive positive determinations.

The Essential Poll reported only 32 per cent of respondents believed most asylum seekers arriving by boat in Australia are "genuine" refugees, while 27 per cent believe the Federal Government is "too soft" on the issue, up four points since the same question was asked in January.

Intriguingly, however, a separate question asking people to identify which policy position they most identified with showed only a small percentage favoured the current government's approach to settlement and processing.

Presented with five choices, just 16 per cent of those who took part in the poll nominated the statement "asylum seekers arriving by boat should not be allowed to stay in Australia but be resettled in another country if they are found to be genuine refugees" as being the one closest to their own view.

That statement is exactly in line with the current position held by the government, which continues to send all asylum seekers who arrive by boat to offshore processing on Nauru and Manus Island, where they are subject to offshore resettlement even if they are confirmed to be refugees.

By far the highest proportion of people – 49 per cent – nominated the statement "asylum seekers arriving by boat should be allowed to stay in Australia if they are found to be genuine refugees" as being closest to their own view.

That option is more generous than the policy of either Labor or the Coalition, currently united in their support of offshore processing and resettlement.

Lucy Morgan, a Policy Officer at the Refugee Council of Australia, said past polls had consistently highlighted that Australians are not necessarily opposed to more humane policies, depending on how questions are framed to them.

"Where people believe others are trying to rot the system, or jump the queue, or are 'economic migrants', that's where there is opposition to treating a group fairly," she said.

Morgan said people were wrong to believe the majority of asylum seekers arriving by boat were not refugees, but that it was unclear whether overcoming this perception would help shift the country towards more humane policies.

"Statistics show in Australia, historically, the vast majority of people who arrive by boat have been found to be refugees. There's not much dispute about that, and it has happened under both sides of politics."

Data published by Australian Customs and Border Services confirms that even on Nauru and Manus Island the majority of detainees are being found to be refugees.

Full story at <https://newmatilda.com//2015/04/16/australians-still-confused-about-proportion-asylum-seekers-who-are-genuine-refugees>

4. Australia violating rights of refugee children by sending them to Cambodia, says Unicef

United Nations Children's Fund joins agencies raising concerns about refugee transfer agreement sending children and their families from Nauru to Cambodia

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Sunday 19 April 2015 13.20 AEST

The United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) says Australia is violating the rights of children being sent from Nauru to Cambodia under the refugee transfer agreement.

Unicef has joined a chorus of international agencies in raising concerns over the \$40m refugee resettlement pact with Cambodia, with the first of the refugees expected to be flown out from Nauru this week.

The agency warned that no government policy or action should knowingly put children's lives or their well being at increased risk.

A Unicef spokesman, Chris de Bono, said Australia and Cambodia needed to be aware of their international obligation under the convention to protect children.

"The world has an expectation that as signatories to the convention on the rights of the child, whatever action they take, they will have given due consideration to its impact on children and they will put the best interests of the child as a primary concern in making any decision," de Bono said.

Analysts say Australia may be in breach of the convention given the threat of the children's rights being violated due to the transfer from Nauru to Cambodia.

A recent Australian report by a former integrity commissioner, Philip Moss, on conditions at the Australian funded centre in Nauru was highly critical and detailed allegations of rape and assault, self harm among children, and trading of sexual favours for drugs.

The Unicef comments come against a backdrop of heightened fears over the welfare of the detainees both in Nauru and at detention centres in Australia, especially the Wickham Point facility in Darwin.

On Saturday a number of detainees with at least one three-month-old child were flown from Darwin to Nauru despite protests.

In the coming week, possibly as early as Monday, a charter plane is expected to fly out from Nauru with about 10 refugees for resettlement in Cambodia.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/19/australia-violating-rights-of-refugee-children-sent-to-cambodia-says-unicef>

5. Michael Bradley: Depths of detention centre secrecy revealed

Transfield's social media policy seemingly prevents detention centre staff from even being followed on Twitter by refugees. It's ridiculous, but it's a symptom of the state of affairs the Government has imposed, writes Michael Bradley.

ABC The Drum
By Michael Bradley
Posted Fri 10 Apr 2015, 12:00pm

"We have zero tolerance," Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said the other day.

He was referring to the widespread allegations of sexual and physical abuse of asylum seekers held in detention on Manus Island and Nauru.

He was kidding of course, as both the current Government and the previous Labor government have tolerated this kind of thing for several years now and given no indication of either remorse or a genuine intention to do anything about it.

What both sides of politics do have zero tolerance for, however, is the risk that we should learn about the crimes that have allegedly taken place in the detention centres. And they have taken the most extraordinary measures to minimise that risk.

Of course, the news keeps leaking out, from people who have worked in the centres as well as official sources such as the Moss review and the Human Rights Commission report.

The Government's response to each revelation has consistently focused on shooting the messenger. This was exemplified most graphically by Scott Morrison's panic over revelations coming out of Nauru and his classic bait-and-switch play of highlighting allegations that Save the Children staff had been inciting the detainees to make up stories of abuse, then kicking 10 of the staff off the island with no due process. That's all turned out to be total rubbish, but his aim was achieved.

The Government's passion for secrecy over what happens on the islands naturally extends to its agents.

Most of the billions of dollars we are spending on keeping asylum seekers in detention go to the private companies who run the camps. One of these is Transfield Services Limited.

This week, Transfield's Social Media Policy, which it contractually imposes on all its employees working in the detention centres, leaked out. It comprises three pretty fascinating pages of corporate insanity. You really should read the whole thing to appreciate its majesty, but in essence it says that employees may be summarily dismissed if they do any of these things:

- Say anything to anyone by any means about anything to do with the centres at Nauru or Manus or the treatment of detainees there;
- Post, send or provide access to any material regarding "Incompatible Organisations" - meaning anyone who is critical of offshore processing or the Department's policies or actions;
- Do anything that may embarrass Transfield or "injure its relationship with the Department";
- Correspond with a current or former detainee by social media (including email);
- Give a current or former detainee their email address or access to their social media such as Facebook or Twitter;
- Assist anyone else to communicate with detainees;
- Promote, support or join an Incompatible Organisation; and,
- Attend public rallies calling for the closure of offshore processing centres.

So, for example, Transfield employees can be sacked if a former detainee, even one who has achieved refugee status and become an Australian resident, follows them on Twitter. And they can't be members of GetUp! or Amnesty or the Greens or the Uniting Church, among the many organisations that have criticised offshore detention.

This policy was drafted by a human being. What's interesting isn't the document itself, which defeats any attempt at satire because of its inherent ridiculousness. Nor the fact that it is legally enforceable. The real point of interest is the state of affairs that enabled Transfield to think that its Social Media Policy is an entirely acceptable thing to impose on its employees.

If Transfield was providing security at ASIO HQ, or emptying the bins at the Defence Department or supplying the catering at Pine Gap, then it would be unexceptional that it imposed extreme secrecy measures on its staff.

But it's not. Transfield is running camps that house people who have committed no crime or illegal act. They have sought asylum in Australia, as they are legally entitled to do. Australia is in turn legally entitled to detain them while it considers their claims, and it has chosen to hold them on Manus and Nauru.

Assume that this is morally just fine, as most Australians apparently believe. Nevertheless, these are not terrorists or enemy combatants or pirates or people smugglers or even welfare cheats or people who haven't returned their library books on time. According to the Government and Opposition, they are just a practical problem - the residue of the time before we stopped the boats.

The operations on Manus and Nauru are not military or national security operations. They are immigration operations. What, in these circumstances, justifies secrecy? Why are we, the people in whose names this is being done and who are paying for it, not entitled to know absolutely everything about what is being done to the detainees on Manus and Nauru?

Surely we are, there can be no valid argument against that.

However, secrecy is what we have, at the most extreme level. Transfield's policy directly threatens its employees with prosecution under the Crimes Act if they disclose anything about the operations on Manus or Nauru.

In saying this, and crafting its idiotic policy, Transfield is doing the bidding of its master: the Commonwealth of Australia. Our Government is doing everything in its power, by law, media manipulation, bullying or otherwise, to prevent us from knowing anything about these matters. In that context, lunacy like Transfield's becomes easy to contemplate.

And, still, the news leaks out.

We now know that, according to people who have worked there, the islands have been the scene of rape, assault, sexual degradation and every other kind of abuse imaginable, as well as the murder of Reza Barati. We also know that these

allegations have been known to the Immigration Department and its hirelings for a long time, and that both major parties have been complicit in doing nothing about it. We have no grounds for comfort that it is not still happening.

We should not be surprised by any of this. Subjecting human beings to the conditions that persist on Manus and Nauru will inevitably result in exactly what has been happening, and it has.

Keeping it secret - preventing us, the people, from knowing what is being done by our servants on the assumption that we'd rather not know - ensures that nothing will stop it from continuing and that nobody will be held to account.

Note to every member of the Commonwealth Parliament: what is happening today on Manus Island and Nauru - this will be your legacy.

Michael Bradley is the managing partner of Marque Lawyers, a Sydney law firm.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-10/bradley-depths-of-detention-centre-secrecy-revealed/6380698>

6. Hundreds gather in Sydney protesting against refugee and asylum seeker policy

ABC News Online

By Anne Barker

Posted Sun 19 Apr 2015, 6:07pm

Hundreds of demonstrators have gathered in Sydney to protest against Australia's policies on refugees and asylum seekers, in the city's biggest rally of its kind for more than a year.

Protesters said recent events on Manus Island and Nauru have again highlighted the conditions asylum seekers endure and supported calls for a more humane system of detention.

The rally came just weeks after the Moss Review, which found credible evidence of sexual assault and abuse inside the Australian-run detention centre on Nauru.

"It turned out to be a very timely event for the government to actually see that there are thousands of people across the community extremely concerned about the anti-refugee policies that they have," organiser Ian Rintoul said.

Mr Rintoul said the case of several pregnant women or new mothers facing deportation to Nauru was an example of an increasingly hardline policy.

He says many Australians still do not know understand what offshore processing means, or its consequences for asylum seekers.

"Since the end of last year when they introduced the new law, those people who have babies now in Australia are systematically expelled back to Nauru," he said.

Mr Rintoul renewed calls for both Australian-run detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea to close.

"Those people need to be brought to Australia so they can be processed and resettled in Australia," he said.

"The offshore processing is a lynchpin of the Government's cruel policies.

"And our message is for both Liberal and Labor policies — both of them endorse offshore processing — and the consequences on Manus Island, [with] two men dead as a consequence.

"[With] the horrendous revelations that keep coming out on Nauru, they have to close."

Amnesty calls for end to secrecy

Speakers from Amnesty International and other pro-refugee organisations called for an end to the secrecy surrounding Australia's refugee laws and the right of refugees to settle in Australia.

There was anger too at the recent deportation of Hazara asylum seekers to Afghanistan.

Shokufa Tahira, an Hazara asylum seeker, accused Australia of breaching its human rights obligations by sending or threatening to send people like her back to their homeland.

"Australia can effectively deport Hazara refugees back to danger, ignoring whether it's dangerous or not," she said.

"I think it is essentially a death sentence if Hazaras are sent back to Afghanistan considering the security situation."

Amnesty International said the recent Moss Review showed that allegations of sexual assault and physical abuse at Nauru were credible, and suggested that government authorities had known about the allegations for more than a year but failed to act.

"All they care about is their public image," spokesman Graeme McGregor said.

"The Government believes it has the consent of the masses, but events like this [rally] show it's not the case.

"The last two years have been an assault on asylum seeker rights and vast majority of that assault cannot be justified on the grounds of saving people's lives at sea.

"Temporary protection visas, fast-track processing, giving guards in detention centres the right to do GBH (grievous bodily harm), none of this saves people's lives at sea."

Separate rally calls for deportation of asylum seekers

But as protesters demanded change, at the other end of the same park, a different rally was demanding all asylum seekers be returned to their home countries.

About 12 demonstrators took part, arguing there were already enough homeless and disadvantaged people in Australia who were more in need.

"Charity begins at home, charity begins at home," they chanted.

"Australians are welcome. The racist reds are not.

"If the refugee coalition really believed in compassion they'd be here advocating for their rights [of the homeless, indigenous and other disadvantaged]."

A line of police kept watch in case of trouble, but the group was drowned out by the bigger pro-refugee rally.

All ended peacefully, with a march from Sydney's Belmore Park to nearby Camperdown.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-19/hundreds-gather-for-sydney-refugee-protests/6404376>

7. Australia reportedly uses navy ship to return asylum seekers to Vietnam

Media reports indicate up to 50 asylum seekers were on board the HMAS Choules on Friday and due to arrive in the port of Vung Tau

The Guardian
Helen Davidson in Darwin
Friday 17 April 2015 17.44 AEST

The Australian government has reportedly used a costly navy vessel to return a number of asylum seekers to Vietnam.

Up to 50 people were on board the Navy supply ship HMAS Choules, the West Australian reported on Friday.

The asylum seekers' vessel was reportedly intercepted in early April.

HMAS Choules left Darwin on 5 April but no publicly available data shows its record beyond there.

It's not clear if the asylum seekers were intercepted and then brought to the mainland, or held on the vessel, but local sources say no large group of Vietnamese asylum seekers has been moved in or out of Darwin in recent weeks.

A previous interception involved a controversial fast-track process to screen 38 Sri Lankan asylum seekers while still at sea, before returning 37 of them to Sri Lanka.

In January the high court found the detention of 157 Tamil asylum seekers on board the Ocean Protector at sea for more than a month last year was lawful.

HMAS Choules was due to arrive in Vung Tau, south of Ho Chi Minh city, within the next day, Fairfax Media reported.

The ship is large enough to carry up to 700 personnel, and has a flight deck "which can accommodate two large helicopters and a docking well in the stern capable of operating a LCM-8 or two LCVP landing craft," according to the navy. The West Australian reports it has a daily running cost of more than \$201,000.

Defence, customs and the immigration department have been contacted for comment, but the Abbott government generally does not comment about “on-water matters”.

Guardian Australia has previously revealed the Australian government engaged a Vietnamese shipbuilding company in the construction of several Vietnamese fishing boat style vessels, to be used in towback operations instead of \$46,000, single-use orange lifeboats.

The wooden vessels have been stored in dry dock in Darwin. Another similar-looking vessel built of alloy is kept in a nearby bay and has been taken out frequently in recent years, according to a local dock worker familiar with it.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/17/asylum-seekers-to-vietnam>

8. Navy in secret asylum seeker mission

The West Australian
Nick Butterly, Canberra
April 17, 2015, 12:09 pm

Australia is moving to return a large group of asylum seekers to Vietnam using a navy ship – at great cost and under an extraordinary cloak of secrecy.

The West Australian understands the Navy supply ship HMAS Choules is currently standing off the Vietnamese coast as part of the operation to hand back a group of almost 50 asylum seekers.

The Vietnamese are believed to have been intercepted by customs and navy vessels at sea earlier this month, north of Australia.

It is unclear whether HMAS Choules has already handed over the asylum seekers to Vietnamese authorities or whether they are still in the process of being transferred.

Members of the Vietnamese community in Australia claim people returned to the country face persecution by the regime.

Under the Abbott Government’s border protection policy no details are made public about asylum boat turn backs and tow backs, even though the operations cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

HMAS Choules, a navy landing ship, has a daily running cost of \$201,621, according 2012 Defence estimates.

This means that a week-long voyage to return asylum seekers to Vietnam would cost at least \$1.4 million – double if you include the return voyage.

The ship was despatched to Manus Island in 2012 to assist the Immigration Department. It was used to provide offshore accommodation and support to Defence Force members and other Australian Government staff as well as for ship-to-shore services.

In January, the then newly-appointed Immigration Minister Peter Dutton revealed 15 asylum boats containing 429 asylum seekers had been turned back since the Government introduced its Operation Sovereign Borders policy.

Though no details have been given since of turn back or tow back operations, it is believed the Navy and Customs have undertaken several missions to push back boats in recent months.

Last month Indonesian media reported that an orange life boat of the type known to be used by the Navy and Customs to push back asylum seekers had been found abandoned on a beach in Java.

When The West Australian revealed details of tow back operations last year the head of Customs asked the Australian Federal Police to conduct an official investigation into the leaks.

When the Government recently pushed hugely controversial phone data tracking legislation through Parliament this year it promised it would not use the laws to pursue reporters or their sources.

<https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/27169707/navy-in-secret-asylum-seeker-mission/>

9. Australian Navy to hand 50 asylum seekers back to Vietnam

The Age
April 17, 2015 - 3:47PM
Heath Aston

An Australian Navy ship carrying up to 50 Vietnamese asylum seekers is hours away from a southern port city in Vietnam where it is expected to hand detainees over to the Communist government.

HMAS Choules is in waters off Vung Tau, south of Ho Chi Minh City.

The vessel is carrying asylum seekers intercepted by Customs and Navy vessels earlier this month, the West Australian newspaper reported on Friday.

A Defence source told Fairfax Media that HMAS Choules was headed to Vung Tau and would likely arrive late Friday or in the early hours of Saturday.

Members of the Vietnamese community in Australia claim people returned to the country face persecution by the Communist government in Hanoi.

The Abbott government has made it policy not to comment on "on water matters" as part of Operation Sovereign Borders.

Fairfax Media has sought comment from Immigration Minister Peter Dutton. It is the first major operation - at least publicly - on his watch since taking over from Scott Morrison in the cabinet reshuffle in December.

In a rare update in January, Mr Dutton revealed that 15 asylum boats containing 429 asylum seekers had been turned back since the government commenced Operation Sovereign Borders.

Last year, the government attempted to hand back 157 Tamil asylum seekers after keeping them detained at sea for a month aboard the Customs vessel Ocean Protector.

The Sri Lankan Tamils, who had taken to the sea on boats from a refugee camp in southern India, were not accepted back by the Indian government. They were eventually brought to Australia briefly before being transferred to Nauru.

HMAS Choules was sent to Manus Island in 2012 to provide offshore accommodation and support to Defence members and government officials. It has been put on standby to accept injured people during riots inside the Manus detention centre.

The West Australian reports HMAS Choules, has a daily running cost of \$201,621, according 2012 Defence estimates. This means that a week-long voyage to return asylum seekers to Vietnam would cost at least \$1.4 million – double if you include the return voyage.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/australian-navy-to-hand-50-asylum-seekers-back-to-vietnam-20150417-1mnew5.html>

10. Abbott government under fire for secret bid to hand back asylum seekers to Vietnam

Sydney Morning Herald
April 17, 2015 - 8:38PM
Heath Aston

Vietnamese Australians and human rights activists have blasted the Abbott Government over a secret Navy-led mission to return a group of asylum seekers back to the Communist government of Vietnam.

In a new milestone for the Coalition's hard-line border policy, an Australian Navy ship was entering Vietnamese waters on Friday after what is believed to be a week-long journey to prevent boats reaching Australia.

HMAS Choules was close to the the southern port city of Vung Tau, south of Ho Chi Minh City, Defence sources confirmed to Fairfax Media.

The vessel was expected to hand over detainees to the Communist government some time after arriving late Friday or in the early hours of Saturday.

The vessel is carrying asylum seekers intercepted by customs and navy vessels earlier this month, north of Australia, the West Australian newspaper reported on Friday.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's office said no comment would be made on "operational matters" but human rights activists lashed the Coalition for another on-water action cloaked in secrecy.

Daniel Webb, director of the Human Rights Law Centre, said: "Australia should never return a refugee to persecution. All governments – whatever their policy position – should respect democracy and should respect the rule of law. Continually operating behind a veil of secrecy is a deliberate subversion of both.

"If the government truly believed its actions were humane, justified and legal, it wouldn't go to such extraordinary lengths to hide them from view."

It was the Human Rights Law Centre that took the government to the High Court after 157 Tamil asylum seekers were detained at sea for a month as the government tried and failed to convince the Indian government to take back the mainly Sri Lankan-born group.

The High Court upheld the government's right to detain asylum seekers at sea.

David Manne, executive director of the Refugee and Immigration Legal Centre, said the government was clearly returning asylum-seekers without properly assessing their claims to protection.

"Any moves by the Australian government to deport these people without a proper assessment of any protection claims they have would not only violate their rights but could well endanger their lives," he said.

"Claims for protection from persecution cannot be properly assessed under what we know is a perfunctory process conducted by Australian officials at sea.

"The Australian public and international community have the right to know whether and to what extent Australia is meeting its obligations to protect people fleeing from harm."

The Vietnamese community, many of whom arrived in Australia by boat after the fall of Saigon in 1975 as the Communist regime of Hanoi took control of the country, expressed horror at asylum seekers being handed back.

Thang Ha, president of the Vietnamese Community in Australia, NSW Chapter, said the government should be aware it could be "throwing people back into hell".

He said returnees would likely be left alone initially but would be followed by party operatives and eventually harassed and likely jailed.

"Human rights activists, democracy activists, Christians, Buddhists, artists and singers, they have all been harassed. Some people have been hunted down, their family members have been harassed. Some have been thrown in jail and never heard from again," he said.

"They are throwing them back into hell."

A report published last year by the leading international group Human Rights Watch found that "the human rights situation in Vietnam deteriorated significantly in 2013, worsening a trend evident for several years".

It said that the year was marked by "a severe and intensifying crackdown on critics, including long prison terms for many peaceful activists whose 'crime' was calling for political change".

HMAS Choules was sent to Manus Island in 2012 to provide offshore accommodation and support to Defence members and government officials. It has been put on standby to accept injured people during riots inside the Manus detention centre.

The ship has a daily running cost of \$201,621, according 2012 Defence estimates. This means that a week-long voyage to return asylum seekers to Vietnam would cost at least \$1.4 million – double if you include the return voyage.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/abbott-government-under-fire-for-secret-bid-to-hand-back-asylum-seekers-to-vietnam-20150417-1mnlpb.html>

11. New immigration powers would let guards 'beat asylum seekers to death'

Former Victorian supreme court judge tells Senate inquiry proposed new powers would 'inevitably encourage violence by guards against asylum seekers'

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Thursday 16 April 2015 13.45 AEST

A former Victorian supreme court judge says new powers proposed for guards in immigration detention centres would in effect authorise them "to beat asylum seekers to death".

In extraordinary evidence to a Senate hearing on Thursday, Stephen Charles SC said the migration amendment (maintaining the good order of immigration detention facilities) bill 2015 would substantially expand the powers granted to guards in detention centres in a way that would "inevitably encourage violence by guards against asylum seekers".

The new powers would allow immigration officers – which may include private contractors – to use “reasonable force against any person” if the officer believes it is necessary to protect the life, health or safety of people in detention or to maintain the good order, peace or security of a detention centre.

Such powers potentially give staff with a low level of training a greater level of immunity than that granted to state and federal police forces.

Charles, who sat on the Victorian court of appeal until 2006, said the standard proposed in the bill would introduce a similar test to those that have been considered in the US, and drew parallels with the recent shooting of Walter Scott by the police officer Michael Slager.

“Time and again police in the United States have been acquitted in circumstances such as these,” Charles said.

“These amendments to the Migration Act will in effect authorise guards to beat asylum seekers to death on the basis they reasonably believe it is necessary ... to do so.”

He said the fact there would be “no effective way to take proceedings against the commonwealth” would further encourage guards to use excessive force in detention centres, and described the training requirements proposed in the explanatory memorandum of the bill as a “joke in extremely bad taste”.

The bill will give the commonwealth, private companies and guards immunity from civil and criminal liability unless it could be demonstrated that the use of force was not in good faith.

The president of the Australian Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs, said the bar on proceedings would make it “virtually impossible” to bring forward an action, because of the difficulty of demonstrating bad faith in legal proceedings.

“Senior courts have ... explained the very high threshold that you must prove to demonstrate bad faith. It’s very hard to show a subjective intent of bad faith of a serving officer acting in the course of their employment,” Triggs said.

She said the language in the bill surrounding the scope of the powers “need to be significantly tightened up.”

Triggs added that if the powers were to be included into the Migration Act then the limits to the exercise of the power should also be clearly spelt out.

Gabrielle Appleby, associate professor at UNSW, said “the individuals authorised under this bill are not department officers, they are contractors”.

Appleby raised concerns about the training requirements for guards, which are not expressly set out in the bill and will instead be left up to the minister. The explanatory memorandum suggests the standards will be a certificate II in security operations, which are a base level training requirement for security operations.

“The determination by the minister is not a disallowable instrument. This means it’s not subject to parliamentary scrutiny,” she said.

The Senate inquiry follows reports of unrest at the Wickham Point detention centre in Darwin on Wednesday.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/16/new-immigration-powers-would-let-guards-beat-asylum-seekers-to-death>

12. New law will increase violence against asylum seekers: former judge

The Age
April 16, 2015 - 4:43PM
Michael Gordon

A new law giving security guards in detention centres power to cause grievous bodily harm if they “reasonably believe” it is necessary to protect life or prevent injury is likely to encourage abuse of and violence against asylum seekers in detention, a Senate committee has been told.

Former judge of the Victorian Court of Appeal Stephen Charles QC said the law allowed security guards to use lethal force “with impunity” because it would be “almost impossible” for them to face prosecution in the courts.

“These amendments will authorise detention centre guards to beat asylum seekers to death if they reasonably believe it is necessary to do so to save either themselves or another person from serious harm,” he said.

Mr Charles cited a legal opinion that the police officer who shot a black American eight times in the back was likely to escape a murder conviction because of the way the “reasonable belief” test has been applied in the United States.

His concerns were amplified by several witnesses who appeared before a Senate committee in Sydney on Tuesday, including the president of the Human Rights Commission, Gillian Triggs.

"I think it is terrible legislation," Mr Charles told Fairfax Media after appearing before the committee. "The guards at present are very inadequately trained and they are talking about giving them minimal training and then making it impossible to sue them.

"It means they will be vastly less trained than prison guards or federal or state police, yet they are authorised to use lethal force with impunity because it's almost impossible to sue them."

The absence of any effective way for detainees to take legal action against security guards who used excessive force would encourage abuse and attacks on detainees, he said.

Representatives of human rights, refugee and law bodies told Senate's legal and constitutional committee the government should either scrap or comprehensively amend the so-called "good order" legislation.

Greens senator, Sarah Hanson-Young, said her party would be opposing the legislation in the Senate and urging cross-benchers to do the same.

"With the high levels of secrecy in detention centres, giving guards unchecked powers to use force is a recipe for further cover ups of abuse and misconduct" she said

The government maintains the legislation, called Maintaining Good Order of Immigration Detention Facilities, is necessary because of the increasing presence of "high risk detainees" such as members of outlaw bkie gangs, which is seen as a threat to the security of centres.

But critics say it leaves the overwhelming majority of detainees, who have no criminals records, vulnerable to excessive force by guards.

The legislation covers immigration detention centres on the mainland and Christmas Island, but not those on Nauru or Manus Island.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has told Parliament that detention centre staff now rely on common-law powers, as conferred on ordinary citizens, to exercise reasonable force when it is necessary to protect themselves and others from harm or threat of harm.

"Clearly, using reasonable force to manage issues of physical safety, good order, peace and security in an immigration detention facility is a matter for Parliament to decide, not the common law," he said.

Mr Dutton said that, provided reasonable force was exercised in good faith, the bill would bar court proceedings against the Commonwealth, including an authorised officer.

Several witnesses told the hearing the legislation failed to provide the clarity sought by organisations including the security contractor Serco. Professor Triggs said: "It's clarity they asked for. It's clarity they haven't got in this bill."

Professor Triggs said limits on the use of force should be based on objective criteria of necessity and reasonableness and contained in the legislation. "If private contractors use excessive force, both the contractors and the Commonwealth should be legally accountable."

In its submission, the Law Council of Australia said the bill risked exacerbating existing tensions and may disproportionately impact on children and other asylum seekers who were at risk. The hearing was told 115 children were being held in mainland detention centres.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre also opposed the legislation and called on the government to address "the real problems" in detention centres, including poor living conditions, the lack of information given to people about their cases and the arbitrary and indefinite nature of detention. It said broadening the coercive powers of security guards was unnecessary and dangerous.

Appearing for the department, the deputy CEO of border operations, Michael Outram, told the hearing the legislation represented a "measured response" to the threat posed by a small number of detainees. He maintained that any person who committed a criminal offence would be subject to criminal sanction.

The aim of the legislation was to provide a more "compliant" and safer environment in immigration detention so that all detainees enjoyed a higher quality of life, he said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/new-law-will-increase-violence-against-asylum-seekers-former-judge-20150416-1mmf56.html>

13. Bill easing liability for using 'reasonable force' against detainees condemned

Human rights groups criticise bill which would give the commonwealth and private contractors immunity from liability where use of force was exercised 'in good faith'

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Tuesday 14 April 2015 17.33 AEST

The federal government and private companies should not be immune from liability for excessive use of force on people held in immigration detention, a parliamentary submission by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) says.

The migration amendment (maintaining the good order of immigration detention facilities) bill would allow immigration officers – which may include private contractors – to use “reasonable force against any person” if the officer believed it was necessary to protect the life, health or safety of people in detention or to maintain the good order, peace or security of a detention centre.

Such powers potentially give staff with a low level of training a greater level of immunity than that granted to state and federal police forces.

The AHRC’s submission to an inquiry into the bill said it agreed individual employees should gain immunity from civil and criminal liability when exercised in good faith, but the bill should not limit the government’s liability.

“In the commission’s view, it is not appropriate for either immigration detention service providers or the commonwealth to be given an immunity if an authorised officer’s use of force is excessive,” it said.

“There does not appear to be any justification for providing a separate immunity to the commonwealth.

“The justification given by the government for providing an immunity to authorised officers is to remove any reluctance they may have to using reasonable force to the extent they are authorised to do so. There does not appear to be any justification for providing an immunity that extends beyond the authorised officers who are exercising the relevant power.”

Detention centre staff who exercise force on asylum seekers must rely on common law defences to use reasonable force. The immigration department said the bill was necessary to respond to “behaviour challenges in immigration detention” from a number of high-risk detainees.

“Employees in this work environment require greater protection at law,” it said.

The bill says that in some circumstances it may be permissible to use force amounting to grievous bodily harm – which can constitute serious disfigurement – if the officer “reasonably believes that doing the thing is necessary to protect the life of, or to prevent serious injury to, another person (including the authorised officer)”.

The immigration department suggested this change was necessary for a situation in which a detainee had taken a hostage.

“In this situation an authorised officer may need to use sufficient reasonable force that causes, or is likely to cause, grievous bodily harm to the detainee should a physical confrontation be necessary,” its submission said.

The Refugee Advice and Casework Services, a community legal centre, said in its submission the bill “severely limits access to the courts, making it unlikely that abuses of the powers created by the bill would be subject to any form of accountability”.

The bill proposes to render the federal government and private contractors immune from liability in the courts in instances where the use of force was exercised “in good faith”.

“Given the draconian nature of the powers being conferred on authorised officers, the limitation on judicial oversight threatens a lack of accountability in the event of serious abuses. An environment of impunity for such abuses should be regarded with considerable concern, especially given the vulnerability of those upon whom such abuses may be visited,” it said.

The bill would establish a complaint mechanism for asylum seekers, but gives the secretary of the immigration department discretion not to investigate a complaint.

The Refugee Council of Australia said it was concerned the complaints mechanism “may not result in investigations being conducted fairly and thoroughly or an appropriate remedy being provided in cases where complaints are upheld”.

The explanatory memorandum of the bill indicated officers who are authorised to exercise force may be required to possess only a certificate level II in security operations, which is a base level security training requirement.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre said it was “concerning that the contemplated training contains no units in relation to, for example, understanding and applying human rights, or understanding and properly dealing with individuals from different cultures or vulnerable or at-risk individuals, including individuals with mental health issues”.

The Australian Psychological Association (APS) wrote that the bill posed serious dangers and risks.

“The proposed extension of powers (and lack of accountability associated with this measure) is concerning for the APS. Psychologists are well aware of the dangers of unfettered power from compelling evidence gathered in classic experiments by social psychologists such as Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo,” it said.

“The proposed measures would increase the risk of immigration detention facility (IDF) staff exhibiting exactly the kinds of behaviours predicted by such research: unquestioning compliance with unethical and dangerous directives, increasing inability to display empathy, and misuse of assigned power.”

The bill also drew a submission from a retired Victorian judge, Stephen Charles SC, on behalf of his daughter, Lucy Hamilton, and Linda Cusworth. It said the fact the bill permitted grievous bodily harm on asylum seekers was unacceptable and would cause similar abuses to that which occurred on Manus Island in the February 2014 unrest.

“Reza Barati was beaten to death with a rock, inside an Australian-funded immigration detention centre facility. Many others were injured that same night,” it said.

“This bill provides an open licence for further deaths and injuries to occur both onshore and offshore, at the hands of authorised officers. It will remove the power of the courts to impose penalties on those responsible.

“This approach would not be tolerated in our schools and our community residential units and for people who have a disability. We are appalled that it could be allowed in centres for those who have already been traumatised by violence and persecution.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/14/bill-easing-liability-for-using-reasonable-force-against-detainees-condemned>

14. Former judge says new powers will allow asylum seekers to be beaten to death

ABC Radio CAF - PM
Sarah Farnsworth
Thursday, April 16, 2015 18:10:08

MARK COLVIN: A former Victorian Supreme Court judge says proposed new powers for security guards at detention centres would allow them to "beat asylum seekers to death" with impunity.

Stephen Charles SC made his submissions to the Senate hearings into amendments to the migration bill in Sydney today.

The Australian Human Rights Commission also spoke out against the proposed changes, saying it would become virtually impossible to bring legal action if guards did turn violent.

Sarah Farnsworth reports.

SARAH FARNSWORTH: The Senate hearing is considering new laws designed to keep order at detention centres, with the Federal Government fearing disturbances are on the rise.

At a public hearing in Sydney, former Supreme Court justice Stephen Charles made his views about the proposed changes clear.

STEPHEN CHARLES: The way I put it was that the guards were authorised to beat asylum seekers in detention centres to death.

SARAH FARNSWORTH: The former judge says under the changes the officers will get a greater level of immunity than is given to police right across the country, and less training.

STEPHEN CHARLES: The impression all of us had in giving evidence was that would get them something like a fortnight's qualification, which would be hopelessly inadequate.

SARAH FARNSWORTH: As he told the Senate hearing, it was "a joke in extremely bad taste". Stephen Charles drew parallels to the recent US shooting of Walter Scott, who was running away from a police officer when he was killed. He said the proposed amendments will make it harder to bring legal action against a guard who inflicts harm and may even encourage it.

STEPHEN CHARLES: Guards in detention centres will feel freer to exercise force, to use force against detainees on the ground that they've been told that they can do so where they think there is reasonable necessity.

SARAH FARNSWORTH: Also giving evidence today was the president of the Australian Human Rights Commission Gillian Triggs.

She said she recognised there may be occasions where private contractors would have to use force against people in detention. But also took issue with the extent of powers the new bill would give them.

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Contracted detention service providers, for practical purposes, the Serco guards, are not police officers. They should not be given wider powers or greater discretion. And there should be clearly defined limits to the power of contractors to use force.

SARAH FARNSWORTH: Ms Triggs told the hearing the department's policy guidelines over the use of force are already clear.

GILLIAN TRIGGS: Force should be a measure of last resort, it should be used only for the shortest amount of time necessary, it should never be cruel, inhuman or degrading, it should not be a punishment for that, of course, is a judicial and not an executive power and it must not be excessive.

SARAH FARNSWORTH: Gillian Triggs said the language of the bill needs to be tightened up.

GILLIAN TRIGGS: If the power to use force is to be set out in the Migration Act then it seems to us particularly appropriate that the limits on that power should also be in the act itself rather than confined to a policy document.

SARAH FARNSWORTH: Former judge Stephen Charles wants more than just a rewrite.

STEPHEN CHARLES: I myself think that the amendments should be completely canned and they should start again from scratch.

MARK COLVIN: Former judge Stephen Charles ending Sarah Farnsworth's report.

<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2015/s4217871.htm>

15. Detention centre interpreters need more training for 'hazardous' work – report

Audit office report says the mostly female staff need more help before, during and after their work in places such as Nauru, Manus and Christmas Island

The Guardian
Shalailah Medhora
Friday 17 April 2015 06.18 AEST

Interpreters who are deployed to immigration detention centres should be given resilience training so that they can prepare for the “challenging and hazardous” conditions of the facilities, a report has recommended.

Federal government should increase support for interpreters and translators before, during and after their deployment to the country's mainland and offshore detention facilities, the report by the Australian National Audit Office says.

It also recommends the workers undertake “resilience preparation” before starting their stints in the facilities.

“Currently, interpreters deployed to the [detention] network are not given access to the same pre - deployment resilience assessment, training and post deployment debriefs, as other DIBP [Department of Immigration and Border Protection] workers,” the report said.

“The facilities are not easily accessible and aspects of life in places such as Nauru, Manus Island and Christmas Island can be challenging and hazardous. For these reasons, work health and safety matters have a heightened importance for all workers, including interpreters,” the report said.

DIBP has agreed both of the recommendations.

Bede Payne, national campaign director for the union that covers translators, Professionals Australia, said that the work performed by translators and interpreters was “extremely difficult”.

“The environment is challenging, the camps are isolated, the work is hard, and the human costs is enormous. All the while, interpreters are treated as outsiders, deposited somewhere between the government workers and detainees,” he told Guardian Australia.

“Turn over in of interpreters working in detention camps is high. It’s hard to get professional people to work in such a tough environment while being shown such little respect,” he said.

Immigration minister Peter Dutton acknowledged that his department was losing interpreters, but said it was due to the increased workload from when asylum seeker boats were arriving rapidly under Labor.

“We’ve been advised by the department on the stresses that they’re under. It has been the case that there has been a turnover of staff over several years, particularly at the height of Labor’s time in government because this is stressful work,” Dutton told reporters earlier this week.

Dutton had blamed the slowness of processing asylum claims on increased security checks and a lack of interpreters.

He said more would be employed on a needs basis.

Head of the asylum seeker resource centre, Kon Karapanagiotidis is not buying the minister’s argument.

“This isn’t an interpreter issue, it’s an issue of poor planning and incompetence,” he said.

“The department has a significant number of interpreters available in key languages spoken by people seeking asylum, including Arabic, Persian and Hazaragi. If there is a shortage, it’s incredibly poor planning on their part. They’ve had ample time to recruit and train additional interpreters,” he said.

“They’re prepared to spend \$3bn a year to lock 2000 people up on Manus and Nauru. You’d think they could invest in more interpreters so they can get on with processing the asylum claims of people they’ve left in limbo for up to three years.”

The lion’s share of money for government interpretation services goes to DIBP, and the vast majority of that goes to providing services for Australia’s detention network.

In the 2013-14 financial year, \$100m of the DIBP’s expenditure went to translation services. Of that, over \$83m went to services in detention centres. By contrast, the Department of Social Services received \$15m for translation services in its resettlement services.

Those in the industry are concerned that the focus on immigration detention may adversely affect resettlement services and integration programs.

“The delivery of language services is critical to Australia. Nearly 700,000 Australians need assistance in accessing healthcare or renewing a driver’s license. But while the demand is real and growing the industry is slipping into crisis,” Payne said.

Women make up 64% of Australia’s translators and interpreters. Only 7% of the workforce is under the age of 30, and by 2040, a whopping 70% of the current workforce will have retired.

Wages are poor, with the average salary sitting at around \$30,000 a year. The work is not consistent and most translators and interpreters are employed on a contractual basis.

“The workforce is collapsing. Quality is declining. Risk to government and the community is increasing,” Payne said. “We are concerned that the issues of the wider industry are being forgotten. The interpreting community has been calling out for change for years.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/17/detention-centre-interpreters-need-more-training-for-hazardous-work-report>

16. Australia prepares to send first refugees from Nauru to Cambodia within days

Guardian Australia exclusive:

- Plane chartered to send group of refugees for resettlement, sources say
- Immigration staff reportedly hand out leaflets promising a chance of ‘a new life’
- Refugees get temporary housing in the ‘style of a serviced apartment’

The Guardian

Paul Farrell

Wednesday 15 April 2015 16.47 AEST

The Australian government has chartered a plane to move the first group of refugees from Nauru to Cambodia within days as part of a \$40m resettlement deal, sources on the island have said.

Guardian Australia has seen several letters that were reportedly distributed by Australian immigration staff to refugees on Nauru. The letters offer them an opportunity to settle in Cambodia, where they will be eligible for citizenship in seven years.

"The opportunity to settle in Cambodia is now available to you. The first flight from Nauru to Cambodia for refugees will be as soon as 20 April 2015. Moving to Cambodia provides an opportunity for you and your family to start a new life in a safe country, free from persecution and violence, and build your future," the letter says.

"Cambodia is a diverse country with multiple nationalities, cultures and religions. They enjoy all the freedoms of a democratic society including freedom of religion and freedom of speech."

It goes on: "Cambodia is a safe country, where police maintain law and order. It does not have problems with violent crime or stray dogs."

The letter says the refugees will be able to send their children to school in Cambodia, and will be given support including cash and a bank account, assistance finding work, income support, language training and health insurance.

One refugee living in the community on Nauru who received the letter told Guardian Australia: "The letter was very confusing because it didn't mention anything exactly. They said support but the people don't know what exactly they mean by support."

"People Googled Cambodia and they said it's not a developed country, there is lots of dangers, and I know people have lots of concerns about it. So not many people are interested."

The letter says they will be offered temporary accommodation in Phnom Penh in the "style of a serviced apartment, guest house or villa". After six to eight weeks, case managers will assist them in gaining access to further accommodation, the letter says.

Healthcare in Cambodia "is of a good quality for the region, with many doctors and hospitals that treat both Cambodians and foreigners", it says.

It is unclear how many refugees have accepted the offer. Guardian Australia is aware of at least one family confirmed on the flight manifest.

Numerous aid groups have warned the Australian government that Cambodia is ill-equipped to take on refugees because it has a poor human rights record and widespread poverty.

Critics of the deal, including human rights groups in Cambodia, argue the developing nation is poorly suited to accept and support refugees. Cambodia remains one of the most deeply corrupt nations on earth (156th on the Transparency International list of 175 countries) and has, according to Human Rights Watch, "a terrible record for protecting refugees and is mired in serious human rights abuses".

In March Australia signed a new memorandum of understanding with Cambodia following a visit from the immigration minister, Peter Dutton.

The immigration department has been contacted for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/15/australia-prepares-to-send-first-refugees-from-nauru-to-cambodia-within-days>

17. Safe and inexpensive: Government spruiks relocation from Nauru to Cambodia in fact sheet to asylum seekers

Brisbane Times
April 16, 2015 - 12:48PM
Heath Aston
with Lindsay Murdoch

In 1980, Californian punk band Dead Kennedys released their second single Holiday in Cambodia. This week, the Coalition government released a document called Settlement in Cambodia.

Both talk about life in the previously war-torn south east Asian nation. But only the seminal punk song's title does so with any irony.

The Abbott government's "fact sheet", handed to asylum seekers in the Nauru detention centre and refugees living on Nauru by immigration officials, talks up Cambodia as a secure and harmonious society with a low cost of living.

"Cambodia is a safe country, where police maintain law and order. It does not have problems with stray dogs," the five-page pamphlet notes.

The Australian government's description jars with the most recent security appraisal of Cambodia by the US State Department.

"Cambodia has a high crime rate, including street crime. Military weapons and explosives are readily available to criminals despite authorities' efforts to collect and destroy such weapons. Armed robberies occur frequently, and foreign residents and visitors, including US citizens, are among the victims," the State Department notes.

"The most common type of theft is 'snatch and grab' robbery, and anything that can be quickly grabbed is at risk: cameras, jewellery, purses, backpacks, mobile phones. Pickpockets, some of whom are beggars, are present in the markets and at the tourist sites."

Another highlight, according to the Australian pamphlet is the cost of living. Cigarettes are just \$1.59 a packet and a domestic beer costs \$1.50, it says.

Petrol is \$1.65 a litre, a basket of fresh fruit and vegetables is \$20 and "a meal at inexpensive restaurant" \$4.53.

Among the incentives to get people off Nauru and settled in Cambodia as part of the \$40 million deal inked between Immigration Minister Peter Dutton and the government in Phnom Penh is a range of financial incentives and relocation costs.

Arrivals will be housed in "serviced apartment, guest house or villa" accommodation for up to three months and then up to 12 months in "affordable long-term accommodation".

A case manager will be provided to asylum seekers to secure employment and families will receive "establishment assistance and cash". "You will also receive a financial assistance for living costs, education, health and rent for a period of time."

Comprehensive health insurance will be provided for four years, including mental health.

"Cambodia has a high standard of health care with multiple hospitals and General Practitioners," the immigration document states.

According to Cambodian government data, levels of health are improving. The average life expectancy for males is 60, up from 47 since 1999. Female life expectancy has risen to 65 from 50.

Refugees have been assured that any babies born in Cambodia will be given citizenship and that families will be able to travel freely inside the country and to their home country if they choose.

But the pamphlet states that no refugees settled in Nauru or Cambodia will be resettled in Australia.

The first group of refugees from Nauru are expected to be flown to Cambodia as early as Sunday.

While asylum seekers in detention reportedly refused to meet with Cambodian officials when they visited the centre recently, up to 10 people are believed to have agreed to be resettled.

When the Cambodian deal was announced an alliance of agencies, including UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan International Australia, World Vision, Amnesty International, Refugee Council of Australia, International Detention Coalition and Children's Rights International said they had "grave concerns" about relocating refugee families to Cambodia.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/safe-and-inexpensive-government-spruiks-relocation-from-nauru-to-cambodia-in-fact-sheet-to-asylum-seekers-20150416-1mm7zy.html>

18. Charter flight scheduled for first group of Nauru refugees to be transferred to Cambodia

ABC News Online
By South East Asia correspondent Samantha Hawley
Posted Thu 16 Apr 2015, 6:19am

A charter flight to transfer refugees from Nauru to Cambodia has been scheduled for next Monday, with the first group offered cash in hand once they arrive.

A fact sheet provided to refugees about life in Cambodia promises a one-off package for those who choose to be resettled in the country.

The offer includes cash in hand and in a bank account along with help finding work, access to education, and language training.

The International Organisation for Migration said it would send an official to Nauru in the coming days to facilitate the possible relocation of refugees to Cambodia.

The ABC has been told up to 10 refugees could be on board the charter flight next week.

Australia's \$40 million resettlement deal with Cambodia was signed last year, but so far no refugees have been sent to the impoverished nation.

The deal has been condemned by the United Nations' refugee agency and human rights advocates.

In a statement released after the deal was signed, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) said it was "deeply concerned" by the precedent the deal sets.

The UNHCR reiterated its stance that asylum seekers should "benefit from the protection" of the state in which they arrive.

The agreement stipulates refugees will only be sent on a voluntary basis, with the number of refugees accepted to be determined by Cambodia.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-16/nauru-refugees-to-be-transferred-to-cambodia/6396218>

19. MEDIA RELEASE: Nauru protest rejects Cambodia as refugee destination

Saturday April 18, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Over 200 refugees from across Nauru rallied at the main refugee family camp, Anibare Lodge, on Friday 17 April, to reject Cambodia as any alternative to Nauru.

The demonstration in defiance of the a recent Nauru government decree requiring seven days notice, was held following media speculation that transfers of refugees from Nauru to Cambodia could be 'as early as Monday 20 April'.

The "Settlement in Cambodia" factsheet being circulated by Australian immigration officers on Nauru declares that Cambodia does not have a problem 'with violent crime or stray dogs,' a clear reference to the some of the dangers facing refugees on Nauru.

The rally was just the latest in the on-going refugees' campaign of non-cooperation with the detention regime on Nauru.

Alongside calls for "Justice," the rally also declared, "Cambodia, never ever." Immigration officers have been approaching both refugees and asylum seekers but there is still no confirmation that any refugee has signed to be sent to Cambodia.

"The demonstration is a very strong indication of what the vast majority of refugees on Nauru think of Cambodia as any destination for refugees," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition. "The government has wasted \$40 million just to get Cambodia to sign an agreement with Australia. It is money that could have been spent resettling refugees and providing needed services in Australia that could have been used by the whole community."

THOUSANDS EXPECTED AT 'WELCOME REFUGEES' RALLY

A major "Welcome Refugees" rally will be held on Sunday, 19 April, 1pm, Belmore Park in Sydney (details below). Sydney's rally follows the national rallies that drew thousands in Melbourne and Canberra on Palm Sunday.

The rally will call to, "Close Manus Island; Close Nauru."

The rally comes in the wake of revelations that the previous Immigration Minister, Scott Morrison, covered-up information about sexual and physical abuse of women and children on Nauru.

The Supreme Court constitutional challenge to Manus Island detention and human rights abuses returns to the PNG Supreme Court in Port Moresby on Monday 20 April.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713

20. MEDIA RELEASE: Wickam Point stand-off to prevent Nauru transfer

STAND-OFF IN WICKHAM POINT DETENTION CENTRE TO PREVENT NAURU TRANSFER

Wednesday April 15, 2015

Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Around 70 asylum seekers are blockading Sun compound in the Wickham Point detention centre to try to prevent mostly asylum seeker families from being returned to Nauru. The 70 asylum seekers are also families from Nauru who fear being returned.

"We are just trying to help each other," one asylum seeker told the Refugee Action Coalition, from inside Wickham Point.

The stand-off began around 2.00 pm Darwin time, when Serco officers attempted to forcibly remove people to Sun compound as a preliminary measure to their transfer to Nauru.

Serco officers have withdrawn from the compound although there are now fears that Serco could use its emergency response team - read, riot squad -- to break the blockade.

Serco had attempted to move a number of mostly Iranian families including children into Sun compound where there is a high security Red section to hold asylum seekers prior to removal.

There are also reports that asylum seekers intervened to prevent the removal following married couples and families being separated by Serco guards, and that there is one pregnant woman among those scheduled for removal.

The Nauru transfers have become a feared almost weekly routine in Wickham Point and has led to a number of people self-harming to prevent their removal to Nauru. At least two people attempted suicide last night to try and prevent their removal to Nauru.

"Nauru is not safe for asylum seekers or refugees. There is limited medical facilities, which is why so many people are being sent to the mainland for medical treatment," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The Minister should immediately halt the removals to Nauru, and begin the process of bringing all asylum seekers and refugees to the mainland."

For more information, contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

21. Fear of being sent to Manus or Nauru cause of asylum seeker self-harm

Fear of being sent to Manus or Nauru the cause of asylum seeker self-harm in Darwin detention, advocates say

ABC News Online
By Avani Dias
Posted Mon 13 Apr 2015, 10:18am

Fear of being sent to offshore detention on Manus Island or Nauru has caused a sudden spike in self-harm incidents at Darwin's detention centre, with up to 15 in the past three weeks, advocates said.

Asylum seekers believed it was "a fate worse than dying" to be sent offshore, according to Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (DASSAN) spokesman Ben Pynt.

He said the removals were happening every fortnight on a Thursday and people were not being informed.

"On the Thursday afternoon people are really beside themselves," he said.

"Last week I was in there on a Thursday and people that I visited told me that nobody had slept on the Wednesday night because everyone was scared that they would be next."

The network has called for the Department of Immigration to inform detainees about their potential removals offshore.

"We think this increased anxiety could be met with a simple solution by the Department," Mr Pynt said.

"They could tell people who is going to be removed and when and they could give them counselling appropriate to that removal."

Mr Pynt was also concerned the Wickham Point Detention Centre's medical centre had reduced its operating hours.

"The medical centre which used to operate 24 hours a day is now only open nine to five, with medications being dispensed until 10pm," he said.

"We're worried that the decrease in mental health resources for a population of 750 people, most of whom have mental illness, is absolutely inefficient and insufficient.

"We're worried that that's going to produce some terrible outcomes for the asylum seekers."

Meanwhile, DASSAN said a Lebanese asylum seeker also climbed onto the roof of the detention centre on Monday night as an act of protest.

The detainee's eye was allegedly injured by a guard and he was denied medical treatment.

"We were told by multiple people inside the detention centre that he had been assaulted by a guard in his many detention transfers," Mr Pynt said.

"He'd been at about four or five centres around the country and was due for removal to Christmas Island over the next couple of days."

The ABC has approached the Department of Immigration for comment.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-13/manus-and-nauru-fear-causes-self-harm-asylum-seekers-darwin/6388572>

22. Police respond to disturbance at Darwin's Wickham Point immigration detention centre

ABC News Online

By Avani Dias and Clare Deligny

First posted Wed 15 Apr 2015, 2:39pm

Updated Wed 15 Apr 2015, 3:10pm

Asylum seeker advocates say there has been a major disturbance at a Darwin detention centre and police have been called.

An asylum seeker has said there has been mayhem at Wickham Point Detention Centre, with about 20 detainees committing self harm in fear of being transferred to Nauru tonight.

The Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (DASSAN) said one woman who witnessed the self harm earlier is being treated at Royal Darwin Hospital.

Police confirmed they had received a call and were en route to the detention centre.

A police spokesman said officers responded to calls of a disturbance at the detention centre just before 4:00pm (ACST) after reports of detainees damaging property and causing unrest.

Ben Pynt from DASSAN said that over the past couple of weeks there had been a steady and rapid decline in mental health throughout the detention population at Wickham Point.

"Over the past week particularly we have seen a spike in self harm and attempted suicides and it is really troubling the lengths that people are going to either to prevent themselves being sent offshore to Manus and Nauru or simply in protest at their detention conditions," Mr Pynt said.

"People are absolutely desperate. They feel that they are going to be in detention forever."

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has been contacted for comment.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-15/disturbance-at-wickham-point-detention-centre/6395352>

23. Police called to immigration detention centre in Darwin amid reports of protest

Up to 50 detainees have allegedly broken down a fence between a camp section of the Wickham Point facility and an interview area, according to one source

The Guardian

Helen Davidson in Darwin

Wednesday 15 April 2015 17.49 AEST

Police have been called to an unfolding incident at a Darwin immigration detention centre on Wednesday afternoon.

Up to 50 detainees have allegedly broken down a fence between a camp section of the Wickham Point facility and an interview area where some detainees are being held, a source inside the centre has told Guardian Australia.

The group then sat on the ground in protest against impending transfers of at least two families to Nauru, he said, including a pregnant woman who allegedly attempted to take her own life on Tuesday.

Ben Pynt, spokesman for a Darwin advocacy group, cited his own sources and claimed fights were also breaking out and doors kicked in.

A police spokesman confirmed officers were called and both members of the metropolitan patrol group (MPG) and the dog squad were on site and assisting, but any further information would have to come from the immigration department.

A spokeswoman for the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, was not immediately able to confirm the unfolding incident.

There have been spate of self-harm incidents and alleged suicide attempts in recent weeks.

On Tuesday afternoon a woman who is five-months pregnant allegedly tried to take her own life but another detainee intervened, Guardian Australia was told.

Three others also attempted self harm, and an older Iranian woman suffered a heart attack later that afternoon.

The older woman was taken to hospital and the other three were taken to medical support rooms inside the centre where they were kept under guard overnight, according to both Pynt and a source inside the detention centre.

The immigration department did not provide confirmation of any information.

The detention centre source has since said the pregnant woman and her husband were separated from other detainees in an interview room ahead of a possible transfer to Nauru on Wednesday night or Thursday morning.

It is this area that the detainees are allegedly trying to get to through the fence.

“The people are so angry and they are trying to break the fences and help them,” he said.

A message obtained by Guardian Australia and purported to be from the husband of the pregnant woman, said his wife suffers depression.

“Her doctor said and wrote that she has to leave detention and must go to community but nobody care about her situation. Unfortunately today she [tried to take her own life], if my friends [did] not come and help her she was die.”

According to Pynt there have now been 19 self-harm incidents inside the centre in the past three weeks, and he said they were often sparked by impending transfers of detainees to Nauru.

“On the Thursday afternoon people are really beside themselves,” he told ABC on Monday. “Last week I was in there on a Thursday and people that I visited told me that nobody had slept on the Wednesday night because everyone was scared that they would be next.”

Pynt called for the immigration department to give people notice if they were going to be transferred in order to relieve some anxiety.

It was revealed on Wednesday the Australian government has chartered a plane to move the first group of refugees from Nauru to Cambodia within days, according to sources on the island.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/15/police-called-to-immigration-detention-centre-in-darwin-amid-reports-of-protest>

24. Reports of self-harming at Darwin detention centre disturbing: Greens

Reports of asylum seekers self-harming at detention centre near Darwin disturbing, Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young says

ABC News Online

First posted Thu 16 Apr 2015, 5:25am

Updated Thu 16 Apr 2015, 8:56pm

Accounts of asylum seekers self-harming 25 times in one day at Wickham Point detention centre near Darwin are deeply distressing, Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young says.

Senator Hanson-Young, the party's immigration spokesperson, said she had heard of detainees going to horrific lengths to avoid being transferred to Nauru.

"A pregnant woman, five months pregnant, has attempted to take her own life in the last 24 hours," she said.

"Another woman, who has recently had a baby, was very, very fearful for what life will be like inside the detention centre."

A spokesperson from the Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network said he had been told there were 25 self-harm attempts inside the Wickham Point detention centre on Wednesday.

Police and paramedics were called to the centre following reports of a major disturbance and multiple incidences of self harm.

The ABC obtained footage from inside the detention centre showing some of Wednesday's events, including what appears to be a group of asylum seekers gathered on a stairwell while a woman lies on the ground screaming.

In a tweet, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection confirmed there had been a disturbance that resulted in minor damage and police attended but denied it was a riot.

A spokesperson for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said reports from refugee advocacy groups were "wildly exaggerated and inaccurate".

"There was minor property damage and there were no injuries to staff or detainees," the spokesperson said.

Senator Hanson-Young argued no asylum seekers should be sent offshore to the Australian immigration facility on Nauru while a Senate inquiry into that centre is underway.

She called on the Australian government to halt all asylum seeker transfers while the inquiry continues.

"While the parliamentary inquiry into the abuse claims on Nauru is happening, no child should be sent to Nauru, no woman should be sent to Nauru, and no mothers should be sent there," she said.

Senator Hanson-Young also said she was concerned by a proposed new law which would allow detention centre security guards to use force against asylum seekers and have immunity from any harm caused.

She said the legislation before Parliament granting new powers to guards would exacerbate problems in detention centres.

"This is excessive force powers, there are no checks and balances, and these are for people who are not qualified to deal with the sensitivities and depressing situations inside detention centres," she said.

Claims 70 people blocked entrance to centre

Two detainees told the ABC that Wednesday's unrest saw about 70 asylum seekers chanting "release us" while blockading the entrance of the centre.

In response to questions about the families, a spokesperson for the Immigration Department said it did not comment on transfer arrangements of individuals.

"Individuals are temporarily transferred from regional processing centres to Australia for a variety of reasons including medical treatment," it said in a statement.

"They are returned to the regional processing centre once they no longer need to be in Australia for that reason."

Mr Dutton's office has released a statement saying the Federal Government is committed to regional processing and resettlement arrangements.

"People desire an outcome to stay in Australia, but these people will never be settling in Australia and the Government has made that very clear," the statement said.

"The Government has made it very clear that this type of behaviour will not change their outcome."

Michael Franti joins vigil after performance cancelled

Meanwhile, American musician Michael Franti took part in a vigil outside the Wickham Point centre after a performance inside the facility was called off because of the unrest.

Mr Franti, who said he had been following the plight of people seeking asylum in Australia for several years, had received Immigration Department approval to perform inside the centre.

"We were waiting to get into the detention centre yesterday when this disturbance took place and we weren't able to see any of it because we were still behind the fence," he said.

"We had to wait a couple of hours then we were told we weren't going to be able to get in.

"We understand that there were a number of people who did acts of self mutilation because they were protesting some women being sent back to Nauru who have small children, and one woman who was pregnant."

While waiting to play for detainees, Mr Franti said he and his band played some music for some of the detention centre staff.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-16/asylum-seekers-at-wickham-point-in-nt-self-harming-greens/6396196>

25. Advocate says Immigration Minister was wrong on roof claims, injuries at Wickham Point detention centre

ABC News Online

By Avani Dias and Xavier La Canna

First posted Fri 17 Apr 2015, 5:23pm

Updated Fri 17 Apr 2015, 5:35pm

An asylum seeker advocate says new photographs taken from inside an immigration detention centre suggest the Government is either misrepresenting events or making statements without the full facts.

Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network's (DASSAN) Ben Pynt said photographs, which were sent to the ABC, appeared to contradict statements made by a spokeswoman for Federal Immigration Minister Peter Dutton on Thursday about unrest at the Wickham Point detention centre.

"He [the Minister] is either speaking without having the full facts, or deliberately misrepresenting the situation. There are no other options," Mr Pynt said.

His comments came after the photographs, which detainees said were taken on Thursday, showed two men on the roof at Wickham Point.

Mr Pynt said the photographs backed-up his comments about the nature of unrest in the Wickham Point detention centre in Darwin on Thursday.

He had said that two men took to the roof of the centre about 4:30pm (ACST) to protest the looming deportation of an Iranian woman who had a very small child to Nauru.

After the men were removed from the roof, five pregnant women also protested on the roof of the compound but later came down, he said.

Denials from government

In an email to the ABC at 6:44pm (ACST) on Thursday a spokeswoman for Mr Dutton denied Mr Pynt's version of events.

"Nobody have [sic] been on the roofs at Wickham Point IDF [Immigration Detention Facility] today," the spokeswoman said in the email.

"The disturbance that occurred yesterday at Wickham Point IDF was resolved last night. There was minor property damage and there were no injuries to staff or detainees. Reports attributed to refugee advocacy groups are wildly exaggerated and inaccurate ... Nobody have [sic] been on the roofs at Wickham Point IDF today. These are yet more mischievous and inaccurate claims made by advocates and detainees."

(Email from spokeswoman for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, Thursday, April 17)

"There were no injuries to staff or detainees," she said. In one image sent to the ABC from somebody believed to be inside the Wickham Point detention centre, a bare-chested man can be seen clearly walking on a roof while in another a different man also appears on the roof.

In a different photograph, a detainee shows what appears to be a cut on his forehead that has been treated.

The ABC cannot independently verify when or where the photographs were taken. In an email on Friday the spokeswoman for the Minister appeared to back away from earlier claims that nobody had been injured.

"A male detainee assaulted a female service provider staff member yesterday and she is receiving appropriate medical care," she said.

Spokeswoman defends comments

Asked whether the Minister wanted to retract comments that nobody had been on the roof during events at the centre on Thursday, the spokeswoman said that her statement on Thursday was accurate at the time it was written.

She said the Minister would not withdraw any of the comments in the email, which also criticised asylum seeker advocates for making "wildly exaggerated and inaccurate statements".

There has been unrest at the Wickham Point centre in recent days and on Wednesday police and paramedics were called to the centre.

An asylum seeker told the ABC the protests were sparked by the looming transfer of detainees to Nauru.

They said several asylum seekers, including pregnant women, were protesting on the roof of the facility and there was a serious fight between the guards and asylum seekers.

"One of the detainees had physical contact with them and the detainee just tried to strangle her," the asylum seeker said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-17/advocate-says-immigration-minister-wrong-on-wickham-point-claims/6402152>

26. Activist group leads rally, says Nauru, Manus Island detention centres must be closed

ABC News Online

By Matt Watson

First posted Thu 16 Apr 2015, 7:08am

Updated Thu 16 Apr 2015, 7:34am

The Refugee Action Collective has led a rally outside Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's office in Brisbane's north, saying the Federal Government must close detention centres on Nauru and Manus Island to prevent more human suffering.

The group's spokesman Mark Gillespie led the protest of about 40 people outside Mr Dutton's electorate office at Strathpine.

Mr Gillespie said there had been a long history of sexual and physical abuse on Nauru that the Government had ignored.

"It has just come to light recently that the Government has known about these allegations for over 17 months and failed to act on them," he said.

"They're only pretending to act on them now."

Mr Gillespie said people had a legal right to cross borders and claim asylum, and the detention centres must be closed.

"That right was not recognised by the Australian Government and they've sent them off to these offshore detention centres," he said.

"They deliberately made life very difficult for those people and tried to convince them to return into the hands of their persecutors.

"They should be allowed to come to Australia and have their claims for asylum heard in Australia.

"If they're found to be refugees they should be allowed to live in Australia."

He said the Federal Government wanted the Australian public to forget about Nauru and Manus Island.

"They want to hide the human cost of their very tough deterrent policy and we want to highlight the human cost," Mr Gillespie said.

"There are people in Nauru and Manus Island and they are suffering enormously.

"We think the abuse begins at the top and the abuse began when they sent people off to those detention centres.

"Increasingly the public is starting to see there are problems with these detention centres and we think the public to the extent that they support the Government [is] because they're given misinformation or no information."

He said the Government had a deliberate policy of keeping journalists away from the detention centres.

"It costs \$8,000 for a journalist to pay for a visa to go to Nauru," Mr Gillespie said.

"If the Australian people could see the human cost, I'm sure they would not support what is happening.

"When there are instances of abuse happening, it's our duty to highlight that."

Minister Dutton's office has been contacted for comment.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-16/calls-to-close--nauru-and-manus-island-detention-centres/6396462>

27. Protest at Immigration Minister's office over offshore detention

ABC News Online

By Matt Watson

Updated Thu 16 Apr 2015, 7:41pm

Refugee advocates have protested outside Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's Brisbane office over the treatment of refugees in offshore detention.

The Refugee Action Collective said the Government was not being honest about abuse occurring in detention centres.

"We think the Government is trying to keep it out of sight," spokesperson Mark Gillespie said.

Viktoria Vibhakar, who spent 10 months on Nauru working with Save the Children, quit because of the way the Government treated asylum seekers.

She said she found incidents of sexual and physical abuse confronting.

"Even more disturbing than that was the lack of appropriate response from the Department of Immigration to concerns that were repeatedly raised about the safety of the environment and the wellbeing of children and families," she said.

Ms Vibhakar wants a royal commission to have an objective look at the evidence of harm and the Government's response, and understand the extent of what is going on.

The Greens have encouraged anyone who has worked in the Nauru or Manus Island detention centres to speak out.

"To tell the Australian people what's really been going on," Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young said.

A spokeswoman for Mr Dutton said the department is implementing all 19 recommendations made by the Moss Review, which was set up to investigate allegations of sexual and physical assault on asylum seekers.

The review said there was no information to prove those allegations.

'Government knew of abuse in 2013'

Ms Vibhakar said she found the extreme deprivation of the detention environment challenging.

Her role was to case manage a group of families with complex needs, including investigating and reporting on child protection issues in the camp.

Ms Vibhakar said she wasn't interviewed by the Government during the Moss inquiry and she suspects it was because the Government was aware that people were being abused.

"The first incident of abuse occurred and was substantiated in November 2013 and that was the sexual assault of a boy," she said.

"For the Government to act as if they have a zero tolerance for the sexual abuse of children is absolutely untrue.

"It does not reflect the manner in which they treated people on Nauru.

"For Minister Dutton to state that Scott Morrison was only aware of these allegations in late last year, I believe that can be refuted very quickly."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-16/protest-at-immigration-ministers-office-over-offshore-detention/6398928>

28. Michael Franti joins call to 'stop the plane' of asylum seekers to Nauru

Call by outspoken US musician to cease transfers from Australia come after reports of detainees protesting and acts of self-harm at Darwin detention centre

The Guardian
Helen Davidson in Darwin
Thursday 16 April 2015 17.21 AEST

US musician Michael Franti has spoken out against Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, amid calls for the government to "stop the plane" and cease transfers offshore to Nauru detention centre.

The call from the outspoken singer – who is touring Australia – as well as refugee advocates and the Australian Greens came after Northern Territory police and paramedics were called to Darwin's Wickham Point detention centre on Wednesday night, responding to a detainee protest which allegedly involved breaking down an internal fence.

Guardian Australia and other media were contacted by people inside the centre to say there had been acts of self-harm by detainees, including a woman who is five months pregnant. They said a large group of detainees had broken through a fence between a section of the family compound and an interview area where some people were being held.

The group then sat on the ground in protest against what they believed were impending transfers of at least two families, including the pregnant woman and her husband to Nauru, one source said.

Photos obtained by the ABC show overturned bins and dozens of people gathered at a fence.

"The people are so angry and they are trying to break the fences and help them," said one person at the centre, adding the families "are afraid of rape and abuse in Nauru".

Franti and his band Spearhead, who have been touring the country following their appearance at Bluesfest, were expected to perform for detainees at the centre on Wednesday, but were unable to go inside due to the disturbance, he told Guardian Australia.

"As we were waiting we were told there had been some kind of a disturbance there and we weren't sure if we were going to be able to get in," he said, adding that the band members listened to news updates on the situation on local radio, including reports of self-harm, while they waited in an administration area.

The musician said it did not make sense to send families to Nauru "where there had been many reports of alleged sexual abuse".

The Moss report released last month detailed credible evidence of physical and sexual abuse of asylum seekers – including of children – at the Australian-run detention facility on Nauru.

"I call on the minister to stop the plane from flying tonight," Australian Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said on Thursday.

"While there is an ongoing review into the circumstances of abuse in Nauru, while there is a parliamentary inquiry under way, it is totally inappropriate for the minister to continue to send families there."

A spokeswoman for the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, on Thursday disputed the detainees' claims, and told the Australian no pregnant woman was due to be transferred.

The incident involved minor property damage and no staff or detainees were injured, said the spokeswoman, although she did not provide comment on reported instances of self-harm.

The Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (Dassan) disputed the government's characterisation of the incident as minor, and said in a statement it was "a widespread protest against the transfer of especially vulnerable people to Nauru".

The group also called for a moratorium on offshore transfers until recommendations from the Moss report into Nauru and the Cornall review into Manus Island were acted on.

The pregnant woman at the centre of the protest action is among more than 19 detainees who have allegedly self-harmed or attempted suicide in recent weeks at Wickham Point, allegedly out of fear of transfer to Nauru. An older Iranian woman who had witnessed one incident had a heart attack and was transported to hospital, said Ben Pynt, a spokesman for Dassan.

More than 15 men have also engaged in hunger strikes since December last year, protesting against the rejection of their asylum claims and indefinite detention, with one becoming critically ill.

St John Ambulance service confirmed it had been called out to the centre this week, but spokesman Craig Garraway, said any further information about patients would have to come from the Department of Immigration.

Members of the police metropolitan patrol group (MPG) and the dog squad were sent in on Wednesday afternoon.

Advocates said the fire department also attended, but a spokeswoman for NT police, fire and emergency services could not confirm.

The immigration department directed Guardian Australia's queries to tweets published on Wednesday evening, and said it had nothing more to add.

"Reports of a riot at Wickham Pt IDC are incorrect," read the tweets. "A disturbance occurred involving detainees that resulted in minor property damage. Police are attending the facility in accordance with normal operating procedure."

Cutbacks to medical services at the centre, which no longer operate at night, have also contributed to rising tensions at Wickham Point, and have put a strain on local ambulance services, the NT News reported.

Franti told Guardian Australia Wednesday's experience at the Darwin facility was an "eye-opener".

"I've been to a lot of places in the world where there is intense conflict taking place, everywhere from Iraq 11 months after the war started there, to Israel, Palestine, Gaza, and I've played in prisons many many times in America, in some of the roughest prisons like Folsom, and San Quentin prisons. But I've never been anywhere where people were detained indefinitely without a crime," Franti said.

"[In] this situation, especially with families, it's hard for me to understand it, to get my head around it, also to understand why anyone would be considering sending families back to a detention centre where there had been many reports of alleged sexual abuse and sexual abuse of children."

Franti also said he had met some asylum seekers in Brisbane who had family on Nauru.

"Just hearing from them, they told me it wasn't so much the conditions in which they were held – they learned to live within that system – but the fear of not knowing when or if they would ever be released and where they would end up."

Following Franti's unsuccessful attempt to perform for the Wickham Point detainees, they joined a small vigil outside in view of the recently closed Blaydin point facility nearby.

"I was sitting there looking at it and thinking that someday all of these facilities will be closed down and will be historical relics of a dark time in history, like the detention centres I visited in California that were there for interning Japanese Americans in world war two," he said.

"Hopefully at some point in our near future these places will be closed down and we'll have a plaque on them that this is the place that we remember a bad mark on our history."

Franti said the band had offered to return at any time while they were in Darwin.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/16/michael-franti-joins-call-stop-australia-transferring-asylum-seekers-nauru>

29. Fresh protests over Nauru transfers reported at Darwin detention centre

Detainees at Wickham Point said to have gone on to the roof of a building, a day after police were called to quell unrest

The Guardian
Helen Davidson in Darwin
Thursday 16 April 2015 18.33 AEST

New protests reportedly began at Darwin's Wickham Point detention centre on Thursday, just a day after police and paramedics were called out in response to up to 50 detainees allegedly breaking down a fence to demonstrate against transfers to Nauru.

Unconfirmed reports, including from people inside the centre, said a number of detainees went on to the roof of a building inside the family compound of the centre.

Detainees have been protesting against transfers – which usually take place on Thursday nights – of people, including families, to Nauru.

One told Guardian Australia the people on the roof on Thursday wanted to see an immigration manager to ask "why they intended to send back a pregnant woman to Nauru".

NT police were unable to confirm if they had been called out to the centre on Thursday afternoon.

Guardian Australia and other media were contacted on Wednesday by people inside the centre to say there had been numerous acts of self-harm by detainees, including a woman who is five months pregnant. They said a large group of

detainees had broken through a fence between a section of the family compound and an interview area where some people were being held.

The group then sat on the ground in protest against what they believed were impending transfers of at least two families, including the pregnant woman and her husband, to Nauru, one source said.

Photos obtained by the ABC showed overturned bins and dozens of people gathered at a fence.

The department of immigration disputed the detainees' claims and said there was never any scheduled transfer of a pregnant woman.

A spokesman for the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, told ABC local radio earlier the disturbance had been resolved on Wednesday night.

"There was minor property damage and there were no injuries to staff or detainees. Reports attributed to refugee advocacy groups are wildly exaggerated and inaccurate."

Earlier on Thursday the Greens and asylum seeker advocates called on the government to halt transfers to Nauru until recommendations from the Moss review (into allegations of sexual and physical assaults on Nauru) and Cornall review (into the death of Reza Barati on Manus Island) were acted on.

A spokeswoman for NT police told Guardian Australia that police attended Wickham Point at the request of security engaged by the department of immigration.

She said the "Disturbance at location was not to a level that required a handover to police, so police left at approx 6pm".

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/16/fresh-protests-reported-darwin-wickham-point-detention-centre>

30. MEDIA RELEASE: New babies returned from Darwin to Nauru

Saturday April 18, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

More than 20, comprising six families and three single men have been transported to Nauru after being seized and handcuffed around 4am Saturday 18 April from Darwin's Wickham Point detention centre.

Among the families are three with new babies - two Iranian families with a three month old baby and a Nepalese family, whose baby is also three months old.

There were distressing scenes in, and out of, detention on Nauru as news of the returns spread.

Asylum seekers and refugees are concerned for the welfare of the babies who will be expected to survive in the same tents as their families, in the heat, humidity and water shortages of detention centre.

"The transfer of the families breaks an understanding brokered with the Immigration department, after protests on Thursday night that no families would be transferred to Darwin this week," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The AMA already regard the mandatory detention of children as child abuse. Given the appalling conditions on Nauru and the recently confirmed reports of sexual and physical assaults on women and children on Nauru, Peter Dutton is twice guilty."

Attached photo is from refugee protest on Nauru on Friday 17 April, at which Cambodia and the safety of women and children were key issues.

"Close Nauru" is a central demand of Sydney's Welcome Refugee rally to be held tomorrow when thousands are expected to rally and march - full details below.

"The three babies returned are three more reasons to protest for an end to offshore processing," Rintoul said.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

31. Up to 20 detainees removed from Wickham Point detention centre overnight, refugee advocates say

ABC News Online

First posted Sat 18 Apr 2015, 2:09pm

Updated Sat 18 Apr 2015, 5:51pm

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has hit out at claims detainees have been removed from a detention centre near Darwin, saying the reports were "inaccurate".

A detainee in the centre and refugee advocates had claimed up to 20 detainees had been removed from the Wickham Point detention centre following mass protests in recent days.

The asylum seeker, who spoke anonymously, could not confirm whether the group included the mother and young child whose scheduled transfer to Nauru had reportedly sparked the first protest on Wednesday.

She told the ABC that overnight on Friday she had heard the screaming of a man and a woman, and detainees were told to stay inside their rooms.

Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (DASSAN) spokesman Ben Pynt said detainees had told him the group included up to three families.

"At 5am the emergency response team entered the family compound and people were told to stay inside their rooms.

"At that point up to 20 people were removed from the compound.

"We're unsure exactly where they've been taken.

"We're fearful some of them have been removed from Nauru."

A spokesperson for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said there had been no transfers to Nauru from the Wickham Point immigration detention facility at that time.

"Actions early today [Saturday] were undertaken to respond to the recent instances of disruptive behaviour at the Wickham Point IDC earlier this week," the spokesperson said.

"The security and good order of immigration detention facilities is vital in maintaining the safety of detainees, staff and visitors."

People who were brought to Australia from a regional processing centre for medical reasons were clearly informed they would be returned to the centre to continue their refugee assessment and processing, the spokesperson said.

"Those who are subject to regional processing arrangements will have their claims assessed in that way and will never be settled in Australia," the spokesperson said.

"Information supplied to the media by advocates, detainees and others who do not have first-hand factual information and are motivated to undermine the clearly stated policy of the Australian Government, and the stability of safe and secure immigration detention arrangements, should be treated with a great deal of caution."

Mr Pynt said there had been four more instances of attempted suicide among detainees that night.

"We're trying to calm people down as we speak to them," he said.

"We're trying to tell them the only way we can help them is if they stay alive.

"We need them to stay calm as we know violence is absolutely the wrong way to go.

"Self-harm is the wrong way to go and the Department does not respond kindly to what it sees as emotional blackmail."

Removal follows days of protest and reports of self-harm

The Wickham Point detention centre erupted with protest on Wednesday when there were reports up to 70 asylum seekers chanted "release us" and blockaded the entrance of the centre.

On Thursday, the Immigration Department confirmed there had been a disturbance that resulted in minor damage but denied it was a riot.

On that day five pregnant asylum seekers briefly took to the roof of the detention centre and made threats to burn down the facility amid anger over plans to deport a woman with a young child to Nauru, according to refugee advocates.

In recent weeks refugee advocates had been warning of a decline in mental health and an increase in incidences of self-harm at the centre.

A spokesperson from DASSAN said he had been told there were 25 self-harm attempts inside the Wickham Point detention centre on Wednesday.

This figure has also not been confirmed by the Immigration Department.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-18/up-to-20-asylum-seekers-removed-wickham-point-detention-centre/6403200>

32. Darwin detention centre families taken to Nauru in early hours, say advocates

Asylum seekers at the centre of a week of protests and incidents of self-harm at Wickham Point detention centre reportedly removed after 5am on Saturday

The Guardian
Helen Davidson in Darwin
Saturday 18 April 2015 16.15 AEST

Families at the centre of protests inside a Darwin detention centre have been transferred to Nauru in the early hours of Saturday morning, advocates and detainees say.

The reports of the transfer follow a week which saw dozens of people protest inside the Wickham Point facility, and numerous instances of self harm and alleged suicide attempts.

Spokesman for the Darwin asylum seeker support and advocacy network (Dassan), Ben Pynt told Guardian Australia that after protests began for the second time on Thursday transfers to Nauru were cancelled. People who had been separated were returned to their usual accommodation in the family compound at Wickham Point, a claim also made by a detention centre source.

However on Saturday morning they told Guardian Australia several people including families with at least one three-month-old baby were put on a flight out sometime after 5am.

It's not known how many people may have been transferred out of Darwin, but a flight from Brisbane to Nauru left at 7am.

The centre had been on lockdown on Friday night, Guardian Australia was told. Guards were not allowing anyone to leave their rooms, which has not been the case during the past year at least.

One person reported hearing a woman screaming and items being smashed somewhere in the centre in the early hours of Saturday morning.

The immigration department did not respond to a request for comment.

An NT police spokesman told Guardian Australia: "police assisted in an operation out there, but the nature of the operation or what it was all about needs to come from the immigration department."

He could not confirm whether the assistance related to further protests or not. Police media have been previously able to confirm details about call outs to the protests.

Northern Territory police had been called out to respond to unrest at the centre over recent days, including the first protest on Wednesday, in which an internal fence was allegedly broken down so detainees could stage a sit in.

The protesters were demonstrating against what they believed were imminent transfers of families to Nauru, including a woman who is five months pregnant. Some detainees had been separated into rooms at the centre, which is widely considered a sign of a transfer in the next day or two.

The department of immigration said there was never a scheduled transfer of a pregnant woman from the centre.

Thursday's incident included a number of people allegedly on a roof at Wickham Point, a claim dismissed by a spokeswoman for immigration minister Peter Dutton as "mischievous and inaccurate claims made by advocates and detainees" in a statement to the ABC.

A spokeswoman for NT police told Guardian Australia that police attended Wickham Point on Thursday at the request of security engaged by the department of immigration.

She said the "disturbance at location was not to a level that required a handover to police, so police left at approx 6pm".

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/18/darwin-detention-centre-families-taken-to-nauru-in-early-hours-say-advocates>

33. Iranians in Australia beg Government to abandon forced repatriation deal with Tehran

ABC Radio CAF - The World Today
Mandie Sami
Monday, April 13, 2015 12:20:00

BRENDAN TREMBATH: Iranians living in Australia have condemned the Australian Government's attempt to strike a deal with Tehran to take back Iranian asylum seekers not found to be refugees.

The Iranians say forcing people to return to Iran is a potential death sentence.

Personal appeals have been made to Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, who is due to arrive in Iran this week.

Mandie Sami reports.

MANDIE SAMI: When you leave Iran to seek asylum elsewhere, you're not welcome back.

The Iranian government has a long-standing practice of not accepting failed asylum seekers.

But at the weekend Prime Minister Tony Abbott confirmed Australia is trying to strike a deal with Iran to change that.

TONY ABBOTT: It's important that those that are found not to be refugees go home, and this is where we'll be talking to the Iranian government about taking back Iranian citizens because they belong in Iran.

MANDIE SAMI: Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop is due to arrive in Iran this week to lobby the Iranian government.

Twenty-two-year-old old Naz Almasi says that's a mistake.

NAZ ALMASI: Julie Bishop and Tony Abbott, please don't send us to death, you're going to sentence us to death with sending us back to Iran.

MANDIE SAMI: Naz Almazi and her family fled Iran two years ago, fearing persecution because of their political views.

She's currently on a bridging visa in Melbourne after having spent four months in a detention centre.

Ms Almazi says it's important Australians understand that just because someone's claim for asylum is rejected, it doesn't mean they're safe from persecution.

NAZ ALMASI: It depends on the court, it depends on the judge, it depends on if you have the lawyer, it depends on if you were ready, if you could speak clearly or not.

So if you haven't been successful it doesn't mean you're not a refugee, you're still in danger.

If they deport them to Iran, who can guarantee that the Iranian government doesn't hang them or torture them, because that's the current situation of the Iranian government.

They don't care how old are you, they just do whatever they want with you.

MANDIE SAMI: What would happen to you if you were sent back?

NAZ ALMASI: I can say that the minimum thing they will do is taking me to prison, but the maximum is going to be torture, it's going to be raping, it's going to be hanging, it's going to be everything you know of and everything you don't know.

MANDIE SAMI: Like Ms Almazi, Reza Yarahmadi also fled Iran, but his family is still there.

The 30-year-old says he had to leave after realising that he would never be treated as a human being if he stayed.

REZA YARAHMADI: I was born in Iran, I was grown up in Iran, but I was not eligible for citizenship because Iran was saying that you are not Iranian, you are Iraqi, you need to go back to your country Iraq.

And then, I was born in Iran, and then I went to Iraq in 2007 and I was rejected by government there, they said well you're not Iraqi, you're Iranian, you should go back to Iran.

Without eligible for citizenship I didn't have any right home I was in Iran.

I couldn't go to school, like every other kid, couldn't go to hospital if I was sick, no health services, not the justice, couldn't get married, couldn't do anything.

I was not counted as a human.

MANDIE SAMI: Reza Yarahmadi has also made a direct appeal to the government.

REZA YARAHMADI: There are many young people no one knows where they are, they've been taken by police, they've been taken by (inaudible), they've been taken by government.

God knows what's going to happen to the people if they go back to Iran.

MANDI SAMI: What do you want to say to Tony Abbott and Julie Bishop about making this deal?

REZA YARAHMADI: Well, that is the worst thing Julie Bishop and Tony Abbott can do.

And I just want to say to Tony Abbott, just put your feet in their shoes, just think one second if you were one of those asylum seekers.

We've been persecuted by our government, otherwise we would not leave our families. We wouldn't put our life at risk, come by a leaky boat from Indonesia to Australia.

I would not do that. No one else would do that if they were happy in their life, in their country.

MANDIE SAMI: Naz Almasi and Reza Yarahmadi's views are backed by Chris Breen from the Refugee Action Collective.

He says Julie Bishop is playing with people's lives.

CHRIS BREEN: She should speak to some of the Iranian asylum seekers, and the Iranian community in Australia, who have experienced the persecution first hand, who have experienced the threats first hand.

She would be risking lives if she was successful in this endeavour.

MANDIE SAMI: But refugee advocates won't find support from the Labor Opposition.

Leader Bill Shorten says he supports returning unsuccessful asylum seekers to their home country, as long as Australia meets its obligations under international law.

BRENDAN TREMBATH: Mandie Sami reporting.

<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2015/s4215271.htm>

34. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop opens asylum seeker talks with Iran

Sydney Morning Herald
April 19, 2015 - 1:56AM
Daniel Flitton

Iran has agreed to send officials to Australia for talks that Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop hopes will eventually lead to a deal for sending back Iranian asylum seekers deemed not to be refugees.

Ms Bishop met Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, in Tehran on Saturday in the first visit by an Australian minister to the Islamic Republic of Iran in more than a decade.

The conflict in neighbouring Iraq was also a major theme of the talks, with Dr Zarif declaring aerial bombardment alone would not defeat extremists from Islamic State.

Iran is playing a major role in the war in Iraq, opening supporting Shia militia fighting in the country against Islamic State, but Dr Zarif said any action was taken with co-ordination of Iraq's government.

Ms Bishop was keen to stress the 300 Australian troops sent to Iraq last week would not take part in combat but train Iraqi forces, and the deployment had a two-year timeframe.

Ms Bishop described the talks as positive, and said Iran had agreed to what she called a "consular dialogue" on Iranians in Australia.

"I have invited Iranian officials to visit Australia as soon as possible so that we can continue the discussion and continue the positive steps we have taken today," Ms Bishop said.

More than 20 per cent of asylum seekers held in immigration detention are from Iran, with thousands more living on bridging visas in the community waiting the outcome of their refugee claims.

Iran has so far refused to accept the forced return of asylum seekers.

Dr Zarif said Iran had agreed to continue talks and Iran's ministry for foreign affairs spokeswoman, Marzieh Afkham, later confirmed officials would go to Australia.

Ms Afkham said Iran remained opposed to forced return of its citizens on principle, but did not wish to put an end to talks before they start.

Dr Zarif said the relationship with Australia had "ups and downs" but it was time to take the relationship to a higher level.

Ms Bishop was expected to meet Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani, later on Saturday, followed by members of Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

The Foreign Affairs Minister is setting a new tone for Australia's ties with Iran, breaking with years of sour suspicions over Tehran's nuclear program to emphasise "common purpose" in defeating Islamic State militants in Iraq. "I believed it was time for an Australian foreign minister to be in Iran," she told reporters.

Her visit follows what has been seen as a potential breakthrough this month in nuclear talks between Iran and the major powers – and is a rarity for any Western politician.

"One of the most significant and vital issues to discuss is the situation in Iraq and our involvement there, and our common purpose with Iran in defeating Daesh," Ms Bishop said – using the alternative name for Islamic State.

But the warming relations do not yet extend to lifting Australia's sanctions on Iran – with a decision linked to wider United Nations sanctions and the outcome of nuclear talks after a framework agreement was struck this month ahead of a June 30 deadline for a final deal.

"The progress that has been made on the framework agreement will change a number of countries' relationship with Iran in the coming months or years," Ms Bishop said.

Ms Bishop said Australia and Iran had a chance to engage on education and trade.

But in response to criticism from Israel and with the US over the nuclear talks, she said the bottom line of any deal was Iran would not develop a nuclear weapon.

Ms Bishop elected to don a headscarf arriving in Tehran – a covering the local morality police force on all Iranian women.

To avoid any awkward moments, protocol also dictates Ms Bishop not extend a hand to shake when meeting male dignitaries.

Ms Bishop said wearing the scarf, which she also covered with a hat, was not an imposition.

"As a matter of fact I wear scarves and hats and headgear quite often as part of my everyday wear," she said.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/foreign-minister-julie-bishop-opens-asylum-seeker-talks-with-iran-20150418-1mny6s.html>

35. Iranian ambassador plays down Julie Bishop's chances of striking deal to repatriate asylum seekers

ABC Radio CAF - The World Today

By Mandie Sami and staff

Posted Thu 16 Apr 2015, 1:58pm

Iran's ambassador to Australia has played down Foreign Minister Julie Bishop's chances of persuading Tehran to take back asylum seekers.

Ms Bishop, who is due to arrive in Iran tomorrow, is expected to press for a deal to forcibly repatriate Iranian asylum seekers who have failed to obtain refugee status in Australia.

The visit will see the first direct high-level talks between Australia and Tehran in more than a decade.

But Iranian ambassador Abdolhossein Vahaji has already indicated his country is unlikely to agree.

"We cannot put any pressure and impose any forces on them in order to send them back to Iran," he said.

"This is against the law and regulation and we cannot [do it] according to human rights [laws].

"Asylum seekers, as a general [principle], have the right to decide where to live... and they are the ones [who] have to make [the] decision whether they want to go back to any country."

International security and nuclear proliferation specialist Dr Maria Rost Rublee says any agreements between Australia and Iran could be jeopardised if Iran does not abide by the conditions of its proposed nuclear deal with Western powers.

World powers agreed with Iran this month on the framework of a deal to rein in its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions.

"Let's say Julie Bishop says OK, we're going to lift those sanctions next week or something like that," Dr Rublee said.

"If Iran ends up backing out of this deal, those sanctions will be back on quickly.

"And so I do think Julie Bishop will be successful in saying look, you really need to do this. We want to engage with you, you know, we've had diplomatic relations with you for almost 50 years and we want to tell you that we're going to be really ready to engage with you, but we need you to sign this deal.

"I think that will be a successful message."

Trade and security high on the agenda during Tehran visit

Ms Bishop's trip will be the first visit to Iran from a high-level Western official since the US and five other nations struck a preliminary deal with Tehran on its nuclear program.

Dr Rublee said the trip was being viewed as a "big deal" for both Australia and Iran.

"First of all, for Australia this is the first time in more than 10 years that you've had the Foreign Minister visit Iran. Australia would love to reengage on trade, because with Chinese growth slowing, Australia is very interested in expanding its trade with other countries," she said.

"Australia and Iran had a very good trading relationship in the past before the Iranian Revolution."

Dr Rublee said other countries would be watching Ms Bishop's visit.

"Both for the US and for Iran, both countries have to sell this nuclear agreement domestically and there could be problems in both countries," she said.

"So both countries will be able to point to this Australian trip as leverage. [Barack] Obama is going to say look, you know, Australia is engaging with Iran, they've started to drop their sanctions. If we don't do this then it's our industry that's going to be left out. And that's something Obama can use to persuade the Republicans in Congress - if Australia's doing it, we can feel comfortable with it as well."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-16/iran-ambassador-plays-down-chances-of-deal-on-asylum-seekers/6398040>

36. Refused asylum seekers face personal data disclosure by immigration department

Departmental manual says it is lawful for it to disclose details without the consent of refused asylum seekers who are to be involuntarily deported

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Monday 13 April 2015 17.53 AEST

Refused asylum seekers can have their personal information disclosed to foreign governments in order to obtain travel documents if they are involuntarily deported, according to an immigration department manual.

The immigration department's manual for "Returns and removals" for asylum seekers says it is lawful for the agency to disclose the information even if the individuals do not give their consent.

The September 2014 manual, which details how the federal government deports refused asylum seekers, both voluntarily and involuntarily, was obtained by Guardian Australia through court proceedings.

The federal government is attempting to secure a deal with Iran that would allow the involuntary return of refused asylum seekers, which Iran has previously not accepted.

Australia has adopted a controversial practice of approaching foreign governments for travel documents for refused asylum seekers. The practice has raised concerns because the very fact an asylum seeker has applied for protection can give rise to a fresh asylum claim (known as a “sur place claim”) if the foreign government persecutes them for having sought asylum.

This is acknowledged in the removal manual, which states that “under no circumstances should they disclose any information indicating any previous PV [protection visa] applications (or any details of protection claims)”.

The Privacy Act prohibits the disclosure of personal information, but the manual says the department can get around this because the Migration Act “impliedly authorises” the department to pass on details to foreign governments to allow a person to be deported.

“Therefore, the disclosure of personal information for the purposes of obtaining a travel document would be permissible,” it says.

It also suggests the disclosure is legal if the asylum seeker has signed a form 1442i, which says that the department can contact foreign embassies and high commissions.

The policy generally adopts a view that removals can only occur once a claim for protection in Australia has been refused, but it contains several caveats. The document reveals that:

- Removal officers can plan the removal of a person who is living in the community on a certain type of bridging visa.
- A direction from the family court that an asylum seeker should have access to a child in Australia does not override the department’s obligation to remove the asylum seeker.
- A request for ministerial intervention – which can allow an asylum seeker to reodge a protection claim with the minister’s permission – will be no barrier to involuntary deportation as long as it has the assent of the assistant secretary of the onshore protection division.
- When asylum seekers make complaints to the Australian Human Rights Commission, privacy commissioner or commonwealth ombudsman the process of removal will be halted only on a “case by case” basis.
- The department reserves the right to override the rules preventing deportation if the person presents a risk of extreme harm to themselves or others, or where they have a history of “serial and vexatious litigation”.
- The department can refuse to allow a person being involuntarily deported to speak to a legal representative if it would “unduly delay or jeopardise” the removal.

Guardian Australia has previously reported that Australia has contacted the Syrian embassy before deporting refused asylum seekers who voluntarily agree to return.

The policy was updated the day after the Migration Legislation Amendment (no 1) Act was passed in federal parliament in September. It says it was reissued primarily to “ensure that an application for a bridging visa is not an impediment to the exercise of the s198 power to remove an unlawful non-citizen who is a detainee”.

It adds that it preserves the policy position that an asylum seeker cannot be removed “while they are entitled to apply for a substantive visa”.

The policy encourages removal officers to treat asylum seekers with dignity throughout the process, and to take into account all the circumstances of their case in determining how the removal should be managed.

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, said on Monday in relation to the potential deal with Iran: “The federal government is working with a lot of countries to provide returns for people who have come here illegally.

“We have one of the proudest records in terms of the number of people we settle through the refugee and the humanitarian programs each year.”

A spokeswoman from the immigration department said: “For removal purposes, the department is authorised under s198 of the Migration Act 1958 to disclose personal information, as necessary, in order to effect the removal of an unlawful non-citizen from Australia.

“This disclosure is permissible under Australian Privacy Principle (APP) 6.2(b), if required, for the purposes of obtaining a travel document.

“Any removal activity is assessed on its own merits prior to any action taken.”

- This article was amended on 13 April 2015 to apply the Guardian style for people who have been refused asylum, which is “refused asylum seekers”.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/13/failed-asylum-seekers-face-personal-data-disclosure-by-immigration-department>

37. Manus Island guard stood down after posts endorsing Reclaim Australia and anti-halal views

Facebook posts by detention centre guard John Akrigg include article suggesting Muslims ‘can’t be Australians’

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Monday 13 April 2015 12.59 AEST

A guard at the Manus Island detention centre who posted links on Facebook to Reclaim Australia and a boycott of halal certified foods has been stood down pending an investigation.

John Akrigg was contracted by Wilson Security on behalf of Transfield Services to work on Nauru in February 2014, and recently listed a change in his employment to the Manus Island detention centre.

Over the past 12 months he has posted several articles and comments that appear to indicate support for a campaign to boycott halal food and stem Islamic immigration to Australia. Several posts are images sourced from pages hosted by Reclaim Australia, which recently led protests across the country against halal certification, sharia law and increased Muslim immigration.

A spokesman from the immigration department confirmed an investigation was under way. .

“The department expects service provider staff to act appropriately and with integrity in all their dealings with the people in their care. Inappropriate use of social media channels will not be tolerated, particularly if it involves offensive material,” he said.

“The department’s service providers have strong social media policies. Their staff will be stood down from employment while any allegation involving a breach of these policies is investigated. This has happened in this case.”

In one post Akrigg shared an image that depicted a pig on a plane, with the words: “In response to continued threats from Muslim hijackers, the Civil Aviation Authority has regulated that large male pigs be placed on all commercial passenger airlines. So sit back, relax and enjoy a Muslim free flight.”

In another post, Akrigg shared a petition he signed supporting the banning of halal certification in Australia. At the top of the post he wrote, “I want them to assimilate, but they won’t”.

A further post from the “Australian – love it, or leave” page depicted a fighter jet in flight with the words “Aussie halal delivery service ... get it while it’s hot.”

Another post he shared from the islam4infidels website said, “Moslems cannot be Australians”.

In a December post he said, “Me in my infidels shirt, isn’t that what we are? I hope this offends some religious nutcases as it seems to do.” An emoji of a bomb is pictured next to the comment.

The comments appear to be in breach of a new social media policy instituted by Transfield Services, which manages the offshore detention centres and subcontracts security services to Wilson Security.

The policy states that a worker must not post on social media any material which “may damage the business or reputation of Transfield Services, or injure its relationship with the department”.

Transfield Services “will treat any breaches of this policy very seriously. A breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including instant dismissal,” the policy says.

Comment has been sought from Transfield and Wilson.

In 2014, several guards on Manus Island ridiculed an asylum seeker who swallowed a pair of nail clippers in a self-harm attempt. The guards were all dismissed by the private contractor then managing the centre, G4S Security.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/13/manus-island-guard-expresses-reclaim-australia-and-anti-halal-sentiment>

37. Detention centre guards suspended over photo with Pauline Hanson at rally

Eight members of the 'emergency response team' at the Nauru detention centre have been suspended following photo taken at Reclaim Australia rally

The Guardian
Joshua Robertson in Brisbane
Tuesday 14 April 2015 20.01 AEST

Eight guards from Nauru detention centre have been suspended after they posed for a photograph with Pauline Hanson at a Reclaim Australia rally which was later posted on Facebook.

The members of the "emergency response team" at Nauru, who were hired on the basis of their cultural "sensitivity", have been stood down pending an investigation into their social media use.

The guards had appeared to endorse Hanson's anti-immigration politics, and some promoted the Reclaim Australia movement and posted anti-Islam slurs online.

A former employee for Transfield subcontractor Wilson Security told Guardian Australia the guards' online posts provided a glimpse of the mindset of ex-defence force personnel who "frequently referred to asylum seekers in their care as 'the enemy'".

This included Facebook posts of material comparing Islam to Nazism, accusing companies from Cadbury to Krispy Kreme of supporting terrorism by having products certified as Halal, and the embrace of the slogan "infidels" through t-shirts and tattoos.

A spokesman for the detention centre operator Transfield Services, which employed the men, said the matters were "very concerning and not at all what we expect of our staff".

It follows Transfield's suspension on Monday of another guard at the Manus Island detention centre who posted links to Reclaim Australia and the boycott halal movements on Facebook.

The Nauru guards posed with Hanson, the controversial former federal MP and One Nation founder who has long called for immigration restrictions, after she spoke at the rally in Brisbane on 4 April.

The rally was one of a string of nationwide events protesting the influence of Islam in Australia, conflating the religion with violent extremism and provoking counter protests by self-described anti-racist groups.

One of the guards, Simon Scott, posted the group photo with Hanson on his Facebook page with the comment: "What more can I say."

Another guard, Graham Motley, a veteran of a Royal Australian Regiment task force that mentored soldiers in Afghanistan, commented under the post: "Royal Australian Infidels".

Two others in the photo, Beau James and Dann Connors, sport T-shirts bearing the word "infidel".

Another guard, Harley Levanic, revealed on Facebook his new neck tattoo bearing the same word. James commented on the picture: "Welcome to the gang... Well done old son. Looks awesome."

A day before the rally, James, tagged a post likening Muslims to Germans who enabled the rise of Nazis through inaction, with the comment: "See yas tomoz boys!!! Bring your pitch forks."

Another guard, Simon Scott, posts on the same day: "Let me know when we are meeting in the city. I need someone to help me with a bag of ammonium nitrate."

Last week, Connors posted about a visit to the Lindt cafe in Sydney where a siege in December 2014 ended in the deaths of self-proclaimed jihadist Man Haron Monis and two hostages. Scott responded: "Did you smell dead joondie in there?" "Joondie", derived from the Arabic word for soldier, is a slang term used by Australian defence personnel to refer to the Taliban.

Last month Scott endorsed a boycott on Halal products, saying: "Don't be UnAustralian and buy these products. Let the filthy sub human genetic Islamic filth have it."

Seven of the eight men suspended – Levanic, James, Connors, Scott, Graham Motley, Cody Allen, and Alan Hartley – are understood to be former military personnel.

Motley served in Afghanistan as part of a mentoring task force led by the 8/9th battalion, Royal Australian Regiment from Brisbane. He told the Toowoomba chronicle in 2012 that the work had given him a better understanding of Afghanistan culture.

The eighth is Jamie Scannell, whose comment on the Hanson photo was: "Pauline Hanson's Protection Team. Great photo boys."

Connors and Hartley both posted on Facebook before the rally urging people to attend.

Weeks earlier, Connors linked to a story about an atrocity about a woman beaten to death in Afghanistan, commenting: "Theres alot (sic) of reasons for why I think islam is a disgusting and evil religion... Absolutely disgusting and needs to stay out of our country."

Levanic responds: "In our country? It should be abolished world would (sic)!"

The team is trained in riot control but also called in to deal with "incidents" in the Nauru centre, from self harm to disputes between asylum seekers.

Many of the asylum seekers on Nauru are Muslims from the Middle East and parts of Asia.

In a job advertisement last year for "offshore security specialists" including emergency response officers, Wilson Security said that "successful applicants will ... be culturally sensitive" while those "with (foreign) language skills are highly regarded".

A spokesman for Transfield Services told Guardian Australia that all eight men were stood down while the company investigates whether they were in violation of a new social media policy.

"These matters are very concerning and not at all what we expect of our staff," the spokesman said.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said it expected "service provider staff to act appropriately and with integrity in all their dealings with the people in their care".

"Inappropriate use of social media channels will not be tolerated, particularly if it involves offensive material," she said.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/14/detention-centre-guards-suspended-over-photo-with-pauline-hanson-at-rally>

38. Eight Nauru guards suspended over racist posts on social media

Brisbane Times
April 15, 2015 - 11:52AM
Heath Aston

Eight security guards from Nauru detention centre who attended a recent Reclaim Australia rally and posted a series of anti-Islamic rants on social media, have been stood down and face investigation.

The group – seven of whom are former Australian Defence personnel – are part of the emergency response team on Nauru and are employed by Wilson Security.

A spokesman for Transfield Services, which engages Wilson staff as subcontractors, said the Facebook posts by the men – which included a group picture with Pauline Hanson at the Reclaim rally in Brisbane on April 4 – were "totally unacceptable" and would be thoroughly investigated.

A spokesman for the Immigration Department said service provider staff were expected to "act appropriately and with integrity in all their dealings with the people in their care".

"Inappropriate use of social media channels will not be tolerated, particularly if it involves offensive material," he said.

In pictures posted on Facebook, two of the men, Dan Connors and Beau James, wear T-shirts that proclaim them as "Australian infidel" and "infidel", respectively.

Guardian Australia reported another guard, Harley Levanic, had posted a picture of himself on Facebook displaying his new neck tattoo proclaiming himself an infidel.

James commented on that picture, saying: "Welcome to the gang ... well done old son. Looks awesome."

Another guard, Dan Connors, linked to a story about a woman beaten to death in Afghanistan with the comment: "Theres [sic] a lot of reasons why I think islam is a disgusting and evil religion ... Absolutely disgusting and needs to stay out of our country."

When the emergency response team was recruited, part of the job requirement was "cultural sensitivity".

Transfield Services spokesman David Jamieson told Fairfax Media that the investigation was looking at a range of company policies that are likely to have been contravened.

It has been reported that the alleged offence was breaking Wilson's social media policy and the picture with Ms Hanson was the central issue.

But Mr Jamieson said the investigation was "much broader".

"It's totally unacceptable. It's not representative of the broader workforce. We are very, very concerned about this," he said.

Mr Jamieson said appointment to the emergency security team required "acceptance of diversity and several cultures".

He would not comment on how many members comprise the Nauru security team.

The scandal around guards on Nauru comes as the Abbott government is pushing ahead with its Migration Amendment (Maintaining the Good Order Of Detention Facilities) Bill 2015.

The bill, if passed, will give security staff greater powers to deal with detainees. The explanatory memorandum of the bill says that detention staff are dealing with "increasing numbers of high-risk detainees, including persons who: have had their visa cancelled as a result of failing the 'character test' often due to convictions for drug and other serious criminal offences; are a high security risk, such as members of outlaw motorcycle gangs; are subject to adverse security assessments; and have become unlawful non-citizens as a result of breaching certain visa conditions".

"The Bill amends the Migration Act 1958 (the Migration Act) to allow an authorised officer to use such reasonable force against any person or thing, as the authorised officer reasonably believes is necessary, to: protect the life, health or safety of any person (including the authorised officer) in an immigration detention facility; or maintain the good order, peace or security of an immigration detention facility," it says.

The government said a number of disturbances in detention warranted a greater scope for force.

Those disturbances include the riot inside the Manus Island detention centre last year in which Iranian asylum seeker Reza Berati was beaten to death by guards. Two Papua New Guinea men are due to stand trial for his murder.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has been sought for comment.

Greens immigration spokeswoman Sarah Hanson-Young said the government should review training for security staff at detention centres.

"You've got to wonder what screening and training these staff have undergone. The government must take responsibility for the actions of these guards," she said.

"It's time there was a review of all training and screening requirements for staff employed in immigration detention centres."

"It is clear that these guards have no regard for the people they are supposed to be looking after."

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/eight-nauru-guards-suspended-over-racist-posts-on-social-media-20150415-1mldlh.html>

39. MEDIA RELEASE: Refugee shot with air gun, then beaten by locals

NAURUAN REFUGEE SHOT WITH AIR GUN PELLET AND THEN BEATEN BY LOCALS

Wednesday April 15, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

A 16 year-old Lebanese refugee has been treated in hospital after being attacked yesterday (Tuesday 14 April), first by a local Nauruan armed with an air rifle, and then by two lifeguards. The boy was attacked at a swimming spot near Anibare Lodge during the afternoon.

The local has sprayed a few pellets in the direction of refugees near the swimming hole, when one of the pellets struck the Lebanese boy in the arm.

The shooter took off, but his identity was obvious to all in the vicinity.

The refugee appealed for the lifeguards who were on duty to help him and to call the police to identify the shooter. The lifeguards admitted they knew the shooter but bluntly refused to help or call the police or agree to identify the shooter to the police.

After further appeals from the boy for help, what followed was a sustained bashing of the boy by the two lifeguards, leaving him covered in cuts, scratches and a badly injured knee that required hospital treatment.

"This is just one more instance of the daily discrimination and physical attacks now facing refugees on Nauru. A few days ago, a young female refugee was sexually assaulted in a car.

"While three Nauruans were arrested by the police in regard to the sexual assault, in many other instances, even when identities are known, the police refuse to act. The unwillingness of the Nauruan government or police to act has allowed a minority to attack refugees with impunity," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The latest incidents also add to the concerns expressed by former Save the Children workers and administrators and others who worked on Nauru that 'Nauru is such a small island it is impossible for people to avoid local perpetrators.'

"The climate of impunity also makes Nauru unsafe. There have been a number of instances where alleged perpetrators have threatened victims and witnesses following attacks.

"The reasons to close Nauru become more compelling day by day," said Rintoul.

"Close Nauru" is a major demand of Sydney's "Welcome Refugee" rally, which thousands of refugee supporters are expected to attend, this Sunday, 19 April, 1pm, Belmore Park.

Speakers include:

Ged Kearney, President ACTU
Dr Sue Wareham, Medical Association for the Prevention of War
Kyol Blakeney, President Sydney Uni SRC
Lydia Shelly, Islamophobia Register
Shokufa Tahiri, Hazara refugee

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713.

40. Asylum seeker who died at detention centre was properly cared for – coroner

Sri Lankan man Ramaiah Mahenthiran died of a heart attack shortly after he arrived at Western Australia's Curtin immigration detention centre

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Wednesday 15 April 2015 13.38 AEST

A 50-year-old Sri Lankan asylum seeker who died of a heart attack at Western Australia's Curtin immigration detention centre was properly cared for, a coroner has found.

Ramaiah Mahenthiran arrived on a boat at Cocos Islands in May 2013 and was detained for three months on Christmas Island.

He had two screenings by nurses and an examination by a doctor, who treated him for an ailment, before being deemed fit to travel to the mainland and transferred to Curtin.

Shortly after he arrived, he experienced severe chest pain and was taken to the medical clinic, where he lost consciousness while nurses were attending to him and then suffered a cardiac arrest. Efforts to resuscitate him failed.

He was later found to have severely congested arteries and lungs, and poor liver function.

Coroner Ros Fogliani found that while Mahenthiran underwent a "fast-track" health screening process that did not incorporate all of the usual components, she was satisfied that did not adversely affect him.

"I am satisfied that the deceased's supervision, treatment and care during the period of his detention were of a proper standard," she said. "His medical care was at least equal to what would have been available to him in the community."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/15/asylum-seeker-who-died-at-detention-centre-was-properly-cared-for-coroner>

41. Peter Dutton defends asylum seeker work rights process amid backlog of applicants

ABC Radio CAF - PM

By Bridget Brennan

Posted Mon 13 Apr 2015, 6:47pm

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has defended the process for granting work rights to asylum seekers living in the community.

Around 24,000 asylum seekers who arrived under the former government are yet to be processed and those who want to work need approval from Mr Dutton.

The Greens and refugee advocates both argue that the process is inefficient and say asylum seekers should automatically be given work rights.

But Mr Dutton said the process was working and that he would continue to process each individual case, despite the task being estimated to take until 2018 to complete.

"I have approved literally thousands of people to be able to enjoy work rights in the community on a bridging visa, and that is the prerogative of the Minister. It's going to continue to be the case," Mr Dutton said.

However, Mr Dutton has admitted his department is under strain and blames the delays on both stricter security requirements and a lack of resources, namely interpreters.

"People know that there is additional cost in processing these applications. We know that it is very important for us to get the identity of people right, because we shouldn't be releasing people into the community about whom we know very little," Mr Dutton said.

"In some cases, we're not even able to identify their name and date of birth, let alone to substantiate their claims for protection. So this is a long and protracted caseload mix that we have, and it's going to be expensive to do that so there will be a budgetary impact.

"It has been the case that there's been a turnover of staff over several years, particularly at the height of Labor's time in government, because this is stressful work, working through these applications, and the department on a day-to-day bases is funded to provide the resources that they need.

"They'll employ those people when they're needed to work through that huge problem that Labor created, and they'll deal with that in relation to interpreters, in relation to those who can decipher documents otherwise. But also the resources we need from the intelligence agencies otherwise."

Delay not caused by lack of interpreters: Refugee advocate group

Kon Karapanagiotidis, chief executive of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC), believes the Government could easily recruit more interpreters to work for the Immigration Department.

"This delay is not caused by a lack of interpreters. There are plenty of Tamil, Hazaragi, Persian, Arabic interpreters," Mr Karapanagiotidis said.

"The Department of Immigration runs a translating-interpreting service, it's the largest interpreting service in the country.

"And when you're a Government that can afford \$3 billion a year to lock up a few thousand people offshore, I'm sure you could afford to train up more interpreters.

"How many new interpreters are they recruiting? How many interpreter scholarships? Here are some great opportunities. How about letting thousands of those people who are not allowed to work be skilled up as interpreters?"

Refugee advocates want the Minister to grant work rights to thousands of asylum seekers on a bridging visa.

"The latest figures that are publically available is 10,000 of some 28,000 have the right to work," Mr Karapanagiotidis said.

"There's at least 18,000 that we know of, based on the last stats from about six weeks ago, that do not have the right to work. The majority of the people that we assist here at the ASRC do not have the right to work.

"The Minister could easily, by amending the migration regulations, grant every single one of these people the right to work. Why hasn't he done that?"

"The Minister's failed them miserably. He's done bugger all."

The Government re-introduced temporary protection visas last year.

But the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre said it did not know of anyone who had been approved for a temporary protection visa.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-13/peter-dutton-defends-work-rights-process-for-asylum-seekers/6389996>

42. Government's council of asylum-seeker advisers has stood empty for five months

The Minister's Council on Asylum Seekers and Detention is there to provide independent immigration advice to Peter Dutton but has been vacant since 2014

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Thursday 16 April 2015 09.36 AEST

A peak immigration council set up to advise the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, on asylum seeker policies has been vacant for five months without any appointments made.

The Minister's Council on Asylum Seekers and Detention is a body set up by the previous Labor government in September 2009. It was supposed to provide independent advice to the immigration minister on "policies, processes, services and programs" for asylum seekers and those held in immigration detention.

But the entire council has been vacant since December 2014, when the terms of the members ended.

The organisation will be reworked with a "new composition" by the federal government. A spokeswoman from the immigration department said: "The Minister's Council on Asylum Seekers and Detention's (MCASD) previous term expired late last year on 28 December, 2014. The government is working on relaunching the council."

"The announcement of a new council and its composition will occur shortly."

The council was vacant at the time when a review led by Philip Moss substantiated some allegations of sexual assault on Nauru.

The council is a peak body and used to feature prominent figures involved in the immigration sector, including Paris Aristotle, Air Marshal Ray Funnell, Kerrin Benson, Caz Coleman, Noel Clement, Jamal Rifi, Nicholas Procter and several other members.

The opposition spokesman on immigration, Richard Marles, said: "This government has never been big on consultation or transparency. From the outset it's been their way or the highway. Nothing highlights this more than the fact the Minister's Council on Asylum Seekers and Detention has been vacant since the end of last year."

The role of oversight boards relating to immigration detention has been previously diminished by the Coalition government.

In December the Detention Health Advisory Group, which advised the immigration minister on health issues in immigration detention, was disbanded by the then immigration minister, Scott Morrison, sparking concerns about the oversight of health practices in detention centres.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/apr/16/governments-council-of-asylum-seeker-advisers-has-stood-empty-for-five-months>

43. Adelaide Hills Mayor questions push to turn Inverbrackie detention site into retirement village

ABC News Online
Posted Fri 17 Apr 2015, 7:07pm

The Adelaide Hills Mayor says turning the former Inverbrackie detention centre into a retirement village would be "problematic" for the local area.

Assistant Infrastructure Minister Jamie Briggs, who is the local Federal MP, today announced plans to sell the site which sits vacant outside Woodside in the Hills.

The centre was the subject of heated protests when it was commissioned in 2010, but was closed by the current Federal Government.

Asylum seekers were moved out four months ago.

The site includes 80 houses, a medical clinic, library and community centre and was upgraded by the Gillard government at a cost of \$10 million.

Mr Briggs said the facility, which is on Commonwealth land and would need to be rezoned before it could be put to public use, has great potential.

"I have always thought it lends itself to a retirement village-type activity," he said.

"The houses are smallish, they're easy to maintain, they're not large blocks.

"But it is an open sale on the open market through a public tender process. It will be sold as one lot."

Mr Briggs said converting the centre into a residential area would benefit the local economy.

"It'll mean 80-odd houses full of people will shop locally, will use Woodside facilities and it'll add very much to the township."

Mayor says rezoning to residential would be 'inappropriate'

Adelaide Hills Council Mayor Bill Spragg said, while he would "love to see" the site occupied, any benefits of the sale would depend on who buys it.

He said Mr Briggs's suggestion that the property be converted into an aged-care facility would lead to a significant change in the dynamic of the area.

"That could be a little bit problematic given that it's three or four kilometres out of Woodside and people would have to get their own transport or a bus," he said.

"There's no public transport here. The houses are fairly old. Modern retirement villages are a much higher standard than this is.

"To redevelop it, you'd have to knock down the old houses and build new ones.

"It'll put a bit more pressure on the council because of our ageing society. If we have a sudden influx of retirees in there, they require different services to families and young people."

Mr Spragg said the land was in a primary production area and any developer who bought it would not be able to increase the number of houses unless it is rezoned.

"We think it would be inappropriate to change the zoning to a residential zone which would allow subdivision and the State Government has made it quite clear to us that's not what they want either," he said.

That may make the site less attractive to a prospective buyer.

Many of the homes are split-level and have three bedrooms.

While some locals want the buildings used as public housing, former staff have told the ABC the facility's set-up makes it completely inappropriate for elderly residents.

The Government is hoping to find a buyer by the end of the year.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-17/inverbrackie-detention-centre-site-to-be-put-on-the-open-market/6402420>