

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. Refugee advocate Kon Karapanagiotidis: 'Both the Labor and Liberal party are cowards'

ABC-TV - One Plus One

Updated Fri 10 Jun 2016, 4:40am

First posted Fri 10 Jun 2016, 4:29am

Whenever there is a terror attack somewhere in the world, Kon Karapanagiotidis watches the events unfold with sorrow.

"One of the great tragedies about terror attacks is that the very people that are its first victims are refugees, the very people who are scapegoated for [the attack]," he told Jane Hutcheon on One Plus One.

Mr Karapanagiotidis is the CEO and founder of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) in Melbourne which was established 15 years ago this week. Mr Karapanagiotidis is a social worker, lawyer and teacher.

The other tragedy about terror attacks, he says, is the national conversations which follow.

"Every time there's an attack, opportunistic politicians — from the Donald Trumps of this world to the Tony Abbotts — seize on opportunities like that and say, 'this is why we need to close our borders, this is why we need to turn people back.'

Asked about his relationship with politicians, he replies with a story.

"A number of years ago I had Scott Morrison come to visit the ASRC when he was the shadow Immigration Minister. He's the loveliest man in person.

"He's going up and he's shaking the hands of refugees, he's wishing them well, talking about how awful it is they're separated from their families and how awful it is that they can't work and contribute.

"I'm thinking maybe I've made a breakthrough.

"And then the very next day he's on television going 'we will stop the boats, we will have temporary visas'.

"So this man who 24 hours earlier was sitting there showing empathy was the next day advocating for the very visa that would mean these people would never see their families."

But his frustration is not aimed solely at the Federal Government.

"Both the Labor Party and the Liberal Party are cowards," he said.

"It's not boats we're stopping it's human beings. It's not boats we are returning, it's human life, often to the arms of torturers."

Of the current political climate it is popular at the moment, he said, to appeal to individualism where people are more concerned about their back pocket.

Lessons in compassion

Mr Karapanagiotidis' parents were immigrants from Greece who came to Australia with little education and a difficult past.

The family lived in Mount Beauty in regional Victoria where they were one of only two Greek families in town.

"The daily experience was one of racism, of being bullied or being told to go back to where you came from. It really did have a profound impact on me," he said.

"It was a pretty unhappy childhood because it was one where you very much understood what it was like not to belong, not to feel welcome and not to fit in."

When he was a child, Mr Karapanagiotidis' parents worked as tobacco farmers. His father was up at three in the morning and worked until ten at night. He passed away when Kon was in his 20s.

Mr Karapanagiotidis remembers his parents' resilience, courage and selflessness.

"What they taught me is something you can't learn at school. They taught me compassion and community, and love and decency and those are the values that have carried me through to now."

When Mr Karapanagiotidis was 12, his family moved to Melbourne. Life did not improve much for the studious child.

"I would spend my days hiding in the library, crying at home when I got back from school, I would spend my days not wanting to be alive, wishing I could just die. That was most of my adolescence."

But eventually a new door opened. At university, Mr Karapanagiotidis realised he could do one of two things — allow low self-esteem and hurt to continue to consume him, or choose the path of hope and generosity.

And so he discovered volunteering.

His first job was working in a men's shelter. Despite his own feelings of worthlessness, working in the shelter opened his eyes to a kind of loss Kon had never known.

Through volunteering he practised his social work and established a network. Then while he was teaching at TAFE he discovered that asylum seekers had virtually no basis support.

What started as a class project in 2001 developed into a 20-metre shopfront in Footscray, Victoria.

The Asylum Seeker Resource Centre was open for business only a few months before the Tampa crisis, when the Australian government refused permission for a Norwegian freighter carrying 438 refugees to enter Australian waters.

Fifteen years after its inception, the ASRC is Australia's largest asylum seeker advocacy organisation and has helped more than 13,000 refugees and people seeking asylum.

"We've done this with no Government funding from the Federal Government on principle," Mr Karapanagiotidis said.

"We have 1,300 volunteers, 80 paid staff, 30 life-saving programs and in a given year we provide over a quarter of a million hours of free assistance, all funded by the community, all driven by the community."

Ups and downs of advocacy

Apart from his job as CEO, Mr Karapanagiotidis has collected six tertiary qualifications.

He is also a qualified massage therapist (he ran a massage clinic for homeless men) and has performed stand-up comedy. He also has a string of awards to his name.

But his work often takes place at the coalface of others' despair and sometimes he feels worn down.

"There's not a week where I don't finish feeling like I'm failing," he said.

"At lunchtime about 250 people sit and have lunch together, and I look around and watch all those children and women and families sitting there breaking bread together and smiling.

"When I'm looking at that I'm going I cannot lose hope. If these extraordinary people can still have it after losing home, family, future, jobs, opportunity, safety, and they can get up in the morning and face another day, the very least I can do is face that with them, so I do."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-10/refugee-advocate-kon-karapanagiotidis-asylum-seeker-resource/7497118>

2. MEDIA RELEASE: Order to close Manus detention likely before Australian election

Wednesday 8 June 2016
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

A directions hearing in the PNG Supreme Court, on Monday 6 June has opened the way for explicit orders to close the Manus detention centre and release all the detainees to be handed down before the Australian election.

At the directions hearing in the Ben Lomai case representing over 700 of the Manus detainees, the Chief Justice, Sir Salamo Injia, ordered that the Namah case, which found that the Manus detention centre was unlawful, be combined with the Lomai case, which seeks orders for the enforcement of constitutional rights on behalf of the detainees themselves.

It is expected that all detainees, who are, or who have been, on Manus, will be represented by the 16 June hearing.

The decision opens the way for possible 'consequential orders' to the finding that Manus was unlawful, to be given as early as 16 June, at the next directions hearing.

The 'consequential orders' may include explicit orders for the closure of the detention centre and for the release of all detainees into the custody of the Australian government.

In any case, a full bench Supreme Court hearing has been set for 30 June, two days before the Australian federal election.

Meanwhile the April ruling that the detention centre is unlawful has placed a very large question mark over what authority Broadspectrum and Wilson's security actually has over the detainees still being held at the detention centre.

"The situation is not sustainable and the confusion has seen increasing tensions inside the detention centre," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

PNG police are now placed inside the detention centre (photo attached) to provide a fig leaf for Wilson's security. It has become routine for PNG police to arrest detainees on the whim of Wilson Security guards, who are no longer sure of their power to assault and imprison detainees inside the detention centre with impunity.

It has also created an Orwellian use of language. Detainees are now called "residents", while the "compounds" have become "areas" - the former Oscar and Delta compounds are now called East Area.

As the numbers of people found to be refugees has risen, the division between compounds housing asylum seekers and refugees inside the detention centre has broken down.

Power cuts have made existing in the hot, humid conditions intolerable.

The conditions for food have also deteriorated. With hundreds of people now being fed in one compound (Oscar and Delta mess together in Oscar), people have been in queue for up to an hour. Bad smelling chicken is being served for two meals each day.

On Sunday, 5 June, only half of the people got any chicken at all -- photo attached.

"For almost three years the asylum seekers and refugees have endured the most worst imaginable conditions that Australia, Broadspectrum and Wilson's could throw at them -- and for all that time Manus has been unlawful, as well as brutal," said Rintoul.

"It is two months since the PNG Supreme Court ruled that the agreement between Australian and PNG is unlawful. The Australian government is simply delaying the inevitable and revealing the contempt it has for the rule of law. Manus must be closed, and all the asylum seekers and refugees brought to the Australian mainland."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

3. Manus Island police presence stepped up as second challenge heads to court

Detainees say changes to regime are only cosmetic and they cannot move freely in the compound or leave without permission

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Wednesday 8 June 2016 14.24 AEST

The future operation of the detention centre on Manus Island appears increasingly uncertain, with Papua New Guinea police now patrolling within the compounds and further legal challenges to the detention of the men held within.

Since the PNG supreme court ruled in May that the detention centre was illegal, the operation of the centre has been legally precarious but the 905 men held within remain in detention. The detention centre is funded by the Australian government and holds asylum seekers who have tried to reach Australia by boat.

The PNG government has said the men on Manus are no longer detained but refugee Naseem Haider told Guardian Australia: "Police make illegal rules in this illegal place. You can't speak about [being free] because police are now controlling the centre in the naval base. It's ... like a big joke when they told you that you are free."

The men inside remain restricted in their movements, they cannot move freely within the compound, which is surrounded by razor wire fences, and can only leave with permission on prearranged buses into Lorengau town, nearly an hour's drive away. Photos show detainees are still security screened by guards at the entrance to the camp.

Previously, security at the Manus detention centre has been solely the responsibility of Wilson Security, a subcontractor of centre manager Broadspectrum, which has a \$1.2bn, one-year contract from the Australian government to run offshore detention centres. PNG police have not previously had a significant presence inside the Manus detention centre but, it is understood, with uncertainty over the extent of Wilson's authority after the supreme court decision, more responsibility has been moved to police.

Daily protests at the compound fences have been running for 26 days inside the detention centre.

On 16 June, a second legal challenge to the Manus detention regime will be back in the supreme court. Three representatives from the Australian high commission were present at a directions hearing in Port Moresby on Monday.

The first legal challenge, brought by the opposition leader, Belden Namah, was upheld in May, with the court ruling the Manus detention centre was illegal. The court ruled the men's detention – many have been held more than 1,000 days – breached their fundamental right to liberty, because they were trafficked into PNG against their will and were arbitrarily and unlawfully held without having committed, or being accused of, a crime.

The second challenge, brought by the Port Moresby lawyer Ben Lomai, is on similar grounds and the court has indicated it is prepared to combine the two challenges and could make consequential orders to have the centre closed.

Inside the detention centre, detainees say changes to the detention regime have only been cosmetic since the PNG supreme court ruling.

"Immigration's and politicians statements [say] we are free to go and the detention is no longer but reality is very different," Haider said. "Freedom is far away from us, we are still in detention and treating badly by the management and police.

"Freedom is [being able to go] where you want to go, no fear for safety and security. But here freedom means to lock in a small area and whatever you want it will depend on immigration's approval."

Behrouz Bouchani, who was found to be a refugee by PNG authorities despite refusing to make an asylum claim in that country, said refugees were being regularly harassed and arrested by police.

"PNG police two days ago arrested an Iranian man and put him in Lorengau jail," he said. "Also they arrested two Pakistani men and have kept them at the police station for hours. Another Iranian man had a serious argument with an officer in Fox mess yesterday. Today one of officers wanted to beat an Iranian man too and a Pakistani man claimed that an officer pushed him and he made complaint against him."

Bouchani said many men in detention were still frightened of police after the riots in 2014 in which police stormed their compounds, shooting at asylum seekers and beating others.

As detention continues on Manus, significant numbers of asylum seekers and refugees held by Australia offshore have been moved to Australia for medical treatment.

At least six people have been moved from Manus and Nauru to Australia in the past fortnight for serious medical conditions, a significantly greater rate than in previous months.

Many of those brought to Australia are being enjoined to legal challenges, or receiving assurances from the government of 72 hours' notice if they are to be removed offshore.

As well, up to 17 men from Manus are currently in Port Moresby for medical treatment. Sources within the detention centre say the previously strict protocols to keep people at the detention centre have been relaxed and it is now much easier for sick or injured detainees to be moved for medical treatment.

On Nauru daily protests continue at the detention centre fences. Asylum seekers and refugees have protested every day for 80 days on the island, erecting banners and chanting at the wire fences at the boundary of the camp. The island has also been seized by a spate of self-harm and suicide attempts.

Guardian Australia has approached the Department of Immigration and Border protection, as well as Wilson Security, for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/08/asylum-seekers-manus-island-police-presence-stepped-up-as-second-challenge-heads-to-court>

4. Inadequate care, communication failures in lead-up to asylum seeker's death, court hears

ABC News Online

By Louisa Rebgetz

First posted Fri 10 Jun 2016, 2:17pm

Updated Fri 10 Jun 2016, 4:09pm

There were communication failures and inadequate care in the lead-up to the death of Iranian asylum seeker Hamid Khazaei, a coronial inquest in Brisbane hears.

Mr Khazaei, 24, died in Brisbane's Mater Hospital after his leg became infected on Manus Island in August 2014.

He was treated on Manus Island before being evacuated to a hospital in Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea.

Mr Khazaei was eventually transferred to Brisbane and died 13 days after he presented with the infection.

Counsel assisting the coroner, Emily Cooper, told a pre-inquest conference in Brisbane two doctors based in Cairns — Dr Mark Little and Dr Drew Wenck — had conducted an expert review into the death.

She gave an outline of the review's conclusions to Queensland coroner Terry Ryan.

"Mr Khazaei presented to the Manus Island clinic with sepsis and within 18 hours of that presentation he met the criteria of severe sepsis," she told the court.

She said the 24-year-old died from a condition that was unusual from sepsis, and was more likely due to a lack of oxygen on the day he was transferred from Manus Island to Port Moresby.

The report said it would not be expected the Manus Island clinicians would be aware of the type of infection Mr Khazaei had, which was chromobacterium violaceum.

"By August 26 August, Mr Khazaei was critically unwell and required insulation, ventilation and aggressive resuscitation management and ... this did not occur," Ms Cooper told the court.

Administrative process impeded patient's transfer

Ms Cooper said administrative requirements meant any movement of a patient would take at least 24 hours to organise.

"This process did appear to impede Mr Khazaei's earlier transfer to Port Moresby," she said.

"Indeed, Dr Little concludes that Mr Khazaei required high-level intensive care unit care, thus being transferred to Pacific International Hospital ... was a failure in this case."

The doctors concluded he should have been evacuated to Australia instead of Port Moresby.

"Dr Wenck provides opinion that it would have made a great deal of difference had Mr Khazaei gone to an Australian ICU unit as opposed to the Pacific International Hospital," Ms Cooper told the court.

"He identifies a number of failures in terms of communication across the board and also in terms of handover not being well documented."

Ms Cooper told the court the death could have been prevented by earlier intubation and correct ventilator management.

"Both experts are critical of the medical care provided to Mr Khazaei throughout his clinical course," she said.

The lawyer representing Pacific International Hospital, David Schneidewin, told the court he would travel to Port Moresby to gather evidence next month.

A full inquest will be held on November 28.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-10/khazaei-coronial-inquest-inadequate-care-in-lead-up-to-death/7501106>

5. Manus Island asylum seeker Hamid Khazaei pre-inquest hears from medical experts

Brisbane Times
June 10 2016 - 2:14PM
Jorge Branco

A Manus Island asylum seeker who died in 2014 may have survived with better and earlier treatment, a pre-inquest hearing has heard.

The hearing heard evidence from two medical experts identifying several failures in how Hamid Khazaei was treated after reporting to the detention centre's clinic with an infection from a cut on his leg.

Dr Mark Little's report, summarised by counsel assisting Emily Cooper, declared the decision to fly the Iranian man to a closer but less capable Papua New Guinean hospital rather than an Australian intensive care unit a "failure".

Ms Cooper also read Dr Drew Wenck's report, saying the 24-year-old's death could have been prevented with earlier intervention and proper ventilator management.

She said the experts had found administrative requirements put in place by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection meant any move off the island would take at least 24 hours, affecting Mr Khazaei's removal.

Dr Wenck attributed the death to a rare brain injury known as hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy and said it was more likely to have been caused by a loss of oxygen on the day he was moved to the Pacific International Hospital in Port Moresby, rather than the infection he was originally treated for. Advertisement

Mr Khazaei first presented to the Manus Island detention centre medical clinic on August 23, 2014, complaining of fever, chills and body aches.

An urgent request two days later to fly him to Port Moresby aimed to have him on a commercial flight by 5.30pm.

But Four Corners last month revealed a department response took almost five hours and he missed the flight, a result Australian Medical Association president Brian Owler said sealed his fate.

Ms Cooper told the hearing, through Dr Wenck's evidence, the asylum seeker died in the PIH of a "hypoxic event".

"He said that hypoxic arrest could have been prevented by earlier intubation and correct ventilator management," she said.

By the time Mr Khazaei was flown to the Mater Hospital in Brisbane, there was nothing anyone could have done, the hearing heard.

Ms Cooper said both doctors agreed an International SOS team stationed in Port Moresby to treat AFP officers, which took over the treatment of the asylum seeker while he was in PIH, also had "no medical option available ... to prevent Mr Khazaei's death".

David Schneidewin, barrister for PIH, questioned whether the team's takeover was appropriate.

He said Dr Wenck's report suggested there may have been "some minutes" shortly after the team stepped in that ventilation to Mr Khazaei was interrupted, although witnesses would have to be questioned further.

A draft order proposed eight different areas of focus, mostly dealing with the adequacy and appropriateness of his care in separate periods from the time he first reported to the medical unit to when his life support was switched off on September 5.

The decision to take Mr Khazaei to Port Moresby instead of straight to Australia and the "heads of agreement" document governing medical services on Manus were also suggested for examination.

Doctors for Refugees barrister Gerard Mullins, instructed by Maurice Blackburn, called for the documents sitting under this, setting out guidelines directly for medical practitioners, to also be looked into.

He pointed to the experts' testimony identifying "poor governance" and "poor and confusing documentation" on Manus Island, leading them to declare there appeared to be "be no process to identify and escalate medical assistance if a patient deteriorated in the clinic".

The inquest was set down for two weeks from November 28.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/queensland/manus-island-asylum-seeker-hamid-khazaei-preinquest-hears-from-medical-experts-20160610-gpgc4p.html>

6. Inquest into asylum seeker Hamid Khazaei's death begins

ABC Radio CAF - The World Today
Katherine Gregory
Friday, June 10, 2016

KIM LANDERS: A hearing has begun into the death of 24-year-old Iranian asylum seeker Hamid Khazaei who died from a rare bacterial infection contracted at the Manus Island detention centre two years ago.

At a pre-inquest conference in Brisbane, one medical expert has described "poor and confusing" procedures at the centre's medical clinic.

Reporter Katherine Gregory went to the hearing and joins us now.

Katherine what was the purpose of today's hearing?

KATHERINE GREGORY: So this is basically a gathering of all the legal representatives that will give evidence at the inquest, talk about which witnesses they'll call before the coroner and why.

They also will confirm the relevant evidence that's needed at the inquest and there's also been a clarification around the issues that will guide the inquest.

KIM LANDERS: So remind us, what happened to Hamid Khazaei?

KATHERINE GREGORY: Well, Mr Khazaei had been on Manus Island for about a year when he cut his leg and it became infected.

It was caused by a rare bacteria found in soil and stagnant water and it turned into acute septicaemia which caused him to suffer multiple heart attacks and become brain dead.

Now it was 13 days before, between him getting sick and dying in the Brisbane Mater Hospital. He was first treated at the detention centre clinic and several days later was taken to the Pacific International Hospital in Port Moresby and then eventually evacuated to Australia.

So it was the time in escalation of medical attention and also the ability of the Manus Island clinic and hospital in Port Moresby to deal with his condition that is now under question at the inquest.

KIM LANDERS: So what do we know about the ability of the clinic there at Manus Island to deal with the infection?

KATHERINE GREGORY: So the counsel assisting the Coroner today gave us some evidence that she'd gathered from a couple of medical specialists.

Now they said that the clinic on Manus Island did not have the equipment to identify the organism which caused the sepsis but it did have access to an antibiotic that could have treated the sepsis infection.

They also found that he should not have been transferred to Port Moresby and instead should have been escalated to an evacuation to Australia once his condition worsened.

And they said that there were not sufficient handover notes and procedures in place at the Manus Island detention centre clinic. They also found that he wasn't given resuscitation when it was needed at that clinic.

Now one doctor, Dr Little was quoted saying that the detention centre clinic had a poor and confusing governance system and what he meant by that was he found that there was no process established or risk management in place to escalate medical assistance if a patient deteriorated.

So the counsel assisting the Coroner said that this inquest will look at whether the Immigration Department and IHMS which are the doctors that provide assistance to asylum seekers, adequately discharge their responsibilities, whether there are enough procedures and equipment in place at the clinic and whether the department should have acted more immediately to transfer Mr Khazaei to Australia for treatment.

KIM LANDERS: Okay, that's our reporter in Brisbane, Katherine Gregory.

<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2016/s4479552.htm>

7. Public servants could face court over death of asylum seeker Hamid Khazaei: lawyers

Sydney Morning Herald
June 7, 2016 - 12:00AM
Noel Towell

Public servants at the Department of Immigration could face prosecution over their conduct in the final days of the life of a detained asylum seeker, lawyers say.

The Australian Lawyers Alliance says the death of 24-year-old Iranian detainee Hamid Khazaei came after basic failures by departmental bureaucrats to uphold federal health and safety laws and they could be held personally responsible by the courts, even if their department is cleared.

Fairfax reported on Monday that Department of Immigration and Border Protection documents – released to the Australian Lawyers' Alliance (ALA) under freedom of information laws – painted a damning picture of what the ALA calls under-reporting of safety breaches "at best", and concealment at worst in Australia's network of offshore detention camps.

The Lawyers Alliance says Mr Khazaei's death in Brisbane hospital in September 2014, from an infection to a leg cut, came after he had been left on Manus Island for 30 hours after doctors requested, from Immigration officials in Canberra, that the young Iranian be taken off the island for treatment.

The ALA says there was a failure by public servants to follow medical advice in the case and that requests made by doctors for the transfer were repeatedly questioned or ignored by DIBP officers and bureaucrats, causing delays in getting possibly lifesaving treatment.

Immigration has not responded to a request for comment on the lawyers' report and Comcare says a number of investigations are underway into health and safety in the offshore detention network.

But the agency did not answer questions on whether it would pursue charges over Khazaei's death.

In Mr Khazaei's case, the lawyers say, Immigration would not respond to medical emergencies outside of office hours and there was a 13-hour delay in the response of a key decision-maker to a request for transfer because they had left their Canberra office for the evening.

Now, with Mr Khazaei's death still the subject of a coronial inquest in Queensland, the Australian Lawyers Alliance says Immigration may have committed multiple breaches of the Work Health and Safety Act.

"This incident suggests a number of failures to meet WHS Act obligations," the ALA's report states.

"The primary duty of care ... requires safe systems of work ... and the provision of information, training, instruction or supervision to protect all persons to risks to their health and safety.

"Systems of work that allow medical advice to be ignored or questioned by DIBP officers cannot be described as 'safe' ."

The lawyers' report also argues the department failed in its duty to conduct due diligence

"Due diligence obligations also appear to have been breached repeatedly," the report states.

"The fact that it took 24 hours for an request for a medical evacuation to reach the person who could order it suggests that systems do not allow for up-to-date knowledge to be acted on."

Departmental officers can be found guilty of offences under section 27 of the WH&S act, and hit with large fines, even where their employer has not been found guilty.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/public-service/public-servants-could-face-court-over-death-of-asylum-seeker-hamid-khazaei-lawyers-20160606-gpcbou.html>

8. The true cost of our brutal detention policy is the lives of young women

Mamamia
7 June 2016
Joanna Robin

A young woman was waiting for a bus at sunset when a car pulled up next to her. The male driver warned her about wild dogs and offered her a lift. She took it because she was terrified of being mauled, but instead of taking her home, the man took her to a house and raped her.

"I went inside. Dogs came in too. Man took off all his clothes and showed me his private parts. I wet my pants and soiled my pants," the woman, a refugee known as Amina*, later recalled.

"This is the reason I left my country – this fear of rape – I see it happen to many. Then he said I don't care and hit my face very hard. He said dogs will kill you if you don't suck my private part. Then I have no choice."

No matter how hard our government may try and hide it, we know the situation for the refugees and people seeking asylum we send offshore is dire. For the unaccompanied women like Amina who are banished to Nauru, many of whom have fled sexual violence in their own countries, it's nothing short of horrific.

According to advocates, wild dogs roam the island in packs, which is terrifying enough, but the worst threat comes from the men who know where these vulnerable women live (in demountable housing scattered throughout the bush) and pick them off one by one.

A new report, Protection Denied: Abuse Condoned, from Australian Women in Support of Women on Nauru documents Australia's deliberate policy of sending women to a place we know is unsafe, but where no-one is held accountable if they are brutalised; the Pacific island of Nauru.

Australian Women in Support of Women on Nauru is a group comprising journalists, researchers, advocates and lawyers including former WA Labor premier Carmen Lawrence.

This is the first report to bring together everything we know about Nauru and the suffering of the women we've left there.

Its aim is twofold: to expose our abuse to the global community and to call for it to finally be brought to an end.

It begins with the story of "Mary", a 24-year-old woman who was found traumatised, bruised and covered in bite marks after being brutally sexually assaulted while she was visiting a friend in the Nauru community in May 2015.

Instead of being taken to hospital, she was taken to the police station and was pressed for a statement. She was mute with trauma. So the police labelled her as "non-compliant".

Eva Orner's film *Chasing Asylum* is a must-see for all Australians (post continues after video):

Then there was "Abyan". The young Somali woman who was raped and she fell pregnant. For months she pleaded for an abortion but instead of receiving proper care, she was flown to and from Australia, at the centre of an obscene tug-of-war between advocates and the Australian government.

In March, another young African woman, known only as "S99" was raped while she was having an epileptic seizure. She too asked for a termination, but was sent to Papua New Guinea where abortion is illegal, except to preserve the life of the mother.

These stories are just the tip of the iceberg. The majority of crimes against women on Nauru, even those which happen inside the detention facility, go unreported. All go unpunished.

"It's a terrible thing to happen to any woman. For these girls particularly coming from their culture where they've set to me is 'the last thing I have is my good name' and that's why it stayed a secret until the girls became pregnant and desperately need help and that's how it's come out," co-author of the report and refugee advocate Pamela Curr told Mamamia.

"People might ask why it's taken so long for this to come out but when we think about it, no woman wants to go public about being raped."

As Curr points out, even in cases where official reports have been made, not one Nauruan has ever been charged or investigated for an assault against a non-Nauruan, including these women.

"This is the true cost of Australia's brutal policy: young women whose lives have been torn to pieces," Julie Macken, a former journalist who also authored sections of the report, said.

"Most Australian women know what it would feel like to be treated as prey, to be humiliated to not be able to protect their kids from violent attacks. Maybe not first hand, but we know mums, aunts, sisters who've been in that situation.

"Are we still comfortable about this brutal policy given that it's other women paying the cost?"

You can read the report in full here:

<http://www.awswrn.org/blog/2016/6/6/protection-denied-abuse-condoned-women-on-nauru-at-risk>

*Not her real name.

<http://www.mamamia.com.au/abuse-of-women-on-nauru/>

9. Australia Using Refugees As 'Human Shields', Says Former Labor Minister Carmen Lawrence

A new report, which Carmen Lawrence helped launch today, draws attention to the abuses of women perpetrated as a result of Australia's current policies. Max Chalmers reports.

New Matilda
By Max Chalmers
June 7, 2016

A former Labor Premier who went on to serve as a minister in the Keating government says "real and serious" harm is being done to the men and women held on Nauru and Manus Island, as a result of the bipartisan policy of offshore detention.

Carmen Lawrence, the country's first female Premier, has criticised both of the major parties for failing to take a lead on the issue, saying the community must push back to put pressure on both sides to find "smart" alternative policies.

“There is a way for us to think this through, to work with local communities in the region, to work with governments, to develop a policy that is good for the long-term and does not use people as human shields,” Lawrence told New Matilda.

“The moral argument is: we punish these people, we use them as deterrence for those who might come. That’s the sort of ethical dilemma that people study in philosophy in their first year of university. They come out on the side of seeing that as a totally inappropriate moral equivalence.”

Lawrence made the comments at a forum held today in the NSW Parliament House, launching a report detailing the abuse of women transferred to Nauru.

Co-authored by Lawrence and a number of prominent women who have worked in politics, journalism and the law – including refugee advocate Pamela Curr and New Matilda’s contributing editor Wendy Bacon – the report compiles a series of stories from Nauru, and examines the history of colonial domination that led to its recent political and economic woes, with a particular focus on the impact on women.

Included among the case studies is the story of a woman known as ‘S99’, who was raped on Nauru while suffering an epileptic seizure and became pregnant as a result. The young African woman, found to be a refugee owed protection, was denied a request to be transferred to Australia for a termination.

In conjunction with a number of other examples, the report describes the incident as part of what it calls “the mounting evidence of a pattern of systemic assault and rape of refugee women on Nauru”.

Both Lawrence and Bacon had originally planned to travel to Nauru in order to complete the report, but were prevented by Nauruan authorities. The pair rapidly raised over \$20,000 in a crowd funding exercise to help them overcome the notorious \$8,000 fee the country demands from journalists applying for visas. Despite offering to oblige, both women had their applications ignored. Bacon’s emails were never returned, and a lengthy bureaucratic endeavour on Lawrence’s part eventually ended with silence on the Nauruan side.

With journalists and even former ministers kept out, and refugees and asylum seekers held in, Lawrence said Australia should take in those people currently held on the island, as well as on Manus.

“Why should New Zealand take them? Why should Canada take them? They’re already trying to do their bit in the international community,” she said. “We should be doing our bit.”

Lawrence said she would vote for Labor in her own electorate of Fremantle, but that in some other electorates a vote for either the Labor or Liberal candidate would ultimately help affirm “destructive” refugee policies. A former member for Fremantle herself, Lawrence passed the seat on to Melissa Parke, who became one of the party’s most outspoken opponents of offshore detention. Current Fremantle candidate Josh Wilson was involved in a local council decision to cut ties with Wilson Security because of its role in offshore detention, but has since stated he supports Labor’s current policies.

Lawrence implored voters to think seriously about the issue before they vote on July 2.

<https://newmatilda.com/2016/06/07/australia-using-refugees-human-shields-says-former-labor-minister-carmen-lawrence/>

10. Martin McKenzie-Murray: Women on Nauru report documents abuse

A new report into the treatment of women on Nauru confirms the dysfunction of offshore detention and the government’s indifference.

The Saturday Paper
June 11, 2016
Martin McKenzie-Murray

In late 2014, a letter signed by the “Youth of the Republic of Nauru” began circulating around the island nation. Addressed to the Nauruan and Australian governments, and the large contingent of asylum seekers Nauru was hosting, the letter was posted on electricity poles, shop windows and the cyclone fencing of the detention camps. It was impassioned, paranoid and threatening. It opened: “We the youth of Republic of Nauru inform refugees and bring forward some key issues created because of resettlement program by the Government of Australia and our corrupt government.

“Among lots of problems we have in our community because of this resettlement program the one big highlighted problem we can see is that Refugees are taking over all our job opportunities and spreading over our small, congested community, making our lives miserable as we can see clearly in the near future refugees will be the leading and ruling people and will make local community people their slaves ... So we warn all the refugees working around in different sectors to quit the jobs and stay back of our community and also stop walking around in the island.”

The island is the size of Melbourne airport – though large swaths of it are uninhabitable – and contains 10,000 people. Currently, there are about 1200 refugees living on Nauru. The population has increased, arguably unsustainably, while the country’s habitable sections have decreased in area because of rapacious strip mining. Before its independence in 1968, the

island was variously governed by Germany, the British Empire and Australia. It has been bombed, murderously occupied by Japan during World War II, and devastated by introduced diseases. In latter years, it has been profoundly undermined by greed and corruption, amid the riches of a phosphate boom. "I wish we'd never discovered that phosphate," Reverend James Aingimea, then minister of the Nauru Congregational Church, told The New York Times in 1995. "I wish Nauru could be like it was before. When I was a boy, it was so beautiful. There were trees. It was green everywhere, and we could eat the fresh coconuts and breadfruit. Now I see what has happened here, and I want to cry."

For a remote Pacific island, Nauru has frequently found itself on geopolitical fault lines. This history was reflected in the hostile language of the youths' letter, reflecting their finding themselves squeezed between the mutual interests of two federal governments. As their letter stated: "Nauru is a conservative country, it is not a multicultural country so resettling refugees means in[tr]oducing different culture from different countries and we think that we are never been ready for that but the mistake and wrong decision of few corrupt people from Nauru government putting the lives, culture, customs, values of Nauru local people in danger."

From there, the letter argued, essentially, that refugees were sexually disempowering local men. It is a crucial element of the report released this week by Australian Women in Support of Women on Nauru (AWSWN). "Our women, girls and teenagers are interested in refugees," the letter continued, "because of their skin, colour, face and handsomeness. Our wives, sisters and daughters are in contact with refugees and having affairs with them and we can never see our women having fun with refugees and neglecting locals."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/immigration/2016/06/11/women-nauru-report-documents-abuse/14655672003353>

11. Nauru's detention centre: 'Many of us think of suicide'

As the number of refugee suicides rise, we examine the detention centre at the heart of Australia's asylum policies.

Al Jazeera Feature
30 MAY 2016
by Jarni Blakkarly

Nauru is a tiny, 34 square kilometre island of barren land in the heart of the Pacific Ocean. Despite the palm trees and picturesque blue waters, the island, home to around 10,000 people, is far from a tropical paradise.

The history of detention centres on Nauru is brief, but the island has been central to Australia's asylum policies.

It first housed a detention centre for asylum seekers between 2001 and 2008, under the so-called Pacific Solution of Australia's conservative Liberal Party, which aimed to stop refugees coming to Australia by holding them on Nauru and nearby Manus Island.

When the centre-left Labor party came to power in 2007, with the promise of a more compassionate response to those seeking asylum, Australia closed the offshore detention centres and, in 2008, moved refugees to centres on the Australian mainland.

Still, the number of asylum seekers arriving on boats continued to rise, peaking at 17,000 people in 2012, according to Department of Immigration statistics.

Under attack by conservatives for being weak on border security, Labor turned back to Nauru for a solution, and the centre was reopened in 2012.

Today, it is home to 543 asylum seekers, including 70 children.

'The worst thing about Nauru'

The asylum seekers held on Nauru spend their days in limbo. The centre is fenced in, with large green tents pitched outside where refugees must endure the tropical heat.

One Iranian refugee, Amir, who asked that his full name and age be withheld, has been on the island for three years. He said he fled Iran when threats were made against his life and travelled to Indonesia where he boarded a boat for Australia.

"The worst thing about the Nauru is the waiting. Nothing ever happens here," Amir told Al Jazeera by phone.

Trapped on the island, refugees wait as their claims for official refugee status are assessed by the UN refugee agency the UNHCR - a process that can take years.

Although the vast majority of claims are successful - government data shows that in 2013, 88 percent of asylum applications were approved - the Australian government insists that those detained on Nauru will not resettle in Australia.

The only way off the island is to agree to resettlement in Cambodia - or return to the countries from which the refugees have fled.

In 2015, Australia signed a \$40m deal with Cambodia to resettle refugees held on Nauru there. Since the deal, only five refugees have accepted the offer to go to Cambodia, according to Australia's Department of Immigration. In March, Immigration Minister Peter Dutton confirmed that two had been returned to their country of origin.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/05/nauru-detention-centre-suicide-160517120527051.html>

12. Refugee women on Nauru are exposed to horrific trauma every day

The Age
June 7, 2016 - 12:00AM
Jenna Price

We know already that refugee women on Nauru are exposed to violence, other kinds of trauma and terrible discrimination. No matter how little our government wants to tell us, no matter how little the Nauruan government wants to tell us, we know that women on Nauru are being violated every single day.

We know that because for at least a year now, we have had accounts from Nauru which detail what a new report calls a pattern of systemic assault and rape.

And we heard the first of these terrible reports from the victims themselves, the women who were medically evacuated to Australia to deal with the horror of the assaults.

These are the women Australia abandoned. No, it's not just our government that abandoned them. It's the rest of us. We are all responsible. These women come from two groups: those granted refugee status; and those who are detainees.

In some cases, there is further violence visited upon the women by the Nauruan government itself. Last year, in a devastating breach of the privacy of women refugees, that government sent out a press release, detailing investigations of the rape of a young Somali woman. It cast doubts on the veracity of the victim's claims. It published explicit details of the woman's state of health, including a description of the woman's genitals. Those terrible revelations came amid claims by respected health workers that the state of healthcare on Nauru is catastrophic. We send women to a country where there are no safeguards in place to protect them and then with very little medical help.

Last year a group of activists decided they wanted to go and see what was happening for themselves and Australian Women in Support of Women on Nauru was born in order to investigate exactly what was going on. The money for the investigation was raised in an instant. The hopes of the activists were dashed much more quickly than that – when the Nauruan government responded to the campaign by saying that no Australian journalists would be permitted on to the island, with the exception of The Australian's Chris Kenny.

Now AWSWN has released its report, after nine months of research and investigation. The group is committed to bringing the story of Australia's treatment of women on Nauru to public attention – in direct opposition to the government which, as the report says, "is determined to place the plight of asylum seekers beyond the reach of the international media and civil society, and therefore as invisible as possible".

This report makes the invisible visible. Here is some of what they found. Women and children regularly exposed to sexual humiliation and harassment. They are subject to intrusive body searches. They have been raped, bashed, burnt, as they hasten from their demountable cabins to the local markets for food.

We already know about the shocking case of Abyan, the young woman who was raped and then became pregnant. The utterly careless way in which she was treated when she sought a termination should make all of us feel ashamed. Louise Newman, the professor of women's health at the University of Melbourne, said at the time: "The treatment of a 23-year-old pregnant rape survivor ... highlights the profound lack of understanding of the psychological impact of rape and trauma. Blaming the victim ... does nothing to help us understand her trauma."

And we know of S99. How awful that we assign numbers to tragedies. S99 escaped from Africa because she feared being stoned to death. At 16, she'd been married off to her much older husband who sexually and physically abused her. She witnessed the murder of her sister – and shortly after, started experiencing seizures. She escaped, ended up on Nauru; and then, in the midst of a seizure, she was raped. As a result of the rape, she became pregnant and asked to come to Australia to have a termination but instead was sent to Papua New Guinea. In May, the Federal Court found that the Australian government had failed in its duty of care to this young woman.

We know of Hadon, who set fire to herself in May this year and remains in hospital in a critical condition.

Maybe we don't know of the young Iranian woman who last month locked herself into her cabin on Nauru and set it alight. Her husband said this was not the first time she had tried to commit suicide. And maybe we don't know about the young African woman who has cut herself off from her community on Nauru since she was raped earlier this year.

Maybe we don't know of so many others. And maybe it's just that both our government and the government of Nauru don't want us to know.

And here we are, just four weeks from the election; and the two major parties think this is all perfectly fine. Both the Coalition and the ALP support offshore detention. There are 267 refugees in Australia right now for mental and physical health reasons and yet our country pretends that if we #letthemstay, all hell will break loose.

There is no hell here. The only hell is the one we make – the one we agree to build – when we send our responsibilities offshore.

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/refugee-women-on-nauru-are-exposed-to-horrific-trauma-every-day-20160606-gpcoy3.html>

13. The torment of women at Nauru: 'This is reason I left my country – this fear of rape'

Canberra Times
June 7 2016 - 7:51AM
Nicole Hasham

The sky was fast plunging into darkness when a car pulled up to Amina*, and the male driver leaned out to warn about wild dogs.

The animals roam Nauru in packs and Amina, a young female refugee who was waiting for a bus home, was already terrified of being mauled.

She accepted the Nauruan man's offer of a lift, but instead of taking her home, he drove Amina to a house, ordered her inside and stripped naked.

"Dogs came in too. I wet my pants and soiled my pants," Amina later recalled.

"This is reason I left my country – this fear of rape.

"[The man] hit my face very hard. He said: 'Dogs will kill you if you don't suck my private part'. Then I have no choice."

The case is detailed in a report to be released on Tuesday by Australian Women in Support of Women on Nauru - a group of researchers, journalists, lawyers and advocates including former WA Labor premier Carmen Lawrence and media academic Wendy Bacon.

The report, Protection Denied, Abuse Condoned: Women on Nauru at Risk, paints a horrifying portrait of rapes, bashings and other degrading acts against women sent to the island by successive Australian governments.

Refugee advocate Pamela Curr, one of the report's authors who spoke to Amina after the attack last year, said hers was not an isolated case.

"I've received calls from young women deeply distressed because they have been picked up on bush tracks and roads by locals and have either been raped or attacked," Ms Curr said.

Not all incidents are reported to police, and most that were "go nowhere", she said, adding many refugee woman say they are targeted "because we cover our bodies and the men don't like it".

The report also cited the case of a young African woman allegedly raped at Nauru in March.

The traumatised refugee, who lives in the community, has not left her room since the alleged incident and has attempted suicide, the report said. It noted that refugee settlement service Connect was refusing to bring her food or water, to encourage her to "rebuild her life" out in the community.

An email sent by a Connect manager to refugee advocate Ian Rintoul, sighted by Fairfax Media, said the alleged victim "has been unwilling to engage with strategies that we have suggested", including mental health support.

Connect was "unable to support her ongoing social isolation by providing food and water daily and thereby enabling a further deterioration in emotional health," the email said, adding that food and water was available nearby.

It said the woman could not return to live at the detention centre, as she had requested, because "facilitating independence is a key aspect of developing self agency and ... a return to [the centre] would be a backwards step".

A Connect spokesman said the woman was not brought food for several days, but was "not doing well" and case workers were now meeting her requests.

A Department of Immigration spokesman said Connect and Nauruan victim support services help assault victims report incidents to local police and access medical and mental health services.

Among the report's recommendations were that Australia end mandatory detention, make culturally and gender-specific medical treatment and counselling available at all times and that abuse cases be investigated by an inquiry with subpoena powers.

* not her real name

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/dogs-will-kill-you-if-you-dont-suck-my-private-part-the-torment-of-women-at-nauru-20160606-gpcfeq.html>

14. Nauruan Consulate Contradicts Peter Dutton Over Who Is Keeping Aussies Out Of Nauru

The Australian government has distanced itself from Nauru's controversial visa policies, which keep journalists and other critics out. But it seems no one told the Nauruan consulate. Max Chalmers reports.

New Matilda
By Max Chalmers
June 9, 2016

A senior Australian barrister who applied for a visa was told by the Nauruan consulate she must first gain approval from the Australian government, a suggestion that was quickly hosed down by Australian officials and eventually resulted in an apology.

Claire O'Connor SC, who has been involved in a number of high-profile refugee cases in Australia, had planned to visit Nauru in late 2015 as part of a fact finding mission. She had intended to travel with others including former Labor Premier Carmen Lawrence, and meet women being held in the Australian backed detention centre, along with those released into the community.

Open about her reasons for wanting to visit, O'Connor had an application for a tourist visa rejected by the Nauruan consulate. She then wrote back asking what the appropriate visa category for someone wanting to speak to refugees and asylum seekers would be.

"All regional processing matters are handled directly through our Justice and Immigration Department in partnership with the Australian Immigration Department," Trent Dabwido, a Consular Assistant, wrote to O'Connor. "I would suggest you approach the [sic] Australian Immigration first to ascertain the possibility of going to Nauru."

"Unfortunately I do not have the contact details for DIAC but this will be the best place to start. If everything proceeds then they will handle your application with Nauru Immigration as our office only deals with tourist permits."

"Hope this helps."

DIAC is an acronym previously used to refer to the Australian government department now known as the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

The email contradicts statements made by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, who earlier this year told ABC radio host Jon Faine that "the issue [of visas] is one for the Nauru Government."

Faine said he was keen to visit Nauru. When he pushed Dutton on helping him do so, the Minister fell back on the same point.

"Ultimately though, as you well know, without the sarcasm, as you well know, issuance of visas is an issue for the country of origin," Dutton said.

"When somebody wants to come here to visit Australia, we make a decision about whether we issue that person with a visa and that's a sovereign right of any nation," he added later.

While at odds with the Nauruan consulate, Dutton's assurances are consistent with the advice given by the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection after O'Connor contacted them as instructed.

"[DIBP] has no involvement in the management of travel to and from Nauru, despite the email you received from Mr Dabwido," Cheryl-anne Moy, a First Assistant Secretary in the Australian Immigration Department, told O'Connor.

Moy referred O'Connor back to Nauruan officials, and said the Australian Department had "asked the Government of Nauru to correct Mr Dabwido's understanding."

Moy noted that she had asked a Nauruan government official to contact O'Connor and clarify the process.

But the confusion didn't end there.

In a follow-up email from the consulate, Dabwido again wrote to O'Connor.

"I apologise as I may have led you to believe that approval from DIAC was a requirement before applying for the Nauru entry permit," he wrote.

"What I meant to say that [sic] DIAC and Nauru Immigration work together on the entry of all persons associated with the camps but Nauru Immigration has the final say in the approval process not DIAC."

That still appears to be at odds with the advice sent by Moy, who told O'Connor her Department had "no involvement", and that "Nauru as a sovereign nation is solely responsible for approval of visas."

O'Connor remains good-humoured about the saga, though the Nauruan consulate confirmed her application had been rejected. She said she wasn't surprised by the first email referring her back to Australian authorities.

"Do you think Nauru itself thought of getting an \$8,000 visa for journalists," she said, referring to the infamously expensive application for journalists wishing to visit. "What I was surprised by was that [the Nauruan official] was stupid enough to put it in writing."

Aside from the awkward contradictions, the email chain also evidences the difficulties faced by journalists, academics, lawyers, and politicians who wish to travel to Nauru to investigate the treatment of refugees passed off to the nation by Australia.

Kept out of Nauru, O'Connor went ahead and co-authored a report exploring the treatment of refugee women on the island. At its launch on Tuesday, fellow authors Wendy Bacon and Carmen Lawrence explained how they had also been kept out of the country.

The team crowd-funded \$20,000 and were prepared to call bluff on the exorbitant cost of applying for a journalist's visa, which Bacon would require. They booked flights and found local accommodation. It wasn't enough.

Lawrence, Australia's first female premier and a former federal minister in the Keating government, pushed Nauruan officials for a number of weeks before they simply stopped replying to her emails.

"I got one response saying there would be a timeframe for a decision," she said. "No decision was ever made."

Bacon also approached the consulate.

"I couldn't even get a response of any kind," she said on Tuesday.

O'Connor said she wanted to tell women on Nauru in person that women in Australia had not forgotten them, and that she still hopes to visit in the future.

In response to questions, the Department of Immigration and Border Protection reiterated the points made by Moy in her email to O'Connor.

"The Department of Immigration and Border Protection has no visibility or input whatsoever into the grant of visa applications for entry to Nauru," a spokesperson said.

"Nauru, as a sovereign nation, is solely responsible for approval of visas."

"The Department has made this point clearly in the past and these facts have not changed."

<https://newmatilda.com/2016/06/09/nauruan-consulate-contradicts-peter-dutton-over-who-is-keeping-aussies-out-of-nauru/>

15. Notorious bikie AJ Graham wins appeal against visa cancellation

ABC News Online

Posted Thu 9 Jun 2016, 9:50am

One of Tasmania's most notorious bikies AJ Graham has won his Federal Court appeal against the Immigration Minister's decision to cancel his visa.

Graham was a founding member of the Rebels motorcycle gang in Tasmania and former president of the club's Kingston chapter.

Immigration minister Peter Dutton cancelled Graham's visa in June 2015 on character grounds, and the 48-year-old was detained as part of a major crackdown on Tasmania's bikies.

Justice Richard Tracey heard the appeal against the decision, and found Mr Dutton's personal decision under the Migration Act was invalid.

Justice Tracey quashed the decision to cancel AJ Graham's visa and ordered the Federal Government to pay his costs.

AJ Graham was locked up in a prison in Goulburn, New South Wales, awaiting deportation to his country of New Zealand after his visa was cancelled.

He hired a team of lawyers to fight the decision, headed by Victoria's former chief magistrate Nick Papas, and included Hobart lawyers Greg Barns and Neil Humphrey.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-09/notorious-bikie-aj-graham-wins-visa-appeal/7495972>