

Project SafeCom News and Updates

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1. Paul Stevenson: I remember the day democracy walked out the door. It was the day we stopped being Australian

If nothing happens now about getting asylum seekers and refugees on the political agenda, then they will languish in hell holes for another three years

The Guardian
Paul Stevenson
Thursday 30 June 2016 15.56 AEST

Where did we go wrong? Did anybody see it happen? The day democracy walked out the door. The day we lost our freedom of speech. The day we stopped being Australian.

Well, I saw it. It was Wednesday 1 July 2015. I was sitting at the Wilson headquarters briefing table with about 20 other senior officers of Wilson Security on Nauru. I recall a chill went down my spine as I listened to the Australian Border Force Act prepared script being read out to the group: "From this day forward, a term of two years' imprisonment will apply to any person convicted of speaking out against offshore detention."

For me as a psychologist, unlike the others at that meeting, I immediately experienced the dilemma of being pitched against my professional ethical code (to protect and foster the wellbeing of my patients), and the threat of imprisonment for doing just that.

For the previous year, I had justified my existence on Nauru and Manus Island by doing my utmost to ease the pain and suffering of innocent people detained in these hell holes. But now it seemed I could endure my own hell hole in jail. Would that be an Australian jail, with a clean bed and three square meals a day, or a Nauruan jail, sleeping on a cement floor in 40-degree heat?

I thought of the nine Save the Children staff who had dared to speak out a couple of months earlier. They were corralled into a room at a hotel under Wilson's guard until we could get them out of the country, and spare them the wrath of the Nauruan police. I also reflected on the brave doctors and nurses of International Health and Medical Services (IHMS), who (prior to the ABF Act), dared to tell their story to the Australian media. I was in good company.

I kept a clandestine profile for my last deployment on Nauru, basically waiting two weeks for the plane to fly in and rescue me from the island. You see, I had already "spilt the beans" before this deployment, and it was only a matter of time before the authorities there found out. It was a very uncomfortable two weeks.

Exiting Nauru for the final time, my mind was focussed on the terror and desperation of the people I had sought to assist. Many of those critical incidents were reported to the Guardian last week when I blew the whistle on all I had seen. These included the excessive number of suicide attempts and self-harm – people swallowing nails and screws, ingesting bleach and other toxic chemicals, the head bashing, the chokings, the lip sewing, and the protests.

But there was one incident which will never leave me alone. This was an incident reported by one of my colleagues, that put me out of action for a day. She said a young woman (Asylum Seeker RPC 3) approached her with her infant child in her arms. Then with arms outstretched she said: "Would you please take my baby, so I can die."

Wake up Australia! What are we doing to people?

I had another contract with Nauru initiated two weeks ago on 16 June when I was asked by PsyCare to report to Nauru RPC 1 on 30 June. By 17 June I had completed my medical examination and PsyCare had completed my visa application, and forwarded my plane ticket. By 20 June at lunchtime – about 2 hours after the Guardian published the story – I received an email to inform me my services were no longer required.

And what of this election campaign? The rhetoric has been pure lies and deceit. On Four Corners Malcolm Turnbull repeatedly stated that offshore detention was the responsibility of Nauru and PNG.

This has always been in contention, but you only have to be on the ground there to know who's in charge. On Nauru, the Government of Nauru is considered by Australian contractors to be a nuisance factor only - an organisation to whom extortionate rent payments are made for the privilege of housing our centres there.

We are not only running the camps, we are supporting and sustaining the whole island. On Manus Island, one never sees any indication that the PNG Government is involved in any way. This was a disgraceful declaration by the leader of our nation, and a testament to just how out of touch he really is.

These next couple of days are crucial in determining the future of Australia's offshore detention regime. Great Australians, like Frank Brennan, Gillian Triggs and Julian Burnside have all called for closure of these concentration camps. After all, these are the international lawyers who best understand the implications of sovereign borders, and are calling for a compassionate integration of the 2000 remaining asylum seekers and refugees on Manus Island and Nauru in Australia.

If you want to talk money, if the centres were closed there would be a budget saving of billions of dollars a year – and that is substantial at a time of marked deficit.

But what of our democracy? What does all this say about Australians, about who we are? What does it do to a country to accept that we are condemned by every decent nation in the world, along with the UN, the UNHCR in particular?

I think it says we are a mob of complacents. We're far happier to spend the dying days of the election campaign on rehashed speeches about the economy, negative gearing, the homophobic-oriented plebiscite.

Both major parties have a policy to do nothing about offshore detention, but remember, if nothing happens now to get asylum seekers and refugees on the political agenda, then they will languish in those hell holes for another three years.

---->>>> *Paul Stevenson is an independent candidate for the Senate in Queensland in the forthcoming election. He is running with the support of the Australian Democrats, of which he is Queensland branch president.*

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/30/i-remember-the-day-democracy-walked-out-the-door-it-was-the-day-we-stopped-being-australian>

2. Paul Ronalds: Barack Obama is hosting a refugee summit, but Australia might not score an invite

Sydney Morning Herald
July 12, 2016
Paul Ronalds

As the end of his time in office draws near, US President Barack Obama is pulling rank and urging world leaders to come together in September for a summit in New York to address the global migrant crisis.

Malcolm Turnbull will barely have time to lick his election wounds before he is confronted with a serious question: will Australia come to this party and make a meaningful contribution to alleviating the worst global refugee crisis since World War II?

The stakes are high. Failure to take meaningful action will confirm Australia's international ignominy concerning the compassion for people fleeing war and persecution.

Along with his co-hosts from Sweden, Canada, Germany, Mexico, Ethiopia and Jordan, Obama wants countries to bring fresh commitments to accept more refugees and increase humanitarian funding so that millions of displaced families can be assured of food, clean water and education.

It shouldn't be hard for a nation like Australia to score an invitation. But the Obama summit is "pay to play", meaning only those leaders who are prepared to make new pledges get a seat at the table. Those who aren't will be left out in the cold, leaving the world to wonder why they didn't step up.

It would be an embarrassment if Turnbull, as leader of one of the wealthiest nations on earth, were not to attend – and a snub to the United States President.

So far there is no indication that Australia will be there, although that may be a result of the protracted caretaker period and immediate post-election uncertainty. But it is now incumbent on Malcolm Turnbull to quickly ensure he will attend, and do so bearing something of substance.

As it considers how to act, the government must keep in mind the magnitude of this crisis. By the end of last year, 65 million people had been uprooted by violence or natural disasters across the planet. It happened in places such as Syria and Iraq, but also as a result of lesser-reported crises such as the Boko Haram violence throughout the Lake Chad basin in Africa.

This is more human upheaval than during the fallout from the Vietnam War. Or Kosovo. It represents one in every 113 people on the planet.

About 21 million are refugees; more than half of these are children.

The Obama summit seeks to deliver a 30 per cent boost to funding for humanitarian organisations and appeals, and a doubling of the number of refugees settled by countries like Australia. Nations hosting refugees will also be asked to provide them with greater opportunities to become more self-reliant, including putting at least 1 million more refugee children in school and granting a million more refugees access to legal work.

Of course, these sort of pledges re-open wounds from Australia's torturous domestic immigration debate.

We must do our fair share by doubling our humanitarian emergencies fund for 2016-17 and committing a further \$442 million to the UNHCR. Such funding increases would go some way to making amends for the savage cuts to Australia's aid budget over recent years. Instead of being a generous contributor to solving global poverty, our official aid is among the stingiest in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Turnbull will also need to put aside some of the less attractive rhetoric of his election campaign, specifically his Immigration Minister's claims that significantly increasing our humanitarian intake would lead to scores of illiterate migrants in dole queues who would also, paradoxically, take local jobs.

Australia currently settles 13,750 refugees a year. A one-off intake of 12,000 Syrians and Iraqis is also currently being processed, although slowly.

But when compared with the magnitude of the current, worsening refugee crisis, our intake looks out of date. Australia cannot credibly maintain its hard-line border protection policies without also offering more safe and legal avenues for resettlement. We know that globally just 7 per cent of those seeking refuge have access to these kinds of pathways.

Despite its election rhetoric, the Coalition has already quietly vowed to increase the annual humanitarian intake to 18,750 by 2018-19. Labor says it would boost numbers to 27,000 by 2025. An urgent increase in our humanitarian intake to at least 30,000 would be a truer reflection of the need, and be commensurate with the growth in our economy.

Of course, even if the government stumped up commitments of this scale it would be doing so under the dark clouds of Nauru and Manus Island. Australia's inability or unwillingness to find a safe country to resettle the 1300-plus people languishing in offshore detention – while the rest of the world grapples with millions of displaced people – undermines our humanitarian credibility on the world stage.

The Obama summit provides Turnbull with a significant opportunity to cast off this recent ugly history.

And if he is willing to take it then Australia would once again be able to say it was standing alongside its global allies and contributing to a humane, sustainable and realistic solution for the millions of people who have had their lives thrown into chaos by forces beyond their control.

---->>>> *Paul Ronalds is chief executive officer of Save the Children Australia. Twitter: @PaulDRonalds*

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/barack-obama-is-hosting-a-refugee-summit-but-australia-might-not-score-an-invite-20160711-gq333b.html>

3. Richard Ackland: Even if they can form government, it will be a sour little victory for the Liberal party

Despite warnings of 'chaos' in the event of a hung parliament, history shows they can be effective. A government that has to fight for its ideas is no bad thing

The Guardian
Richard Ackland
Monday 4 July 2016 06.30 AEST

At the moment the Liberal party is a burnt and broken enterprise and to repair it may be quite impossible.

Tony Abbott's baton of failure has been passed to Malcolm Turnbull. The party is stuck in a miserable warp that locks out the country's crying unresolved issues, and there's no one in the wings with the integrity, intellect and command to drag it out of its pitiable state.

The great issues of the day that define who we are as a country were not part of the Coalition's play sheet, and this includes: climate change, offshore imprisonment of refugees and marriage equality. Instead, we had the mirage of an economic "plan" for jobs and growth, which on closer inspection turned out to be trickle-down economics based on a bunch of tax cuts for the better off.

Turnbull says he can form a majority government, in which event it will be a sour little victory – a victory without a mandate. The hard-right soul of the party is also in flames – just look at what happened in Tasmania where Senator Eric Abetz's Christian regressives run the local machine. There's no moral authority to be found there – all we might hope for is that now he sits quietly in a corner for a very long time.

The party started to take a primordial direction under John Howard, who is now paraded as a patron saint. The Liberals failed to heed the message that was delivered in 2007 when the saint was flung ignominiously by voters out of his own seat.

Turnbull and Scott Morrison crying foul on Saturday night about Labor party lies was a treat to behold. The “we was robbed” line coming from the people who brought us children overboard, Islamic scares, the “intelligence” for the Iraq war and fake budget projections is an exciting new audacity. Even the party’s very name is a lie.

The campaign was laced with warnings about “hung parliaments”, “vote sharing fiascos”, “chaos”. The obverse is that MPs should be puppets and parliament a rubber stamp for the party with the majority of seats, doing what the executive commands – yet “stability” has not been a uniform feature of the long history of Westminster-style parliaments. Indeed, the Senate has ensured that in Australia hung parliaments are the norm and minority governments are not unknown.

Importantly, this state of affairs is not always unworkable. Julia Gillard’s government operated both as a minority and in a hung parliament quite effectively, even if chaotically.

With the support of crossbenchers and the Greens, the Gillard Labor government passed 561 bills through parliament, not one of which was defeated on the floor of the House of Representatives, including the National Broadband Network, the carbon tax, the resource rent tax (even though it turned out not to be very effective), the National Disability Insurance Scheme, the household assistance package, and pension increases. Despite the raucous attacks from the Coalition, by any standard it was an effective government.

The federal election of September 1940 delivered a hung parliament in wartime. Menzies lost the confidence of the House with the result that John Curtin emerged as Australia’s most important prime minister. And it’s not as though that parliament sat on its hands – it passed the Statute of Westminster, legislation that gave Australia its own sovereignty, and created a uniform income tax regime, one of the most powerful public policy instruments. The Senate was hostile to Labor 21 to 15.

Political historian Rodney Cavalier argued that Australia today lives “in the shadow of the 1940 parliament more than any other”.

The election of December 1961 produced a situation most akin to today’s circumstances. The House of Representatives was then composed of 124 seats and following the election, and after provision of a speaker, the Menzies coalition clung on with a majority of one: 61-60. That was because the two Labor members for the territories were only permitted to vote on matters that affected the ACT and NT.

The wafer thin majority did not impede Menzies entering the great pantheon of do-little conservative heroes.

The mother of Westminster parliaments is also the mother of all hung parliaments where prime ministers have frequently failed to win majorities on the floor of the Commons – most notably and recently David Cameron in 2010, resulting in a Conservative Liberal-Democrat power sharing arrangement but an effective government nonetheless.

In fact, governments that control both houses invariably flop. Malcolm Fraser’s government had control of the Senate for a time and it is widely believed not to have done anything much with this unique opportunity. On the other hand, when the same advantage was delivered to the Howard government in 2004, the Senate was treated dismissively and arrogantly, the beginning of the hubris that saw voters turn the tide.

A government that has to fight for its ideas and legislation on the edge of a razor is no bad thing. The contest is more alive and substantial arguments have a better chance of winning the day.

One encouraging aspect of the 2016 election result is that the very best and worst efforts of the Murdoch press have not mattered a hill of beans in the outcome. If anything, the over-larded bias proved to be counterproductive to anyone other than the rapidly decreasing clutch of rusted on believers.

Now the smugness and swagger has been taken down a notch, or 10, from a Coalition that has assumed a god-given right to rule.

I remember two elections ago standing in the queue outside a polling station in the seat of Wentworth when a van pulled into the kerb, the door flung open to disgorge a small tribe of Turnbuls. Father and Mother Turnbull, little Daisy Turnbull and some retainers.

While Father Turnbull worked the queue, from which no one could escape, pumping hands and spreading charm, young Daisy bounced up and down advising the slack-jawed constituents that her father is “awesome”.

Alas, awesome no more.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jul/04/even-if-they-can-form-government-it-will-be-a-sour-little-victory-for-the-liberal-party>

4. Elizabeth Farrelly: There's hope in the ambiguous election result

Sydney Morning Herald
July 8, 2016 - 4:29PM
Elizabeth Farrelly

The week since our fabulously failed election has brought much hand-wringing and gnashing of teeth. Yet to me it's been a week of hope. Even now, the pundits dirge on about market miasma, ongoing uncertainty, lame-duck leaders, constitutional crisis and policy paralysis – like these were bad things. But right now, for Australia, I reckon a Parliament hovering between the hung and the hapless is the best possible kind.

Election Saturday offered a grim choice between one government hopelessly glued to coal, concentration camps and dirty roads, and another with the exact same adhesions. Both are hopelessly bewitched by big money – corporate on the one hand, union on the other – and do its ugly bidding.

But Sunday dawned upon a small miracle; ambiguity. Somehow, despite the left-right straitjacket of our binary system, despite all the gerrymanders and pork barrels, we'd lucked into the kind of ambiguity that may yet get us out from under Big Money. To me, every day we wake up sans government seems another day bright with possibility.

Money is more symptom than cause. Our binary system is busted, blown apart not by fiscal deficit but by a monstrous deficit in public trust. We no longer believe our politicians tell us the truth, about anything, ever – even when perhaps by some chance they do. We don't believe they speak according to fact, act according to conscience or promise according to intent.

But deceit is self-limiting. Government spin is like super-phosphate. It worked for a while, delivering apparent bounty before undermining its own benefits, leaving us in the deserts of corporatism. And yet - miraculously - we managed on Saturday to split the system right along its mid-seam. This is hope. This is the crack where the light gets in.

The whole left-right thing has always seemed to me a false and irritating dichotomy. Values do not come in packages. Believing coal should cede to renewables doesn't necessarily mean you support feminism or multiculturalism or free healthcare. You can oppose cycle lanes and also genetic modification.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/theres-hope-in-our-woeful-election-result-20160707-gq0edd.html>

5. Paul Keating says John Howard should 'hang his head in shame' over Iraq war

Sydney Morning Herald
July 8, 2016
Georgina Mitchell

Former Prime Minister Paul Keating has called for John Howard to "hang his head in shame" over his involvement in the Iraq War, which he says brought "the spectre of terrorism and racial strife" to Australia.

Mr Keating, a Labor Prime Minister who served for two terms and was succeeded by Mr Howard in 1996, said Mr Howard should "atone for his actions and those of his government" after a UK government report found the 2003 invasion of Iraq was based on flawed intelligence.

The Chilcot report, released on Wednesday, found the flawed intelligence should have been challenged but wasn't, and the severity of the threat posed by Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction", which were never found, was presented to the public with "a certainty that was not justified".

Despite these findings, Mr Howard joined his former British counterpart Tony Blair in defending his role in sending Australian troops to war along with British and American soldiers.

"I defend that decision. I don't retreat from it. I don't believe that, on the basis of the information that was available to me, it was the wrong decision. I really don't," Mr Howard said in a news conference in Sydney on Thursday.

Mr Howard said it was clear the Saddam Hussein regime wanted to resume its "WMD" program, while Tony Blair said he would invade Iraq again if he was put into the same situation.

On Thursday evening, Mr Keating gave a scathing assessment of Mr Howard's justification, saying it was a "stubborn and unctuous denial" that should be "held in contempt by every thinking Australian".

"Could you imagine the woebetidings of Howard and the Liberal Party, had it been [Bob] Hawke or I who had committed Australia to such an un-mandated assault on another country?" Mr Keating said in a statement.

"We would never have heard the end of it. The Liberals would have been wringing their hands for decades.

"The incompetent management of Iraq following the invasion, fractured that country and with it, Syria and the region around it, casting millions adrift from their lives and homes. A sea of refugees. Yet Howard has no shame of it. And no responsibility.

"Howard has visited on Australia the whole spectre of terrorism, through his craven and ill-judged support of the United States and its invasion."

Mr Keating said Australia was "perhaps the most successful multicultural society in the world", with the settlement of a large Muslim population, but "John Howard put the torch to that".

"Now we live perpetually with the spectre of terrorism and racial strife, visited upon us by his prejudices and lack of judgment," he said.

"In the face of the Chilcot Report, John Howard should atone for his actions and those of his government. He should, at least, hang his head in shame."

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/paul-keating-says-john-howard-should-hang-his-head-in-shame-over-iraq-war-20160707-gq12fq.html>

6. Time for new voices: Why Steve Price's tired schtick is getting very, very old

Sydney Morning Herald
July 12, 2016 - 1:09PM
Andrew P Street

Being a past-your-prime performer – sorry, "heritage artist" – can be difficult.

There comes a time when one's audience is no longer going to get any bigger and those still paying attention are doing so out of fondness for your early stuff. No one heads along to a Rolling Stones gig hoping to hear a bunch of songs off the substandard new record and no one buys a late-period Paul McCartney album expecting it to be one that finally throws the Beatles in the shade.

But we recognise that, at this point in time, this is just what they do. Mick Jagger's not going to suddenly return to the business career he put on hold at age 19 when he can still howl Satisfaction at a paying audience. Not only is it fun and lucrative, but it's pretty much the only thing he can do.

A similar thought went through my mind while watching Monday night's Q&A, as veteran conservative broadcaster Steve Price dismissively talked over journalist Van Badham even as she was explaining how dismissive attitudes toward women – such as those expressed by Price's avowed pals Eddie McGuire and Sam Newman – contribute to a culture of violence. When she called him out on it, he called her hysterical – and the audience oohed as though they were watching a pantomime villain twirl his moustache.

And it's easy – and also fun! – to criticise Price for his casual misogyny and to giggle at how flustered and defensive he got when the woman he was attempting to talk over refused to yield. It's deserving of mockery, because he was legitimately acting like a clown.

But, in his defence, that's his thing.

There's an inexplicably competitive market in Australian media for the niche best described as "middle-aged man suspicious of everything that's not him", as the existence of The Verdict and slew of angry criticisms about this year's Gold Logie nominations made soberingly clear.

And it's not like Price has an alternative career to fall back on. This is his market share, and he's going to cling to it.

That's because Price, Newman and McGuire and their ilk are all heritage artists. They have their classic material that they pull out to a decreasing audience of people that still punch the air as they sing along to such well-loved hits as You're Getting Hysterical, It's Just A Bit of Fun, Some of My Best Friends Are (Of The Group I'm Currently Stereotyping) and, of course, the timeless classic It's Political Correctness Gone Mad!

We've heard those songs enough. They're relics from another era, sending as reprehensible a message as the Beatles' Run For Your Life and the Stones' Under My Thumb.

And, like classic rock, it gets far too much airplay. Watching Price's undignified scramble on Q&A was like watching a sitcom dad demanding his daughter turn off that darn hippy-hoppy music, only with more genuine venom and fear.

Words have power and that's why we take them so very seriously. Words shape attitudes and they shape actions.

If your job demands broadcasting the message that some group of people are less important than the one you represent, then you can't pretend to be shocked, much less blameless, when that group is subsequently victimised by your audience.

This isn't a freedom of speech issue: it's a matter of taking responsibility for what one says. That isn't exactly that onerous a demand to ask of those of us operating in the media, surely?

There are so many better songs out there, from a diverse range of far superior artists. They should be getting more airtime, because Price's tired schtick is getting very, very old.

<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/time-for-new-voices-why-steve-prices-tired-schtick-is-getting-very-very-old-20160712-gq3qrb.html>

7. Pauline Hanson could unleash hatred and violence, says Tim Soutphommasane

'There's great potential for harm to be done when you're talking about inflammatory rhetoric,' says race discrimination commissioner

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Tuesday 5 July 2016 09.45 AEST

Australia's race discrimination commissioner, Tim Soutphommasane, fears Pauline Hanson could create a new wave of racially fuelled hatred and division.

Hanson's One Nation party is likely to take at least three Senate seats and has a long list of anti-Muslim policies.

At her first media conference since election night, Hanson said Islam was not a religion of peace but rather an ideology.

She wants a royal commission into Islam, and says hatred has been preached in mosques. Her party also wants surveillance cameras in all mosques and Islamic schools.

Hanson said some Australians were now seeing she was right almost two decades ago when she used her maiden speech in federal parliament to warn that Australia risked being swamped by Asians.

Soutphommasane told the ABC Hanson's anti-Asian comments 20 years ago had unleashed a great deal of ugliness and division and he feared a similar experience with her return to the political arena.

"There's great potential for harm to be done when you're talking about inflammatory rhetoric or appeals to xenophobia," he said.

"They make a sure recipe for hate and division. Australian racial tolerance and community harmony will not be served by an indulgence of such kind."

Soutphommasane said events overseas had shown how "licensing hate can lead to serious violence and ugliness in our streets and our communities".

"We shouldn't be doing anything to compromise the remarkable success story of Australian multiculturalism," he said.

Hanson went to the election on a platform that includes doing away with the Racial Discrimination Act and "abolishing multiculturalism", although she hasn't said how that could be achieved.

She also wants to stop further Muslim immigration, halt the intake of Muslim refugees, ban the construction of mosques, and ban the burqa and niqab being worn in public.

She has called for a referendum on changing the part of the constitution that offers protection for the free practice of religion.

Soutphommasane said he had invited Hanson to meet him to discuss her views.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jul/05/pauline-hanson-could-unleash-hatred-and-violence-says-tim-soutphommasane>

8. Tim Soutphommasane: Pauline Hanson might be back, but Australia has moved on

Sydney Morning Herald
July 5, 2016 - 7:46PM
Tim Soutphommasane

The more things change, the more they stay the same. That's the feeling you get sometimes about race and political debate.

In her maiden speech to Parliament in 1996, Pauline Hanson warned that Australia was being "swamped by Asians" and called for multiculturalism to be abolished. This week Hanson again claimed the country is being swamped by Asians. Her One Nation Party has also made it part of its platform to abolish the Racial Discrimination Act, impose a ban on new mosques, and have a royal commission into Islam.

Apart from the new emphasis on Islam, the politics of Hansonism haven't changed during the past two decades. By contrast, Australian society has moved on. We have grown even more diverse. Close to half of our population is first- or second-generation Australian. The largest source countries of immigration are now China and India.

Moreover, multiculturalism enjoys robust public support. Surveys show that about 86 per cent of Australians believe it is good for the country. The vast majority of us are relaxed and comfortable about leaving room for diversity in our national identity.

There is, of course, a small but vocal minority of our society that is anything but relaxed and comfortable. Some are fearful and anxious about cultural change. Sometimes, racism can play a part in forming or expressing these concerns.

We should be clear about a few things. It's important that we are able to have debates about multiculturalism and immigration. In a democracy, no issue is ever beyond discussion.

But the manner in which we conduct debates matter. Citizens should be civil and respectful. Arguments should be grounded in facts and reason. Passions and emotions must never spill over into violence.

The recent experience of the US and Britain demonstrate exactly what can happen when politicians appeal to xenophobia. Consider the violence seen at rallies in support of Donald Trump. Or consider the murder of British parliamentarian Jo Cox in the lead-up to the Brexit vote (which has since unleashed a spike in racist attacks).

Rhetoric isn't just rhetoric. It has consequences. If you constantly tell people that things are at breaking point, or that some groups are criminals and terrorists, don't be surprised if people start taking you at your word.

This goes to one responsibility that our political leaders must fulfil. It isn't in the national interest for politicians to give licence to prejudice.

There is a grave cost when they lapse. Groups and communities can be singled out. Back in the 1990s, it was those of Asian backgrounds who were susceptible. Today, it is Muslim Australians who are frequently labelled as a public threat (though Asian Australians aren't yet off the hook).

Liberal democracies must take their values seriously. Every member of our society should be free to live without fear of discrimination. This includes being free to practise their religion, as guaranteed by section 116 of the Constitution.

For friends of decency, taking our values seriously means fighting any resurgent intolerance. It means confronting racism and bigotry. People can be admittedly reluctant to do so. No one these days wants to be accused of being "politically correct" about race. People can be cowed into silence or into turning a blind eye.

But we shouldn't be apologetic about responding to ignorance or nastiness. Yes, everyone is free to have an opinion. But having an opinion doesn't mean that others must agree with you. Those who invoke freedom of speech shouldn't complain when others exercise the same freedom.

Indeed, calling out racism or bigotry doesn't mean that you are preventing someone from having an opinion. It just means that you are holding them to account for what they say. If people don't want to be called a racist or a bigot, they can start by not expressing a racist or bigoted opinion.

Which brings us to how we define racism and bigotry today. Some believe something is only truly racist if it involves a belief in racial superiority or is motivated by malice. Anti-Muslim hostility, meanwhile, is frequently excused on the grounds that "Islam is not a race".

We can dispense with both excuses. The first overlooks how racism is as much about impact as it is about intention. You don't need malice in order to vilify or discriminate. Lazy stereotypes and casual exclusion can also cause harm. Sometimes ignorance or arrogance is all that it takes.

As for Islam not being a race? That's a clever trick – one that ignores how anti-Muslim feeling can involve a mingling of ideas about race, culture and religion. Whatever its nuance, religious bigotry does little to aid racial tolerance and harmony. Elections often give countries a chance to measure their social progress. So far after this election, we have seen some early signs of the racial ugliness and social division that erupted 20 years ago.

---->>> *Dr Tim Soutphommasane is race discrimination commissioner.*

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/pauline-hanson-might-be-back-but-australia-has-moved-on-20160705-gpyydt>

9. Report Shows How War Profiteers Are Now Refugee Profiteers, Too

Arms dealers flood war-torn Middle East with weapons and then lobby EU to militarize borders against refugees—profiting from both ends of conflict

Common Dreams

Monday, July 04, 2016

by Nika Knight, staff writer

As Europe comes to terms with a Brexit vote fueled in large part by anti-immigrant hate-mongering, a new report exposes how war profiteers are influencing EU policy to make money from unending Middle East conflicts as well as the wave of refugees created by that same instability and violence.

The report (pdf), *Border Wars: The Arms Dealers Profiting from Europe's Refugee Tragedy*, released jointly by the European Stop Wapenhandel and Transnational Institute (TNI) on Monday, outlines arms traders' pursuit of profit in the 21st century's endless conflicts.

"There is one group of interests that have only benefited from the refugee crisis, and in particular from the European Union's investment in 'securing' its borders," the report finds. "They are the military and security companies that provide the equipment to border guards, the surveillance technology to monitor frontiers, and the IT infrastructure to track population movements."

The report shows that "far from being passive beneficiaries of EU largesse, these corporations are actively encouraging a growing securitization of Europe's borders, and willing to provide ever more draconian technologies to do this."

In the past decade, the report says, corporate players have viewed intractable Middle East warfare as a windfall: "Several large international arms companies cited instability in the Middle East to assure investors about future prospects for their business. The arms companies are assisted by European governments, which actively promote European arms in the region and are very reluctant, to say the least, to impose stricter arms export policies."

Indeed, "from 2005 to 2014, EU member states granted arms exports license to the Middle East and North Africa worth over 82 billion euros," according to the report.

The report details how a steady flow of arms from outside the Middle East supplies all players in multi-part conflicts, such as Syria's civil war, with an endless supply of high-tech weaponry—thus ensuring that those conflicts endure.

And as these wars create more and more refugees who seek asylum in Europe, the very same corporations are lobbying the EU to 'securitize' its borders against them—thus creating additional profit for those in the business of militarization.

Moreover, Stop Wapenhandel and TNI found "industry representatives, government officials and military and security personnel meet around the year at conferences, fairs and round tables."

The report quotes Nick Vaughan-Williams, international security professor at the University of Warwick, saying: "At these events it is possible to identify a cyclical culture whereby the presentation of new technologies not only responds to, but also enables and drives the formulation of new policies and practices in the field of border security and migration management."

And these "special fairs and congresses on border security are relatively new," the report notes. "They all started within the last decade."

"I believe the influence of the military and security industry on the shaping of the [EU's] border security policy is quite big, especially on the securitization and militarization of these and on the expanding use of surveillance technology and data exchange," Stop Wapenhandel's Mark Akkerman told Common Dreams. "Industry efforts include regular interactions with EU's border institutions (including high ranking officials and politicians), where ideas are discussed that later turn up in new EU policy documents."

"For example, the industry has been pushing for years to upgrade [EU border agency] Frontex to a cross-European border security agency," Akkerman added. "The new European Border and Coast Guard Agency the European Commission has proposed, which has a lot more powers (has its own equipment, direct interventions in member states, binding decisions forcing member states to strengthen border security capacities) than Frontex has now, is exactly that."

"If the establishment of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency proceeds," the report notes, "this would mean a fundamental shift to an EU-controlled system of border security, with the possibility of bypassing the member states and forcing them to strengthen controls and purchase or upgrade equipment."

"It is not hard to predict that this will lead refugees to use increasingly dangerous routes, strengthening the business case for traffickers. For the military and security industry, however it means the prospect of more orders from the agency itself and from member states," the report continues.

Akkerman pointed out the EU's stunning dismissal of human rights in this profit-motivated process:

"The human rights of refugees play no real role in this thinking, except for promotional purposes. Both the policy makers and the industry sometimes try to sell the increase in and militarization of border security as a humanitarian effort, in terms of strengthening search and rescue capacities. The EU has repeatedly tried to put all the blame for refugee deaths on traffickers. This has resulted in narrowing its response to 'taking away the business model of smugglers', with even more military means to try to accomplish this."

"This creates a downward spiral: the greater the controls and the more the repression, the greater the risks refugees are forced to take resulting in more deaths. Experts (academics) and human rights organizations have been warning about this for years, but they have been ignored."

As death tolls rise and a record number of people are displaced by conflict, it seems that the fear-mongering and profiteering—and devastating human rights abuses—will only continue.

<http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/07/04/report-shows-how-war-profiteers-are-now-refugee-profiteers-too>

10. Editorial: Corruption extends beyond state borders

Sydney Morning Herald
Editorial
June 30, 2016 - 12:05AM

At election time more than any other we see our democracy on display. We look to our politicians to represent our interests in the contest of ideas so that we can vote for what we believe in instead of fighting each other in the streets. Yet on corruption, which sabotages the system that serves us, our federal MPs are letting us down.

Some of the dimensions of that failure came into view this week, with the conviction of former NSW Labor MP Eddie Obeid for misconduct, and a Fairfax Media/ABC 7.30 investigation into alleged corruption in the Australian Border Force, the federal agency formed in 2015 to guard our nation's borders.

On the evidence, crime syndicates and people smugglers are rorting Australia's visa system to set up prostitution rackets, drug importation networks and criminal financial enterprises. It is asserted that thousands of people have bought visas with fraudulent applications for a going rate of \$50,000 in cash. It appears every link in the visa supply chain is infected – migration agents, employers who sponsor workers, education providers and immigration officials.

The head of the immigration department's investigations office between 2007 and 2013 Joseph Petyanszki said investigators had uncovered thousands of cases of fraudulent visa applications but in most cases no charges had been brought. He claims that the singular focus of both major parties on stopping asylum seeker boats has enabled endemic visa fraud among those arriving by plane. If that is so, then we have all been duped.

State and federal agencies investigating drug and tobacco trafficking in the past two years have also identified serving border force officers involved in corrupt conduct. Labor leader Bill Shorten demanded that the government answer the claims. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said allegations of criminality would be pursued relentlessly.

Yet the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, the small corruption watchdog responsible for overseeing law enforcement agencies including the Australian Border Force, the Australian Crime Commission and the Australian Federal Police, is so overloaded that it relies on the AFP 's help. It has also recently asked the border force to help pay for its operations.

No matter how determined or hard working its officers, a watchdog that cannot operate independently from the agencies it is meant to watch over is compromised. This unacceptable situation points to the deeper problem: that the system for policing corrupt conduct among federal agencies, departments and MPs is piecemeal, underfunded and lacks leadership and coordination.

The solution is a standing independent watchdog with the power to expose corruption and misuse of power in the federal public service and Parliament. It's supported by the Greens and Nick Xenophon but the Coalition and Labor rejected a Greens Senate motion for a National Integrity Commission in April. Shorten now says he would ask the Parliament to look at it again if he wins the election.

The Herald has long argued for a federal anti-corruption body similar to the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption. Among 78,000 Fairfax Media readers who participated in a YourVote survey, 79 per cent want the government to establish such a body. Only 6 per cent don't.

Every state now has an independent anti-corruption watchdog and the Northern Territory soon will. The lack of a federal watchdog implies that corruption miraculously stops at state and territory borders, or that federal government departments, agencies and MPs can keep themselves in line better than outside scrutiny would. Both propositions are implausible.

In just the past few years, some matters that might have attracted the attention of a National Integrity Commission or similar include: alleged kickbacks for the production of Australian plastic banknotes by companies linked to the Reserve Bank of Australia, backdoor donations to the NSW Liberal Party through the federal Liberal fundraising body the Free Enterprise Foundation, claims surrounding inducements or enticements allegedly offered to James Ashby, the former staffer who made sexual harassment allegations against the speaker Peter Slipper in 2012 but later dropped them, slush fund allegations against former prime minister Julia Gillard, links between federal Labor and corrupt unions.

When decisions about which allegations are referred to one-off inquiries and royal commissions are politically motivated, the public is rightly sceptical. Our democracy needs to be protected by all legitimate means at our collective disposal. That includes a federal anti-corruption body, the sooner the better.

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/smh-editorial/corruption-extends-beyond-state-borders-20160628-gptmt3.html>

11. Border Force rejects claim it unlawfully detained racing driver Greg Holloway

Holloway alleges officers 'exceeded the statutory power authorised' by law when he was detained more than 30 times at Australian airports since 2011

The Guardian
Melissa Davey
Wednesday 6 July 2016 18.20 AEST

The Australian Border Force has rejected claims by Melbourne racing car driver Greg Holloway that he has been detained unlawfully more than 30 times at Australian airports since 2011 for interrogation, questioning, searching, X-raying and luggage testing.

Holloway has taken the matter to the supreme court, and is seeking aggravated and exemplary damages. His statement of claim alleges the actions by the officers constituted false imprisonment and were unlawful because the officers "exceeded the statutory power authorised" by legislation.

"On each of these occasions the plaintiff has been released from questioning without charge, investigation or any subsequent action being taken," court documents state. "As a result of the alleged conduct, the plaintiff claims that the commonwealth has caused him loss or damage including loss of liberty for extended periods, fear, anxiety and panic attacks, and loss of income and opportunity relating to his business interests. The plaintiff seeks both aggravated and exemplary damages."

Holloway, who is also a businessman, has also requested all documents relating to him held by Australian Border Force be handed over. Last week, Victorian supreme court judge John Dixon formally ordered the commonwealth to release most of the requested materials to Holloway, including CCTV footage and documents relating to his being detained and questioned.

Dixon rejected the commonwealth's claims that the documents could not be released for security reasons.

"I am persuaded that the forensic interests of the plaintiff in this information are legitimate and the claim of the commonwealth to secrecy or confidentiality in respect of identification information if not non-existent, is weak," Dixon found. "As such, the public interest in preserving secrecy in identification information is incapable of outweighing the public interest in the due administration of justice."

He also refused to redact the names of officers from most of those documents, finding: "The fact that ABF [Australian Border Force] officers work in controlled areas at airports is irrelevant. As asserted by the plaintiff, so do AFP [Australian federal police] members and authorised contractors, none of whom have a basis upon which to assert immunity in relation to their identity.

"I consider the claim that immunity should be granted because there is an increased prospect that, if identified, ABF officers may become involved in, or recruited for, involvement in illegal behaviour is a nonsense." The commonwealth has denied Holloway's allegations, in particular that he was unlawfully detained.

A spokesman for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection told Guardian Australia that despite being ordered to hand over documents to Holloway, the department "does not accept the claims that have been made and will be defending this matter before the supreme court".

"As the query relates to a matter which is subject to court proceedings, no further comment is appropriate at this stage," he said.

The spokesman would not confirm if the materials had since been given to Holloway.

The case continues.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jul/06/border-force-rejects-claim-it-unlawfully-detained-racing-driver-greg-holloway>

12. Hazara refugees take Immigration Minister Peter Dutton to Federal Court over citizenship application delays

ABC-TV - Lateline

By Jason Om

First posted Wed 6 Jul 2016, 5:20pm

Updated Wed 6 Jul 2016, 8:33pm

Two Afghan refugees have taken legal action against Immigration Minister Peter Dutton over delays in the processing of their applications for Australian citizenship.

The ethnic minority Hazara men fled persecution in Afghanistan, arriving in Australia by boat in 2010 and were granted permanent protection visas as refugees.

The Federal Court in Melbourne has heard the men qualified for Australian citizenship by living in the community for four years and then sitting and passing the citizenship test.

However, since passing the test in 2014 and 2015 respectively, the men have not progressed to receiving a citizenship ceremony.

The ceremony is the final stage of becoming of a citizen, where applicants make a pledge of commitment to Australia and receive a certificate of Australian Citizenship.

"After I passed the test I was very happy," one of the litigants known only as "BMG16" told Lateline, but after almost two years of limbo he decided to take the matter to court.

The Immigration Department's service standard of processing citizenship applications is 80 days.

"I'm working for five years, I pay tax, I'm not [on] Centrelink, I have a good [police] record. I don't have any problems in Australia," the man said.

The Refugee Council hopes the court action will serve as a test case for potentially hundreds of refugees in a similar predicament.

"It seems to be discriminatory," the Council's Asher Hirsch said.

"It seems to be affecting refugees who came by boat where other migrants applying for citizenship such as those coming from the UK are getting processed in a much quicker time."

Hazaras' citizenship ceremonies cancelled

Sydney's Hazara community is watching the court case closely with several members telling Lateline they have received invitations to citizenship ceremonies, only to have them cancelled.

Community advocate Arif Nabizada has been fielding calls from many Hazaras who are frustrated by delays of up to two years.

"Obviously it is very unfair," he said.

"I'm really hoping that this person will win the court case because that is a window of opportunity for others."

Lateline has been told a number of Sri Lankan Tamil permanent residents have also had their applications stalled.

Lawyers for the Federal Government belatedly filed a response to the court case today after missing a deadline last week.

A spokesman for Mr Dutton said he would not provide any comment given the matter is before the court.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-06/hazara-refugees-take-legal-action-over-citizenship-application/7574988>

13. Richard Di Natale: Greens will not deal on closing offshore processing centres

The Greens leader says: 'Our policy will never change. We want those camps closed'

The Guardian

Melissa Davey

Thursday 30 June 2016 16.21 AEST

The Greens leader, Richard Di Natale, has said his party will not move from its position that offshore processing centres must be closed if there are negotiations with the major parties after the election.

He was speaking while campaigning in the Victorian electorate of Batman on Thursday, a seat held by Labor's David Feeny but which the Greens' Alex Bhathal, running for a fifth time, hopes to win.

The day before, Di Natale told reporters that although the Greens wanted offshore processing centres closed, that position was a "starting point" and that everything was a "negotiation".

Asked to clarify on Thursday whether the Greens were willing to do a deal with Labor, he said: "Our policy will never change. We want those camps closed.

"That is a bottom line that we will never negotiate on. Those camps must be closed because they harm and damage people. If we have an opportunity to vote against offshore processing, we'll do that.

"Our policy is rock solid. We will never compromise on an end to those camps. We will never compromise on the cruelty and brutality that is offshore detention. But that shouldn't stop us from trying to get the other two parties to change their position."

Di Natale also dismissed claims that Labor party strategists believe Adam Bandt's seat of Melbourne, the only lower house seat held by the Greens, could go to Labor's candidate, Sophie Ismail.

"I think Adam Bandt has done a wonderful job in Melbourne and I'm very, very confident Adam will be returned," he said.

The press conference outside the Commonwealth Bank building in Reservoir, where many senior citizens were doing their banking, was interrupted by a couple of vocal pensioners.

"It's all bullshit," an older man yelled while walking past. Another senior man asked "What are you going to do for the pensioners?" before quickly being guided out of earshot by a member of the Greens staff.

Reservoir, about 12km north of Melbourne, is increasingly gentrified, attracting young, independent professionals and couples looking for housing more affordable than Brunswick and Fitzroy. But there are also many people with Italian ancestry and Di Natale spoke to them in Italian, sharing jokes and outlining how to vote.

He then moved on to the markets in the neighbouring suburb of Preston, joining Bhathal as she talked to storeowners. Bhathal, who has lived in the electorate for 30 years, knows many of them well. There was an awkward moment when Feeny showed up, shook hands with Bhathal and then moved on. Feeny has a habit of showing up "a few minutes after" the Greens do, Bhathal said.

The Greens have 600 volunteers on the ground in the Batman electorate, with up to 170 people door-knocking at once. Taylor Karney, 21, and Lance Fox, 35, voted at a Labor pre-polling visited by Di Natale and Bhathal on Thursday.

They know who Bhathal is. "Her posters are everywhere," Karney said.

"But they need to talk about more than just the environment and start speaking about employment and taxation and other things that also affect people in their everyday lives."

Di Natale spent a lot of time answering questions about Greens policy. He said it was frustrating that the Greens policies – beyond the environment – weren't cutting through.

"But it's changing," he said. "People see our positions on things like renewable energy and our commitment to the NBN; they see how those policies are jobs-rich. But it's a challenge, being a party that's relatively young compared to the two old parties, and being in a party that doesn't get the media exposure of its policies that the other parties do.

"We've released a suite of policies around jobs and the new economy."

The Greens have announced a \$400m investment in Tafe to provide skills for the long-term unemployed and the elderly. The party's Renew Australia policy has a plan to transition workers in coal to renewable industries through training and reskilling programs.

"I've made a deliberate effort to focus on our strong position on jobs and also economic issues," he said.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/30/richard-di-natale-greens-will-not-deal-on-closing-offshore-processing-centres>

14. Most people sent to Manus Island are genuine refugees, new figures show

Sydney Morning Herald
June 30, 2016 - 3:35PM
Bianca Hall

Almost 90 per cent of the asylum seekers Australia has sent to Papua New Guinea are genuine refugees, new figures suggest.

Figures tendered to the PNG Supreme Court this week, and obtained by Fairfax, show that just 12.3 per cent of the detainees on Manus Island who have been processed were found not to have valid claims for protection.

This means that 87.7 per cent of people who have been assessed are refugees - an almost identical proportion to the number of boat arrivals to Australia who were later found to be genuine refugees. Figures from 2012-13 show 88 per cent of boat arrivals were found to be genuine refugees.

Despite this, many of the men on Manus Island have languished there for almost three years.

There are 1010 refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island, the documents show, with 43 of those people remaining under the medical care of Australian authorities - a figure unchanged in two months.

The number of people processed by PNG authorities is also unchanged in the two months to June 28 - despite assurances by the PNG government that it would fast-track processing.

PNG authorities have approved 545 people for refugee status and assessed another 76 as being "non refugees".

Languishing in detention are 389 asylum seekers who are yet to have their refugee claims processed.

The Supreme Court in Waigani, PNG, is impatient with progress so far. On Wednesday it issued a two-week deadline for the remaining asylum seekers to be processed. Chief Justice Sir Salamo Injia said the process had dragged on for long enough.

The court also insisted that asylum seekers now be called "residents", after a recent Supreme Court ruling that the detention of asylum seekers at the centre was illegal.

According to a statement of claim lodged in the court, delays in processing asylum claims "and resultant uncertainties over future prospects", is one of the most frequently-made complaints by asylum seekers and refugees on Manus.

"The applicants are now beginning the third year of their accommodation at the Centre and still do not have any idea as to when they will be released."

Lawyer Ben Lomai told local media in PNG that none of the refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island wanted to stay in PNG once their cases had been resolved.

The figures, compiled by PNG, show the highest groups of detainees on Manus Island are Iranians, Afghans, Pakistanis and stateless people.

Of the 389 still in limbo, 242 have gone through initial assessments and are waiting for the PNG Immigration Minister, Rimbink Pato, to sign off on their cases - while another 147 are yet to have their claims heard.

However, in the past two months, PNG authorities have assessed more people not to be refugees than in the past: of the 242 waiting for Mr Pato's sign-off, 127 were given negative assessments compared with positive assessments for 115 people.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/most-people-sent-to-manus-island-are-genuine-refugees-new-figures-show-20160630-gpv5ns.html>

15. Two asylum seekers threatened at gun point in Port Moresby, one injured

ABC News Online
By Papua New Guinea correspondent Eric Tlozek
Posted Tue 12 Jul 2016, 8:37pm

Two asylum seekers have been threatened at gunpoint at a motel housing asylum seekers and refugees in Port Moresby.

Australia's Department of Immigration and Border Protection has confirmed two men were caught up in an armed robbery at the motel on the evening of July 10.

"Two residents from the Manus Regional Processing Centre (RPC) were present at the time," a spokesman said in a statement.

"One resident was assaulted by an offender, however was not seriously injured.

"Law enforcement in PNG is the responsibility of the PNG Government."

The men were among a group from Australia's detention centre on Manus Island who were staying in Port Moresby for medical treatment.

Refugees on Manus Island said Australian security contractors were also robbed.

They said the asylum seekers were traumatised and had asked to be sent back to the remote province.

But the department said they would remain in Port Moresby for the moment.

"They will return to the Manus RPC when their treatment is complete," the spokesman said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-12/two-asylum-seekers-threatened-at-gun-point-in-port-moresby/7623228>

16. 'End this political game': Manus Island refugee makes plea to Australia

Myanmar refugee Imran Mohammad Fazal Hoque writes of 'inhumane and cruel torture' suffered during 1,000 days in Australian-run detention and calls for government to find safe resettlement

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thursday 30 June 2016 15.22 AEST

A Rohingya refugee held on Manus Island for more than two-and-a-half years has pleaded for Australia to "end this political game" and find resettlement for refugees in a safe country.

Imran Mohammad Fazal Hoque, 22, who fled Myanmar as a teenager, has written a 26-page account of nearly 1,000 days spent in the Australian-run detention centre on Manus Island.

Imran, who learned English while in detention and whose written account was assisted by teachers on the island and compiled by friends in Australia, said his dossier was "the cry of a voice in isolation ... to the whole world".

"I am a Rohingya boy from Myanmar (Burma). I am 22 years old now. I have been persecuted and deprived of my basic human rights since I was born right up to now. I have never known safety or peace, and I have never known citizenship or a right to call any country my own."

Imran describes in comprehensive detail the daily privations, and the restrictions on movement and communication on Manus Island. His words offer a rarely seen insight into daily life in the Australian-run detention centre.

He writes that there is regularly not enough food in the detention centre, and people often miss out on meals. There was no dentist on Manus for 15 months, no chance for private conversation with family, and detainees' personal property was often stolen or withheld.

"These types of inhumane and cruel torture devastate us and make us furious and, most importantly, put us in a desperate position where the human mind loses control. One can do extreme things when pushed to their limits. For example, we can take our own lives."

Imran was a teenager when he fled Rakhine state in western Myanmar – the country formerly known as Burma – where the religious and ethnic minority face extreme state-sponsored repression and persecution.

Often described as "the most persecuted people on Earth", the Muslim minority Rohingya are denied citizenship and regularly attacked by state security forces or anti-Muslim mobs. Rohingya are forced from their homes, which are often razed to the ground, into camps, prohibited from moving, banned from all but the most basic education, and forbidden from many jobs.

Arriving in Indonesia, Imran was first recognised as a refugee – that is he faced a "well-founded fear of persecution" in his homeland and could not be returned – by the UNHCR in 2013.

However, with no refugee protection available in Indonesia (the country is not a party to the Refugees Convention) and without prospect of resettlement, Imran boarded a boat for Australia, ending up on Christmas Island, before being transferred to Manus on 29 October 2013. He has since been recognised as a refugee for a second time, this time by Papua New Guinean authorities.

Imran writes that since the Papua New Guinea supreme court decision in May this year – which found the detention centre on Manus Island was “unconstitutional and illegal” – conditions have got worse in the camp.

“The safety of our lives has dropped significantly since this centre was found to be illegal.”

Imran has pleaded with Australia to “end this political game” and find a peaceful, durable solutions for those held in offshore detention.

“We have had more than enough of this torture. We are in a situation in which it is difficult to choose what to do because whatever we do, there are negative consequences.

“We are neglected, abandoned, tortured, humiliated, beaten to death and most notably accused of being criminals and terrorists without committing any crimes.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jun/30/end-this-political-game-manus-island-refugee-makes-plea-to-australia>

17. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton links asylum seekers with terrorism

Sydney Morning Herald / AAP
July 1, 2016 - 9:00AM

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has linked asylum seekers with terrorism, insisting recent attacks overseas have made border security a key issue for voters at the election.

"They want to make sure that we know who's coming to this country – they've seen what's happened in Istanbul and in Brussels and in Paris," he told Sky News on Thursday night.

"We've shown over the course of the last couple of years that we've been able to stop people boarding planes that have been on their way to Australia, we think, to do harm."

Asked whether he was suggesting a link between boat arrivals and terrorist attacks, Mr Dutton said voters had seen what was happening in parts of Europe where countries had lost control of their borders.

He said many of the 50,000 asylum seekers who arrived in Australia during the Labor years came without documents.

"You cannot have people travelling in the modern age without identity documents," he said.

Mr Dutton provoked a furore in May when he claimed "illiterate and innumerate" refugees would take Australian jobs or "languish" on the dole and use free health services provided by Medicare.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/federal-election-2016-immigration-minister-peter-dutton-links-asylum-seekers-with-terrorism-20160630-gpvkq.html>

18. New boats to return asylum-seekers

The Australian
June 30, 2016
Paige Taylor

A 5500-tonne barge has delivered four wooden “turnback” boats to Australian Border Force officers on Christmas Island, freshly -painted with Sanskrit names -including “Jayana”, meaning -victory.

The boats, transferred from Darwin aboard the carrier Crest Angelica, are a contingency ahead of possible new attempts by -people-smugglers to bring asylum-seekers to the Australian territory. The Australian has been told more boats of the same Vietnamese design are held in Darwin.

The boats are a cheaper alternative to the orange lifeboats the Coalition originally used to turn back asylum-seekers after it launched Operation Sovereign Borders. The wooden fishing boats have diesel engines, navigational aides and other features expected of a boat that is designed for open -waters, such as watertight bulkheads.

The office of Immigration Minister Peter Dutton -declined to comment on the boats delivered to the Australian territory, the main destination for about 50,000 -asylum-seekers who reached Australian shores between 2008 and 2013. In Operation Sovereign Borders media updates this year, Mr Dutton and Major General -Andrew Bottrell have said resources to detect boats and turn passengers around were increasing.

"We know that people-smugglers are continuing to try and use any excuse to convince people to get on to a boat. As a result of that, our deterrence framework has been reinforced significantly," Major General Bottrell said in March.

The latest turnback boats -arrived at Flying Fish Cove on Saturday. One has already been taken aboard the Ocean Protector and the other aboard the Ocean Shield, two large vessels that -patrol and intercept asylum boats. Two of the small wooden boats will remain at Christmas Island for collection if needed.

The most recent known -attempt by asylum-seekers to reach Australia by boat was last month when 12 Sri Lankans sailed close to the Australian territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Locals on a ferry were the first to see the boat, which was stopped by Australian Federal Police.

Within two days, the passengers, including women and children, were taken ashore and flown to Colombo.

Before the Sri Lankans were sent back by plane, Major General Bottrell said 25 boats carrying 698 people had been turned back and returned to their country of departure since the Coalition began -Operation Sovereign Borders.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/federal-election-2016/federal-election-2016-new-boats-to-return-asylumseekers/news-story/9e57526ab66d4e055aedef3b70cbd2f9>

19. Unicef urges Coalition to resettle asylum seeker children from Nauru by end of year

Nicole Breeze says Australia's offshore processing system is 'in crisis' and Coalition should appoint minister for children

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Thursday 14 July 2016 17.00 AEST

The UN's children's agency has called on the Turnbull government to commit to a timetable that would see all asylum seeker and refugee children off Nauru by the end of the year.

And Unicef Australia, as part of a five-point agenda, says the re-elected Coalition government should appoint a dedicated minister for children to "prioritise young people in policy making" and establish a national plan for children.

Unicef's agenda calls upon the government to commit to resettling children and families on Nauru and adults on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea, or nominate a time frame for their resettlement in a credible third country.

Unicef Australia's director of policy and advocacy, Nicole Breeze, told the Guardian that Australia should commit to "resettlement of those people currently in offshore processing by the end of the calendar year 2016".

But strict criteria, Breeze said, had to be established for resettlement countries so that they could safely accept refugees.

Nauru had made significant progress in implementing improvements to child welfare, including passing a child protection and welfare act, Breeze said, but the small island nation was still not a suitable nor safe place to resettle refugee children.

The island's harsh physical environment, remaining gaps in governance and support services, and limited options for education or livelihood meant it was unlikely that families with children would be able to settle safely or successfully.

By moving asylum seekers and refugees to offshore processing islands, Australia was "unfairly shifting its responsibilities", Breeze said.

"Nauru and Manus Island were never meant to be long-term solutions or resettlement options. It is our view that they are unsustainable. Australia's offshore processing is a system in crisis and it is causing crises for those people in it."

Current government policy is to resettle refugees held on Manus Island but these efforts have foundered. The detention centre, where more than 800 men are held, has been ruled illegal by the PNG supreme court.

Refugees on Nauru can choose to be moved to Cambodia but this arrangement, too, has been a costly failure, with only one person so far resettled there. Nauru has refused to permanently resettle any refugees.

Domestically, a federal-level minister in Australia dedicated to children, Breeze said, would be able to develop a national plan for children to improve standards of protection, education and healthcare.

Key issues for a national plan include:

- Addressing childhood inequality; an Acoos report found one in six Australian children live below the poverty line.

- Increasing investment in early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Ensuring all children are formally registered at birth in Australia. A report in the Australia and New Zealand Journal of Public Health found one in five Indigenous children born in Western Australia were not formally registered at birth, meaning they had no official identity.

Ireland, Canada, and Britain have dedicated ministers for children, as have previous Australian governments: the Fraser, Hawke, Howard, Rudd and Gillard administrations all had ministers with portfolio responsibility for children or youth affairs.

Australia's states and territories have dedicated ministers for children. Their portfolios are primarily concerned with child protection issues.

Unicef has also called on the government to restore Australia's overseas development assistance contribution to former levels and promote overseas programs to counter child poverty.

The child rights agency argues that Australia's ratification of the optional protocol to the convention against torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment would offer greater oversight and protections for children in held detention.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/jul/14/unicef-urges-coalition-to-resettle-asylum-seeker-children-from-nauru-by-the-end-of-the-year>

20. Nauru election candidates clash over campaign advertising on election eve

ABC Radio - Pacific Beat
 First posted Fri 8 Jul 2016, 4:56pm
 Updated Sat 9 Jul 2016, 4:32am

Nauru will head to the polls today after what independent observers say were free and fair campaigns, despite disagreement between government and opposition candidates over campaign advertising.

Eight thousand people are registered to vote in the tiny island nation, which hosts an Australian refugee processing centre.

Opposition politicians earlier this week told Pacific Beat they had been prevented from holding public rallies ahead of the election, and that they could not advertise or campaign in local government-owned media.

"The government is using the government media, the local media to put out propaganda and to put out ads, and we do not have access to the same facilities," said former president and opposition candidate Sprent Dabwido.

"We've put in requests and we haven't heard back from them."

In a statement, the Nauru Government labelled the claims "childish and desperate political point scoring", and said no political advertising is allowed to be broadcast on Nauruan radio or television.

"It is laughable how that they are attempting to use foreign media to make untrue claims against this Government," Nauru's communications minister Shadlog Bernicke said.

However, after taking his complaints to independent election observers currently on the island, Mr Dabwido said there had been a turn around, and he and other opposition candidates had received clearance.

"After we raised our concerns with them, the next day we got a reply from media saying 'yes, you're most welcome to put up ads'," he said.

He denied that there is a policy against broadcasting political advertising, and said incumbent candidates were using the medium.

Nauru's Electoral Commissioner Joseph Cain said it is an offence for any candidate to use government resources for campaigning, and he knew of no candidates advertising on Nauru television.

Hopes for a clean slate after the elections

The Commonwealth Secretariat and the Pacific Islands Forum have sent observers to the island at the invitation of the government, and the vote is being overseen by a newly established electoral commission.

"So far what we have seen has been pretty much normal," said former Kiribati president Anote Tong, who is leading the Commonwealth Secretariat's observer team.

"People have the opportunity both speaking for government and against government, and nothing has indicated that there are any pressures to suggest that some candidates are not being given the opportunity to speak," Mr Tong said.

The country's opposition politicians have been in conflict with the Government for more than two years, after five of them were suspended from the island nation's 19-member parliament.

Three were suspended from the parliament for speaking to foreign media, while two others were removed for behaving in a disruptive way in the parliament building.

A protest out the front of the parliament in June last year led to three MPs being arrested, while one other was prevented from leaving the country after having his passport cancelled.

Mr Tong said he hopes the country's politicians are able to mend ties once the election is over.

"I truly hope so ... They've got very, very smart people running for parliament, and I think they need to put their energies together and I really hope that they can begin to work together very soon after the election is over.

"I think it's important, not just for Nauru but I think for most of the small island countries where we don't have the energy and the resources to be focusing too much on confrontation and conflict," he said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-08/nauru-candidates-clash-over-campaign-advertising/7582094>

21. Suspended Nauruan politician Roland Kun granted NZ citizenship, flees country amid election

ABC Radio - Pacific Beat
Posted Mon 11 Jul 2016, 4:09pm

After spending 12 months stranded in Nauru, former opposition MP Roland Kun has left the country for New Zealand, where he has been granted citizenship, his lawyer says.

Mr Kun was one of five opposition MPs who were unlawfully suspended from Parliament in 2014, and his Nauruan passport was subsequently confiscated.

In Mr Kun's case, the suspension was reportedly for speaking to the international media about the breakdown in the rule of law in Nauru.

His lawyer, Claudia Geiringer, told the ABC's Pacific Beat program that an application for citizenship had been filed in December under the legal pretext of "exceptional circumstances of a humanitarian or other nature".

No charge has ever been laid against Mr Kun in connection with the cancellation of his passport, but the Nauru Government has refused to issue him a new one.

As a result, Mr Kun has been separated from his family — who have been in New Zealand since June last year — for more than a year.

The former MP was reportedly granted New Zealand citizenship about 10 days ago, Ms Geiringer said, and "since then its all been happening very fast ... we managed to get a passport into Nauru".

On the heels of Saturday's election fervour, Mr Kun reportedly discreetly boarded a last-minute, outgoing flight to Brisbane on Sunday before continuing to New Zealand.

Mr Kun did not run in Saturday's election.

Kun proud to return to NZ 'as a real Kiwi'

"I'm so proud to be returning to my adopted country as a real Kiwi," Mr Kun said in the statement released by his lawyer.

"After spending 12 months stranded in Nauru because of the actions of the Government I just can't believe I'm finally going to see my beautiful family again.

"I'm extremely grateful for the assistance of my legal team and grateful for the consideration of [Prime Minister Peter] Dunne and the New Zealand Government on the matter of citizenship and the issuing of a passport," he said.

Ms Geiringer was unable to specify why Mr Kun was granted New Zealand citizenship, but cited "very strong humanitarian reasons to be back in New Zealand ... that was at the heart of our case".

Mr Kun has requested not to be contacted for comment until Wednesday.

Ms Geiringer told the ABC she understood the Nauruan Government had become aware Mr Kun had fled, but could not comment on whether or not the move would affect New Zealand-Nauru relations.

Ties between the two nations have been strained since New Zealand suspended aid to Nauru's justice sector last year, citing a diminishing rule of law.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-11/former-nauru-mp-roland-kun-returns-to-new-zealand/7587282>

22. 'I couldn't crack up': Nauru opposition MP recounts his dramatic escape to New Zealand

The Guardian
Eleanor Ainge Roy
Wednesday 13 July 2016 15.22 AEST

Reunited this week with his family after more than a year trapped on Nauru, Roland Kun, who was secretly granted NZ citizenship, is looking forward to a 'normal life'

For more than a year Nauruan opposition MP Roland Kun was trapped on the 21 sq km patch of baking, mostly barren rock in the Pacific Ocean.

He wasn't imprisoned, but, just like the 500 asylum seekers and refugees across the island in Australian-run detention centres, he wasn't exactly free to go either.

"I couldn't crack up, because I was determined they wouldn't beat me," says Kun, whose Nauruan passport was revoked last year after he was accused by authorities of being involved in anti-government protests and of being a national security threat. Kun has always denied the claims.

Kun applied for New Zealand citizenship on humanitarian grounds in December last year. Prior to being trapped on Nauru, Kun was the primary caregiver to his three young children, and his wife was unable to live in Nauru after being banned by the government.

"The government of Nauru was not going to ruin my life, or my family's life," he says. "I wouldn't let them."

But without a job, regular income or any semblance of a normal routine, Kun's rebellious spirit was tested by empty days and lonely nights – his schedule pivoting around bedtime Skype calls with his wife, Katy, and three children in Wellington, New Zealand.

"The children didn't understand what was going on," recalls Kun. "At one point they were wondering if I was deliberately avoiding the family, and that was heartbreaking. A lot of trust was broken in the time I was away."

In early 2016, his two eldest children became increasingly disinterested in the patchy, frustrating Skype conversations with their father, where 30 seconds of chat could take 10 minutes of dialling and redialling.

Kun's youngest started potty training and began to talk. As the months marched on, Kun despaired about how, or when his ordeal would end.

And then, unexpectedly, an Australian stranger knocked on his door.

The man presented Kun with a package containing a New Zealand passport, granted on exceptional humanitarian grounds by the New Zealand government.

"I was very excited, but also full of trepidation," explains Kun. "I knew the Nauruan government were determined to keep me on the island, and if they heard of my plans they'd try and stop me leaving, even with a foreign passport."

Quickly and secretly, Kun plotted escape. He told none of his extended Nauruan family of his plans (even though he was living with them), fearful of island gossip.

Suspicious that his phone may have been tapped, Kun devised a simple code to tell his wife and lawyer of his intention to flee.

"I told them that the present they sent me had arrived, and I would be meeting a certain friend for lunch on Sunday. They understood that meant I'd be trying to leave."

Kun chose the day after the election to escape, when many islanders were tired and hungover from festivities. He hastily bid his Nauruan family farewell on Sunday morning, unsure when or if he would see them again.

It was “very sad” he recalls, but all his emotional energy was focused on getting to New Zealand take care of his young family.

Kun’s sister loaded his suitcases into the car and pretended she was on her way to board an international flight and that her brother – Kun – was driving her.

Sweaty, nervous and excited, Kun arrived at the airport an hour before a flight to Brisbane was scheduled to leave. He purchased a ticket in the terminal, then hung back until every other Brisbane-bound passenger had passed through customs and immigration.

“There was a lot of activity in the airport, two planes about to leave and others landing – the customs official was too busy to be suspicious, they didn’t want any complications. I don’t think the government was aware I had left.”

Back in New Zealand, wife Katy and Kun’s lawyer Claudia Geiringer were on tenterhooks waiting to hear if he’d boarded the flight. From Brisbane, a text message came through – Kun was free.

“We had a witness who saw Roland get on the plane in Nauru, but I wasn’t convinced until we had a report of him getting off the plane in Australia,” Geiringer says. “Then, yes, we could breath a sigh of relief.”

Kun, who spent Tuesday ensconced with his wife and children in the family’s home in Wellington, wants one thing now he’s back in New Zealand as a Kiwi: normality.

“Normal life is the goal now, the prize” says Kun. “I might think about work a few months down the track, but for now all I want is to spend time with my family. That is all I have ever wanted. To be at home with them.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/13/i-couldnt-crack-up-nauru-opposition-mp-recounts-his-dramatic-escape-to-new-zealand>

23. Nauru justice minister accuses Guardian and ABC of trying to destabilise government

David Adeang also targets Fairfax Media and Radio New Zealand, saying foreign media has been ‘spreading lies’

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thursday 14 July 2016 14.57 AEST

The Nauru government has launched a bizarre broadside at Australian and New Zealand media, accusing the Guardian, the ABC, Fairfax and Radio New Zealand of “spreading lies” and failing “dismally” in an attempt to destabilise it.

In a swingeing attack on foreign media, who are – save for selected sympathetic reporters – banned from visiting the island, the justice minister, David Adeang, said media organisations had “unethically attempted to influence our domestic politics by spreading lies, promoting opposition MPs and refusing to report the huge progress Nauru has made over the past three years under the Waqa government”.

He said he was “sick of the lies and the lack of respect of our sovereignty” and confused as to why media outlets did not report on “other countries with poor human rights records and no democracy”.

The Guardian applied for a visa to visit Nauru to cover the elections in the weeks leading up to the poll but inquiries to Nauru’s director of immigration received no reply. It did report the results of the election, noting that the president, Baron Waqa, and Adeang, had been returned.

The elections were largely “safe, free and fair”, according to observers from the Pacific Islands Forum. “The people of Nauru have exercised their democratic and fundamental right to elect their members of parliament,” said an election monitor, Boki Raga.

But the polls were not without controversy. The former Nauruan opposition MP Roland Kun was trapped on the island for more than a year when the country refused to allow him to leave, alleging that he was a national security threat and that he had been involved in anti-government protests.

Kun, having applied for asylum on humanitarian grounds, was clandestinely granted New Zealand citizenship – and a passport was smuggled to him – so he could be reunited with his wife and three children in Wellington.

The Nauruan government is routinely criticised by human rights groups for its failure to protect free speech and the rule of law, as well as for breaching international legal obligations.

At the UN's universal periodic review, the Australian government criticised the erosion of the rule of law in Nauru, urging the Pacific country to allow journalists to visit, lift censorship of the internet and stop banning MPs from parliament if they criticise the government.

Nauru's adherence to the rule of law has also been heavily criticised by senior members of its judiciary. The country's former chief justice, Geoffrey Eames, resigned from the role citing interference in judicial independence and the country's only magistrate, Peter Law, was sacked and deported because the government did not approve of one of his migration decisions.

Nauru's police and its criminal justice system are under-resourced. A Senate inquiry last year reported that Nauru police had laid charges in just five cases out of 50 referred to them. Despite formal reports of 29 sexual assaults on asylum seekers and refugees on Nauru, including 10 on children, there have been no arrests or prosecutions.

But the country has made changes to its criminal code. Same-sex relationships have been decriminalised and, after a refugee was convicted and fined for attempting suicide, this has also been removed from the criminal code.

Last year New Zealand suspended all aid to Nauru's justice sector after repeatedly flagging concerns about justice and human rights on the island.

Since the collapse of its once-lucrative phosphate mining industry, the Nauruan government has been overwhelmingly dependent on Australian and New Zealand aid for its solvency. Nauru's phosphate reserves were almost exhausted by the end of the 1990s, with an estimated 80% of the country being stripmined.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/14/nauru-justice-minister-accuses-guardian-and-abc-of-trying-to-destabilise-government>

24. 'Humiliated': Nauru government lashes out at Australian media following election win

Canberra Times
July 14 2016 - 9:53AM
Nicole Hasham

Australian journalists reporting on the plight of asylum seekers at Nauru have been left "humiliated" by a recent election that returned the island's administration, a senior government minister claims.

In an offbeat statement released on Thursday morning, Nauru Justice Minister David Adeang said the election results on the island, which hosts a controversial Australian-funded detention centre, showed that Australian and New Zealand media should "show more respect" to Nauru's government and people.

The government of president Baron Waqa was returned with an increased majority.

Mr Adeang's statements follow long-held international concerns over governance at the Pacific island nation. Foreign Minister Julie Bishop last year sought assurances that the rule of law was being upheld at Nauru, after several opposition MPs were arrested and others had their passports seized.

Nauru has also banned access to Facebook, blaming social media for the spread of pornography, and imposed a \$8000 visa fee for a foreign journalist to apply to travel to the nation.

New Zealand's parliament has also expressed concern over allegations of interference with the judiciary and the treatment of opposition MPs.

Mr Adeang singled out Fairfax Media, as well as the ABC, the Guardian and Radio New Zealand as having "unethically attempted to influence our domestic politics by spreading lies, promoting opposition MPs and refusing to report the huge progress Nauru has made over the past three years under the Waqa government".

He claimed the "campaign to destabilise the government has failed dismally" and the media had been left "humiliated".

"They lied about us ignoring the rule of law, but have refused to report the fact that our courts – thanks to our reforms - are now among the most independent and respected in the Pacific," Mr Adeang said.

He said it is was "baffling" that certain journalists criticised Nauru while "ignoring other countries with poor human rights records and no democracy".

Mr Adeang claimed criticism of Nauru was an attempt to influence the Australian government's offshore processing policy.

"[Foreign media] now must accept the will of the Nauruan people in a democratic vote, respect our country, our government and the fact that we are a sovereign country not beholden to them, and start reporting the truth," he said.

His comments follow an episode of A Current Affair last month, in which Mr Adeang claimed reports by refugees and asylum seekers of rapes, assaults and other crimes at Nauru were inflated or untrue, and that crime rates on the island were "much lower" than in Australia.

It also follows a Senate inquiry last year that found local police, which are reportedly under-resourced, had laid charges in just five out of 50 cases referred to them.

In November last year, the United Nations raised concern over the state of public education on the island, saying while a truancy policy has been introduced, "enforcement has been constrained by frequent absenteeism of teachers".

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/humiliated-nauru-government-lashes-out-at-australian-media-following-election-win-20160713-gq5bhu.html>