

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Tuesday, 1 August 2017

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1. Gillian Triggs: Australian government 'ideologically opposed to human rights'

In her last week as human rights commissioner, Triggs says human rights are 'regressing on almost every front'

The Guardian
Michael Slezak
Wednesday 26 July 2017 09.27 AEST

Gillian Triggs has accused the Australian government of being "ideologically opposed to human rights", saying Australia's human rights are "regressing on almost every front".

Triggs has used the last week of her tenure as human rights commissioner to say human rights in Australia were going backwards for almost all relevant groups. "Whether it's women, Indigenous, homeless and most of course asylum seekers and refugees," she told ABC Radio National on Wednesday morning.

Triggs said the Coalition government held some responsibility for the regression. "I think it's partly because we have a government that is ideologically opposed to human rights," she said.

"Mr Abbott, when he campaigned for government, one of those campaign platforms was the elimination of the Australian Human Rights Commission. So in that sense it was part of the platform and it's been maintained pretty well ever since."

Triggs also blamed the slipping of human rights in Australia on the lack of a legal protection of rights – a bill of rights – that would ensure governments could not act counter to human rights.

"Unlike almost every other comparable country Australia has no bill of rights against which government policies can be benchmarked," Triggs said.

"As there is no bill of rights, the courts are very very hamstrung in standing up for human rights."

She said the fear of terrorism was being exploited to centralise government power "giving ministers really unprecedented power without the supervision of the court."

She said Australia had produced more counterterrorism legislation than North America and Europe, and since there was no bill of rights in Australia, those measures were not necessarily consistent with fundamental human rights.

Her time in the role was marked by fierce clashes with the Coalition government. She dismissed claims that she acted in a partisan way, instead blaming the government for framing issues that way.

"Firstly I categorically reject any suggestion that we acted in a political way," she said.

"There is no doubt at all however that rather than take on the substantive factual and legal points that we were making the government decided it was better to attack us on political grounds," she said.

"I do of course accept that that was the perception created not only by government members but by a major newspaper in Australia."

She said she had no regrets and was very proud of what the Human Rights Commission achieved under her leadership, with a "miniscule" budget of just \$14m.

"I believe we have done a terrific job. We have stuck to the facts. We know the facts are right. We know the law is right. We are very proud that. I think there are no regrets and I very much hope that in the future the commission can continue to be fearless in standing up for the rights of Australians."

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/26/gillian-triggs-australian-government-ideologically-opposed-to-human-rights>

2. Refugees who helped Edward Snowden now look to Canada as their only hope

Lawyers in Canada are frantically working to bring four refugees and their children over, amid concerns that they face grave reprisals over their actions

The Guardian
Ashifa Kassam in Toronto and Benjamin Haas in Hong Kong
Wednesday 19 July 2017 08.35 AEST

For two weeks they sheltered the world's most wanted man, ferrying Edward Snowden between tiny apartments in Hong Kong's poorest neighborhood.

Now the four refugees are at the centre of a court battle in Canada, as lawyers frantically work to bring them and their children to the country amid concerns that they face grave reprisals over their actions.

“It seems like the families’ connection to Snowden has made them radioactive and put them in a uniquely vulnerable situation,” said Michael Simkin, one of the lawyers behind a motion filed this week in federal court and aimed at expediting asylum claims for the group in Canada.

The families lived in obscurity until last year, when Oliver Stone’s film on the whistleblower revealed that Snowden had been protected by asylum seekers in Hong Kong.

After journalists tracked them down, the refugees – three from Sri Lanka and one from the Philippines – came forward, explaining that they had been introduced by their mutual lawyer and that their actions had come before the US demand for Snowden’s arrest was recognised in Hong Kong.

Since then, the asylum seekers claim they’ve been routinely questioned by authorities to find out what they know about Snowden. Their lawyers have spoken out about relocating their clients several times over suspicions that members of Sri Lankan security forces are attempting to find them.

In May, Hong Kong rejected their asylum claims, paving the way for deportation to their home countries, where the claimants say they could face imprisonment, torture and even death. Lawyers are now appealing the decisions; though they believe they have little hope of success.

Two weeks ago, the asylum claimants – who include a former Sri Lankan soldier who alleges he was tortured by the army and a single mother from the Philippines who said she fled the country after being kidnapped and sexually assaulted – were ordered to report to a detention centre in Hong Kong in early August. Their lawyers fear their children will end up in foster care as the parents await deportation.

Every development in their cases is being carefully tracked in Montreal, where a team of lawyers have launched For the Refugees, a non-profit organisation dedicated to bringing the families to Canada as privately sponsored refugees.

Using funds collected from donors to cover the expenses of settling the families, the paperwork to bring the four adults and their three children to Canada was filed in January. “We are encouraged by prime minister Trudeau’s commitment in taking a clear lead internationally in welcoming refugees,” lawyer Marc-André Séguin said in April.

But months later, it appears that little progress has been made in processing the Canadian claims, said Simkin. “Canada today is truly their last – and only – hope,” added the lawyer. “Once the families are arrested, it will severely compromise our ability to ever relocate them to Canada. Our clients’ lives are at stake, and this may be their last chance to escape a horrific fate.”

In recognition of the urgency facing their cases, Simkin said that Canada’s minister of immigration, Ahmed Hussen – who came to Canada as a teenaged refugee from Somalia – had committed in May to expedite the asylum claims. Two months later, consular officials said the files had not been fast-tracked, leaving the families at the whim of a process that could take years.

Simkin questioned why the Canadian government had seemingly changed its mind. “We don’t know if the US has put any kind of pressure on Canada, we don’t know why Minister Hussen has reversed his decision ... What we do know is that the families and their three, stateless children who are under six years old are being punished, and that’s just not right,” he said. “We cannot use these families as a proxy for punishing Edward Snowden.”

After attempts to seek answers from the ministry proved fruitless, the lawyers said they were left with no other option but to file a legal challenge and hope that a federal court judge will force the Canadian government to fast-track the claims.

On Tuesday, the office of the minister of immigration said that the government is committed to ensuring every case is evaluated in a fair manner. “The Minister has not made any commitment to expedite this application,” said a spokesperson for the minister, declining to comment further due to privacy reasons.

The legal saga that has entangled the refugees has also attracted attention from Human Rights Watch, who – noting that Hong Kong has accepted fewer than one percent of refugee claims in recent years – urged Canada to open its doors to the families.

“The compassionate act of letting Edward Snowden into their homes should never have landed these families in peril,” the organisation’s Dinah PoKempner said in a statement. “No one should have to risk a return to torture or persecution because they opened their door to another who feared the same.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/18/refugees-who-helped-snowden-now-look-to-canada-as-their-only-hope>

3. Family denied last chance to stay in Australia after second bid for intervention fails

A family facing deportation to South Korea, after more than nine years in Australia, has been denied a last chance to stay in the country.

Source: SBS World News
Saturday July 22, 2017

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has refused to intervene in the case of the Lees, despite thousands signing a petition to stop them being thrown out of the country.

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection advised the family in a letter that their final appeal for intervention by the Immigration Minister had failed.

"The department has assessed that this request does not meet the guidelines for referral to the minister," the letter said.

Byran Lee said he is devastated by the decision.

"Someone can just decide our whole future within two days...this one guy. It's shocking. I am just crushed," he told SBS World News.

The Lees had urged Immigration Minister Peter Dutton to intervene after a migration scam swallowed up more than hundred thousand dollars of the family's savings.

The migration agent hired by father David Lee to get him permanent residency instead fled the country with the money. Subsequent visa bid extensions, involving the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, failed due to what the family said was poor legal advice.

The plight of the Lees has led to more than 6,000 people signing an online petition started by their local Catholic Church, St. Christopher's Parish Syndal.

Patrick Jackson from the local church said it hard to see the family experience such hardship.

"They are very hardworking members of this parish and it's a real tragedy that they have been slapped down," he said.

A spokesman from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said the Lee family's case has been carefully considered.

David Lee, an IT engineer, has run a series of businesses and was recently granted an innovation patent for a web-based device he invented that can control home appliances.

His wife Jessica works as a piano teacher.

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/07/22/family-denied-last-chance-stay-australia-after-second-bid-intervention-fails>

4. Revealed: how Australia 'dumped so much fucking money' on asylum-seeker ad campaign

Exclusive: PR company paid \$277,000 for three days' work to persuade asylum seekers in Afghanistan and Pakistan not to travel by boat to Australia, email shows

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Tuesday 1 August 2017 04.00 AEST

The Australian government "dumped so much fucking money" on a company behind a taxpayer-funded campaign to deter asylum seekers arriving by boat that it made more than US\$277,000 in profit for three days' work, the Guardian can reveal.

The Singapore-based company Statt Consulting has been paid at least \$15m by Australian taxpayers to target advertising inside Afghanistan and Pakistan, aimed at persuading would-be asylum seekers not to attempt to travel to Australia.

New tender documents show Statt was contracted to produce "printed publications" for just under \$1m between February and June 2017 following the Australian government's announcement of a US resettlement deal for refugees on Nauru and Manus Island.

An email seen by the Guardian raises questions about Statt's profit margins from government contracts under Labor and the Coalition between 2011 and 2017. Government procurement rules state that "officials must gain value for money", and set out rigorous standards to ensure this value has been met.

An email from October 2013 shows Rene Le Cussan, a director of Statt Consulting, discussed the withdrawal of company dividends for herself and other directors. Le Cussan wrote: "Since we are being honest about biases, mine are... 1, customs has dumped so much fucking money on us in the last few months that I feel it is the most likely time we are going to be able to take dividends. Including the fact that we just made an extra USD 277,000 profit yesterday for literally 3 days work."

She continues, to list her second bias as "I'm in the middle of buying a house".

That \$277,000 sum was worth about \$292,000 Australian dollars at the time.

Luke Falkner, a director of Statt, told the Guardian: "Given the nature of our work and our confidentiality obligations to our clients we are unable to comment on the specifics of our work. Our contracts on behalf of the Australian federal government were awarded through an open and competitive tendering process.

"They are subject to a rigorous compliance program which includes regular external reviews for compliance and delivery in accordance with highly specific objectives. In addition, our business is fully audited by an independent firm on an annual basis, with the most recent audit completed in February 2017.

"At all times our fees are completely transparent to our clients."

The Australian customs agency approved more than 10 extensions of its contract with Statt, culminating in a single contract worth \$15m, further documents released under freedom of information legislation show. It justified this in part because Statt was originally selected in 2012 "as being able to provide best value for money following a competitive process for the conduct of offshore communication activities in the Middle East".

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/aug/01/revealed-how-australia-dumped-so-much-fucking-money-on-asylum-seeker-ad-campaign>

5. Workers on lunch watch on in horror as man sets himself alight in Sydney's CBD

Megan Palin and AAP
news.com.au
July 28, 2017 6:18pm

WORKERS sitting down to lunch in Sydney's bustling CBD have watched in horror as a man doused himself in petrol and set himself alight outside the Department of Immigration and Border Protection office.

The 37-year-old man, believed to be of Iranian background, set himself alight and reportedly threatened to self-immolate on Lee Street near Central Station about 1.30pm on Friday. He was reportedly protesting an immigration decision.

The incident was captured on CCTV. Footage shows the man sitting down as two police wielding fire extinguishers approach him. The man suddenly lights himself on fire and quickly becomes engulfed in flames. "He was yelling out 'I want to stay, I want to stay,'" one anonymous witness reported.

Another witness, who also asked not to be identified, said she was sitting down to lunch with colleagues when she saw the incident unfold. "He was just standing there, police around him and the fireys, and then he doused himself," she said.

A nearby office had previously been evacuated with a crowd spilling onto the street, the witness added. "They basically evacuated the immigration department. "Everyone who had been lining up to get their passports done — probably about 50 people. "By the time he did it they'd corralled him into the underpass so he wasn't really visible to everyone."

The sound of the man's screams stuck in her mind more than the sight of him alight, the woman said. "He was screaming in pain. A wailing, agony, uncontrolled screaming." Officers were ready with a fire extinguisher and water. The witness said emergency services extinguished the man immediately, stripped him of his clothes and loaded him into an ambulance. It is understood the man suffered superficial burns only and is being treated in hospital.

A NSW Police spokeswoman wouldn't confirm if the man made any threats but said the incident was not terror-related. "Police made attempts to negotiate however the man lit himself on fire," a police statement read. "Police were ready with a fire extinguisher and extinguished the man. Fire & Rescue NSW then doused the man in water."

The man suffered superficial burns and was treated at the scene.

FULL STORY AT <http://www.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/news/workers-on-lunch-watch-on-in-horror-as-man-sets-himself-alight-in-sydneys-cbd/news-story/1ce1a292fbedde4bc8a659c110936c0f>

6. Power and water cut off for refugees on Manus as Dutton confirms closure

Authorities cut off basic services to a number of detention compounds as they try to force refugees out to a transit centre in the township of Lorengau

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thursday 20 July 2017 07.33 AEST

Refugees in some compounds inside the Manus Island immigration detention centre have had the power, water, toilets and phones cut off while they are still living in the camp.

As 57 vigils – demanding “evacuate now” – were held across Australia on Wednesday night to mark four years since the introduction of a regional resettlement policy for boat-borne asylum seekers, the situation at the Manus Island centre grows increasingly chaotic.

Compounds within the centre are being progressively shut down, even while people are still living in them.

The withdrawal of basic services – including electricity, water and phone lines – is being used to force people out of the centre, which the Papua New Guinea and Australian governments want closed by 31 October.

Peter Dutton, the Australian immigration minister, confirmed on Wednesday evening that the centre would close by the end of October.

“Manus Island is due to close by the end of October. I’ve been very clear about that and that is what we’re going to achieve,” Dutton told the Nine Network, adding the timing relies on the United States accepting asylum seekers after 30 September. However, the US deal has foundered after the US hit its 50,000 cap for refugee resettlement this year and officials abruptly leaving their on-island interviews on Nauru two weeks early.

Authorities want refugees to move to the Australian-built transit centre near the township of Lorengau, but the majority of refugees are refusing to go, saying they are not safe.

A notice posted inside the detention centre on Tuesday says that because refugees have moved themselves to Bravo and Charlie compounds within the centre and refused entreaties to leave “the power has now been turned off to Bravo and Charlie compounds. This means the phones located in Bravo has (sic) been affected. BRS will undertake electrical work to reinstate the phones after all residents have moved out of Bravo compound”.

“Power will remain off in Charlie compound”.

Staff inside the centre say about 20 refugees are inside the compounds and refusing to leave.

The Guardian has contacted PNG’s immigration authority for comment, but has not received a response.

Wednesday marked four years since the announcement by the Rudd government that no asylum seeker who arrived in Australia by boat would ever be settled in Australia.

Kevin Rudd, now President of the Asia Society Policy Institute, took to Twitter to defend the offshore processing and the regional resettlement arrangement he struck with PNG.

“July 2013 Agreement with PNG was for 1 year only. Refugees should’ve been resettled in Oz by Abbott/Turnbull 3 yrs ago,” he wrote.

Rudd also reposted a 2016 article he wrote which said that refugees had been “left to rot” on Manus by the governments which followed his, and that they should be resettled immediately.

Rudd said the agreement he signed with PNG, which included provisions for housing, health and education, was only for 12 months and after that, asylum seekers could have been resettled in New Zealand or Australia.

He blamed the Coalition for turning the 12-month agreement into a permanent agreement, refusing offers from New Zealand to take some refugees. Rudd said he was only in office for two months after the deal and under the Coalition, implementation fell down appallingly.

“Frankly, the bottom line is these poor folk should have been resettled in either New Zealand or Australia or elsewhere three years ago,” Rudd told the ABC. “The cases could have been easily assessed within a 12-month period, the fact that it has gone on so long is plainly unacceptable.”

But when he signed the deal with PNG and later Nauru, Rudd said: “No matter where people smugglers try to land asylum seekers by boat in Australia, they will not be settled in Australia. This is our core principal.”

Asked about his statements at the time, Rudd said on Thursday that with deaths of asylum seekers at sea, the government had to send a clear message. "There was a requirement by us as a responsible government to send a clear message to people smugglers that we were changing policy," he said.

The Coalition government under both Tony Abbott and Malcolm Turnbull have consistently blamed Labor for border "chaos". "We have seen elsewhere what happens when nations lose control of their borders," Turnbull told the Australian last month. "We cannot afford to let this happen again. We will not let it happen again."

The Greens immigration spokesman, Nick McKim, said the declared tactic of pressuring refugees to leave compounds was evidence of the Australian government's "willingness to engage in blatant human rights abuses in order to coerce refugees". "If power, water and communications with families were denied to Australian prisoners in an Australian prison there would rightly be calls for a royal commission. "The men on Manus have had their rights and freedoms stolen from them by the Labor and Liberal parties, and are now being tortured to force them into danger. Enough is enough. They need to be evacuated to Australia."

Marking four years since Rudd's regional resettlement arrangement, the Refugee Council of Australia chief executive, Paul Power, has told the prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, in a letter he had "made his point" on stopping boats, but that the offshore islands of Manus and Nauru needed to be immediately closed.

Power wrote the refugees in Australia's offshore detention centres were Australia's legal and moral responsibility.

"As more of the people sent to Nauru and PNG have been given refugee status, I have taken opportunities to discuss their situation quietly with officials of other governments and UN agencies. In every single conversation, it has been emphasised to me that the protection of these refugees is Australia's responsibility and Australia should not expect other nations to take on this responsibility, particularly given the current scale of global displacement."

Power told the prime minister his government had "made its point" on its capacity to physically stop boats reaching Australia.

"There is no need to prolong the suffering, uncertainty and fear of those who have now been held for between three and four years. Ultimately, the only practical and decent thing for the Australian government to do is to provide ongoing protection for those currently being held in the offshore processing arrangements in PNG and Nauru – and to do so urgently."

The Manus and Nauru processing centres were reopened in 2012 under the Gillard government, but 13 July marks the date of the policy shift – under Rudd – prohibiting any asylum seeker who arrived by boat from ever resettling in Australia.

Despite consistent revelations of physical violence – including murder – sexual abuse of women and children, allegations of torture by guards, medical neglect leading to death and catastrophic rates of mental health damage, self-harm and suicide attempts, both of Australia's offshore processing centres remain operational.

Nauru will continue as an "open centre" indefinitely, but the Manus centre – ruled illegal by Papua New Guinea's supreme court 15 months ago – will close on 31 October under pressure from the PNG government and from the private contractors running the centre, who have refused to continue working there.

Roughly 2,000 people remain on Australia's offshore processing islands, and figures released under Senate estimates questioning show that the two camps have cost \$4.895bn to build and run.

The Department of Immigration last month agreed to pay \$70m in compensation to 1,905 men it illegally detained men on Manus in damaging and dangerous conditions, but did not admit liability.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/20/power-and-water-cut-off-for-refugees-on-manus-as-dutton-confirms-closure>

7. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus human rights trashed as refugees forced to move

Monday July 24, 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Charlie Compound, where ten Rohingya, Pakistani and Afghan refugees have been living for a month has been demolished after power and water was cut off and the refugees were evicted by PNG police and immigration officials last week. (Photos attached.)

The eviction and demolition are the latest moves by an increasingly desperate government to try and force people out of the detention centre to meet the deadline for the end of the Ferrovial contract on 31 October.

The ten refugees have been living in Charlie since Border Force announced that the Foxtrot compound was being closed at the end of June. They have been forced to try to find accommodation elsewhere in the detention centre defying attempts by Border Force and PNG immigration to force them to move to the East Lorengau Transit Accommodation, closer to the Lorengau settlement on Manus Island.

But there are fewer places for them in an increasingly crowded camp.

The latest notice inside the detention centre says that there are 102 days until the detention centre closes. But only people determined to be refugees are allowed in East Lorengau but it is unsafe and has even fewer services than the detention centre. There are around 60 refugees presently living at East Lorengau, but, in turn, they are being pressured to sign agreements to be resettled in PNG. Although PNG has no resettlement arrangements. The few who have signed for PNG resettlement are living precariously in Port Moresby.

Refugees have again been told that Foxtrot compound is going to be closed 'in the next few days'. But there is nowhere for them to go.

To make space within the detention centre, refugees will have to be forced to move out of Oscar and Delta compounds to East Lorengau. Yet East Lorengau, has room for only around 280 and there are over 700 refugees in the detention centre.

There are around 60 refugees at East Lorengau, who are being pressured to sign agreements to be resettled in PNG.

Any forced closure of Foxtrot would create badly overcrowded and unsanitary conditions inside the detention centre.

Neither Border Force nor PNG immigration have any legal power to use force on refugees inside the detention centre. In April 2016, The PNG Supreme Court found that all the Manus detainees are being held unlawfully.

"Withdrawing power and water, closing down accommodation areas, ending services and activities have become the method of choice for Border Force to pressure the refugees," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"They hope by creating intolerable conditions, they can force enough people out of the detention centre. This kind of coercion amounts to further human rights abuses of people the government has no right to imprison. Such abuses that have already cost them \$70m million in damages for the years of unlawful detention.

"Things are coming to a head. Minister Dutton says he wants to close the detention centre but there is nowhere in PNG to put the asylum seekers and refugees and no third country. There is no prospect of refugees from Manus being settled in the US before the deadline.

"That leaves Australia - a choice the Minister, and the Labor opposition will find the decision hard to swallow. But it is a dilemma of their own making. The sooner everyone is brought to Australia, the sooner they will get the safety and security they need."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

8. Manus Island closure: refugees forced out of compound and threatened with arrest

Foxtrot residents told to leave 'immediately' as detainees fear Papua New Guinea government will resort to 'force and violence' as part of rolling closure

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Wednesday 26 July 2017 17.01 AEST

Refugees and asylum seekers have been forced out of one of the largest compounds of the Manus Island immigration detention centre and threatened with arrest as part of the rolling closure of the facility.

A letter, seen by Guardian Australia, informs those who are in the Foxtrot compound that they have until the end of Tuesday to vacate. Immigration officials and police were also seen visiting refugees and asylum seekers to inform them verbally, one detainee said.

"The ceasing of water, power, and cleaning services within Foxtrot is imminent," it said. "Resident who elect to remain in Foxtrot compound upon water, power, and cleaning services are ceased [sic] are personally liable for any risk associated with residing in or entering Foxtrot compound.

"All residents are required to move effective immediately."

The letter then tells detainees they may be in violation of Papua New Guinea law if they refuse, and that any attempt to “occupy without consent” is subject to legal action and will be reported to PNG police, alongside any other “noncompliance or potentially illegal action”.

Four years after the offshore processing regime was restarted, the Manus Island centre is being closed with many of the detainees still inside. The Australian and PNG governments have determined it will be completely shut down by 31 October, after the PNG supreme court ruled it was illegal. Officials have been withdrawing basic services in different sections to force people out.

Those detainees with refugee determinations have been told they can stay at the East Lorengau transit centre, or can temporarily relocate to one of the other detention centre compounds until they too are closed.

Non-refugees are being housed in Mike compound, but Guardian Australia understands not all of the estimated 150 men have moved there. Other compounds are already overcrowded, detainees have said.

“The government is determined to close detention and is increasing pressure on the refugees,” said detainee and Kurdish Iranian journalist, Behrouz Boochani.

“On the other side the refugees are determined to resist and don’t want to leave detention. It seems the government does not have any other option but to force people. I’m really worried the government will use force and make violence in coming weeks.”

Detainees have frequently expressed concern at the closure plan, saying they are not safe in the transit centre or the PNG community.

They are still waiting to learn if any will be accepted into the US under a deal struck between Malcolm Turnbull and former US president Barack Obama.

The US hit its quota for this year’s refugee intake this month, and officials reportedly left Manus and Nauru mid-interviews. The new intake doesn’t begin until October.

Earlier this week a letter signed by the men detained on Manus accused the Australian government and all opposition parties of “using us as un-uniformed soldiers to so-called protect your borders”.

The letter gave Australian officials the same 159-day “countdown” as the centre’s closure to “find a safe country for us and send us out of this country directly from this detention prison, or we are not moving anywhere”.

“We are not going to fight and we are not going to cause any unrest. We are powerless and weak,” it said.

“You have the army, the police and all of the necessary manpower and equipment. Bring them here and we will line up so you can shoot us to end our misery if you want to force us out.”

It comes amid an international spat between the UNHCR and the Australian government, which the former has accused of renegeing on a verbal agreement over refugee resettlement.

Volker Türk, the assistant high commissioner for protection within the UN’s refugee agency, said the Australian minister for immigration, Peter Dutton, had agreed to allow for “compelling humanitarian cases” of family reunification for people on Manus or Nauru with relatives in Australia, in return for the UNHCR’s assistance on the US deal.

The UNHCR had identified 36 cases it wanted to present out of more than 2,000 refugees and asylum seekers held offshore.

The Australian government has maintained no one will be coming to Australia.

Unicef Australia has welcomed the US deal but was deeply concerned about children on Nauru with family in Australia.

“Family unity is one of the most fundamental principles in international law,” the organisation said.

“Yet Australia’s offshore processing arrangements have fractured a number of families for four years, and may now cause permanent separation for children and their loved ones, who have already experienced severe grief and trauma.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/26/manus-island-closure-refugees-forced-out-of-compound-and-threatened-with-arrest>

9. MEDIA RELEASE: Closure threats stepped up on Manus Island

Wednesday July 26, 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

PNG Immigration has announced its intention to close Foxtrot Compound inside the Manus detention centre as of today, 26 July. The notice (attached) is the latest in the campaign of Border Force and PNG immigration to force asylum seekers and refugees out of the detention centre.

Refugees on Manus have been told they can be moved to the East Lorengau Transit Accommodation but, it is dangerous, with even fewer services than the detention centre. Rations are delivered twice a week to East Lorengau because the refugees there do not get enough money to buy enough food.

Refugees have been told that moving to East Lorengau will not affect any opportunity to be resettled in the US - but residents at East Lorengau have been pressured to sign to be resettled in PNG.

In any case, re-settlement in the US is entirely speculative. No-one has been told they have been accepted to go to the US.

It is doubtful anyone is going to move voluntarily; Oscar and Delta compounds that house refugees are already overcrowded. East Lorengau cannot fit all the refugees being held inside the detention centre.

"Threats cannot solve the crisis that the Australian government has created for itself on Manus Island. The government has no resettlement arrangements for those they are holding unlawfully on Manus," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

PNG Immigration, Broadspectrum and Wilson's Security officers have locked gates in areas surrounding Foxtrot in an attempt to prevent refugees occupying unused areas of the detention facility. Overnight the old IHMS buildings became the latest to be demolished.

Over 600 refugees signed and sent a letter to the Australian government and politicians on 24 July (attached) setting out their concerns at the lack of services and safety at East Lorengau as a result of the attempted forced closure of the detention centre.

"Refugees and asylum seekers have been unlawfully detained in PNG since July 2013. They should be unconditionally released and returned to Australia, instead of being subjected to increased threats of detention and deprivation," said Ian Rintoul.

TIME TO COME CLEAN; MORE DUTTON LIES ABOUT NAURU RESETTLEMENT

The Refugee Action Coalition has called for the government to release all minutes and emails relating to the undertaking by the Australian government to the UNHCR to resettle vulnerable and separated families on Nauru.

"The Minister can settle who is telling the truth about the undertaking by releasing all the information the immigration department has," said Ian Rintoul.

"It would not be the first time that Minister Dutton has been caught telling lies. We are still waiting for him to release the CCTV footage from Good Friday on Manus Island. But that footage has not been released because it would put the lie to his allegations that refugees led a young boy was led into the detention centre. Dutton should be sacked, but instead this unreliable and incompetent Minister is being elevated by Prime Minister Turnbull."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

10. MEDIA RELEASE: More attacks on refugees on Manus - two brutally injured

Sunday July 30 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Three attacks in twelve hours on refugees on Manus Island shows how unsafe the Manus community is for refugees and exactly why refugees are refusing to move from the detention centre to East Lorengau.

Two refugees, one Sudanese and one Iranian, have been brutally attacked in two separate incidents on Manus Island overnight (photos attached).

In a third incident, an Afghan refugee was attacked and robbed this morning (Sunday, 30 July) near the hospital.

Despite urgent calls from refugees and the Lorengau hospital, IHMS refused to attend to the hospital. After waiting hours and with hospital staff unable to stop the bleeding, at around 10.00am, this morning (Sunday), refugees arranged transport to take both of the injured men to IHMS to the detention centre.

Around 10pm on Saturday night, up to eight local men entered a house in the Lorengau settlement and attacked the Sudanese refugee slashing his leg with a bush knife.

In the second attack, (around 4.00am Sunday) the same people responsible for the first attack it seems attacked an Iranian refugee and after robbing him, quite deliberately hacked his wrist open, cutting veins and tendons.

"They turned him over and cut open his veins," one refugee told the Refugee Action Coalition, "It was like revenge; like they wanted him dead."

Then, this (Sunday) morning, while refugees were assisting the Sudanese and Iranian at the hospital, the Afghan refugee was robbed of his phone and belongings, in broad daylight, by another group of locals.

The brutality of the attacks have increased the refugees' fears for their safety and their lives. Refugees are also fearful that the news that they have received a payout from the Australian government has made them increased targets.

"The callous push to close compounds in the detention centre and drive refugees out has to stop," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The moves to meet the arbitrary October deadline for closure is literally putting refugees' lives at risk. Not only are refugees vulnerable to attack, there is no adequate medical treatment and insufficient food for those forced into East Lorengau.

"It becomes clearer and clearer, that the government has no solution for the people they illegally dumped on Manus, and that the refugees and asylum seekers must be brought to Australia."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

11. Manus Island refugees seriously injured in machete attacks

Three separate robberies – two with machetes – likely to increase resistance among refugees to being forcibly removed from the closing detention centre

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Monday 31 July 2017 13.56 AEST

Violence continues to mar the forced relocation of refugees out of the Manus Island detention centre, with three men attacked – two with machetes – in separate robberies on the island at the weekend.

A 27-year-old Sudanese refugee had his leg cut with a bush knife when men broke into a guesthouse he was staying in in the main Manus township of Lorengau on Saturday.

In an unrelated incident, an Iranian asylum seeker had his wrist badly cut when he was attacked and robbed in the street in the early hours of Sunday morning.

Pictures of the man's injuries – showing a deep wound and significant blood loss – were circulated on social media.

"They turned him over and cut open his veins," one refugee said. "It was like revenge; like they wanted him dead."

And later on Sunday, an Afghan refugee was attacked as he walked on the street near the hospital and had his wallet and phone stolen.

The two men attacked with knives have been treated at Lorengau's small hospital but will probably require more specialist attention in Port Moresby.

The attacks are likely to increase resistance among asylum seekers and refugees to being forcibly moved from the closing Manus Island detention centre to a new "refugee transit centre" built by Australia on the outskirts of Lorengau.

The Papua New Guinean and Australian governments are committed to closing the Australian-run centre – ruled illegal by PNG's supreme court 16 months ago – by the end of October. The dismantling of the compounds has begun even before men have moved out.

Some refugees have been left living in buildings without power or running water, and threatened they will be arrested if they refuse to move to a compound Australia has built near the township of East Lorengau.

They have been told their chances to be resettled in the US – which many believe are remote and fading – will be jeopardised if they don't agree to relocation.

Medical, catering, educational and recreational facilities have begun to be shuttered. Bulldozers and cranes have been moved in – including at night – to begin demolishing buildings.

A letter from PNG's immigration authority on Monday announced that all power and water to Foxtrot compound would be cut imminently.

The Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani told Guardian Australia: "The Australian Border Force and PNG immigration cut the power and water in Foxtrot which is the largest compound in Manus prison camp. According to their plan, they want to first close Foxtrot then close other compounds to force people to go to the transit centre which is close to the local Lorengau community.

"About 100 refugees are living in Foxtrot and at this moment there is not any place for them to live.

"Pressure is increasing inside the prison camp, and on the other side the attacks on the refugees in Lorengau town are increasing. The ABF plan is to put pressure on both sides to force the refugees to go back to their countries."

Tensions have been steadily building between the refugees on Manus – all single men – and locals in the small township of Lorengau.

A number of consensual relationships have begun between refugees and Manusian women. There have also been allegations of sexual offences by refugees and asylum seekers, including against children.

There is resentment too, of apparent advantages given to refugees and asylum seekers, including around accommodation and allowances for food and cigarettes.

Manus, the smallest province in PNG and distant north, is underdeveloped and routinely ignored by the Port Moresby-centric national government.

The Iranian refugee Behrouz Boochani told Guardian Australia refugees did not feel safe being forcibly relocated to Lorengau. "It's a chain of attacks and, unfortunately, the local police cannot protect the refugees," he said. "This kind of incidents are commonly happens in Lorengau town for refugees."

Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition said there was no viable solution for refugees and asylum seekers in PNG, and those illegally held on Manus – most for four years – should be brought to Australia.

"The moves to meet the arbitrary October deadline for closure is literally putting refugees' lives at risk," he said. "Not only are refugees vulnerable to attack, there is no adequate medical treatment and insufficient food for those forced into East Lorengau."

Last month the Australian government agreed to pay \$70m in compensation to 1,905 men held on Manus for their illegal detention and the physical and psychological damage their incarceration had caused, but without admitting liability.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/31/manus-island-refugees-seriously-injured-in-machete-attacks>

12. MEDIA RELEASE: Crisis looms on Manus as water and power turned off

Monday July 31, 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Tensions escalated on Manus Island on Monday, after the power and water for Foxtrot compound was turned off (notice attached) around 1pm.

Refugees were again told that they 'need to move to East Lorengu Transit Centre', but nothing is said about where asylum seekers were meant to go inside the detention centre.

At one point, in the late afternoon, PNG police assembled menacingly at the Foxtrot gate. But refugees came from throughout the centre to the gate and demanded the power be reconnected to Foxtrot. By 6.30pm, the police had gone.

Tonight, nobody has moved and there are no guards in Foxtrot. Refugee ingenuity means that there is still some light and power in Foxtrot (see attached photo). But refugees are still demanding that power and water be officially turned back on, tomorrow, Tuesday.

The move against Foxtrot, and the threat of demolition, has created a dangerous situation.

Border Force is creating an impossible situation inside the detention centre, trying to drive people out by depriving them of the most basic necessities and services. It is a form of collective punishment against people that the Australian government has imprisoned illegally.

But nobody is willing to move to East Lorengau when they face the butchery of bush knife attacks. In any case, East Lorengau can only accommodate 298 refugees, and there are over 700 on Manus.

"Malcolm Turnbull has shown his contempt for the most basic human rights of people in his care. Holding the Manus refugees hostage in this way is a new low for the Australian government," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The government has no plans to resettle and provide protection for those who are on Manus. Instead of brutalising who need protection, they should end the stand-off at Foxtrot, restore the power and water. They can stop the atrocities, and meet the October deadline for closing Manus by bringing all the refugees and asylum seekers to Australia."

The Refugee Action Coalition has called a snap "Bring Them Here" protest, Thursday, 3 August, 5.15 pm (for 5.30 start) at Malcolm Turnbull's office, 287 New South Head Road, Edgecliff (near Edgecliff station).

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

13. Manus Island asylum seekers demand water, power reconnection at detention centre

ABC News Online
By Papua New Guinea correspondent Eric Tlozek
Tuesday August 1, 2017

Asylum seekers on Manus Island have protested about attempts to force them to move out of the Australian-funded detention centre.

A large group of men housed inside the centre gathered to demand Australian and Papua New Guinean authorities reconnect power and water to one of the main accommodation compounds.

They chanted "bring power back" and "we don't want PNG" before eventually dispersing.

Immigration authorities have told refugees inside the centre they must move into a so-called "transit centre" near the main town on Manus Island, while those men whose claims were rejected must leave PNG.

They said electricity, water and cleaning services will be progressively shut off and that PNG Police will deal with any asylum seekers or refugees "illegally occupying state property".

Sudanese refugee Abdul Aziz Adam said the refugees had demanded that Australia and Papua New Guinea abandon attempts to force the refugees to resettle in Papua New Guinea.

"We do not want your country, so do not force us to resettle in your country," he said.

Most of the 700 refugees on the island are refusing to move because they believe they are not safe in the PNG community.

The protest comes after two men were injured in machete attacks over the weekend, and the men inside the detention centre say they are being targeted when they go into the town.

A 27-year-old Sudanese refugee was attacked when men broke into a guesthouse in the main town of Lorengau.

In a separate incident, a 27-year-old Iranian asylum seeker was attacked and robbed on the street on Sunday morning.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-01/manus-island-asylum-seekers-demand-water-and-power-reconnection/8764152>

14. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus protest defies Foxtrot shut-down threat

Tuesday August 1, 2017
Refugee Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

FOXTROT PROTEST DEFIES MOVE ORDERS

A mass protest at the Foxtrot compound on Manus Island has defied Border Force orders to move and demanded that power and water be officially restored to the compound. (Photos attached) .

The protest gathered at 2pm at Foxtrot compound chanted, "We do not want to settle in PNG; do not force us."

PNG immigration and Border Force did not respond to their call to come to Foxtrot to discuss the situation.

They have also re-iterated their determination that no refugees will move to East Lorengau.

Refugees and asylum seekers are still living in the Foxtrot compound. Refugee electricians have ensure that their is power to the accommodation rooms of the compound.

"We are fearful that they will try to cut the water from Oscar and Delta compounds so we have taken a stand at Foxtrot," one refugee told the Refugee Action Coalition from the protest.

Meanwhile, frustration at the lies and resettlement delays on Nauru has sparked renewed mass protests at the detention centre on Sunday and Monday nights.

The Refugee Action Coalition has called a snap "Bring Them Here" protest to demand an end to the intimidation and forced moves on Manus - Thursday, 3 August, 5.15 pm (for 5.30 start) at Malcolm Turnbull's office, 287 New South Head Road, Edgecliff (near Edgecliff station).

The protest will also raise the victim the tragic circumstances for asylum seekers in the Australian community that ed to the attempted self-immolation by an Iranian man at the Sydney immigration office on Friday, 28 July.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

15. UNHCR says Australia must end offshore detention and stop dividing families

Filippo Grandi says Australia causing physical and mental harm and should honour commitment to reunite families

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Monday 24 July 2017 15.01 AEST

Australia's bipartisan refusal to resettle any refugees held on Manus Island and Nauru continues to cause physical and psychological harm, and will deliberately and permanently split vulnerable families, the United Nations high commissioner for refugees has said.

In an statement condemning the offshore processing regime, high commissioner Filippo Grandi said Australia had failed to honour a "clear understanding" that vulnerable refugees held offshore with family in Australia could be reunited with them.

Australia is instead insisting that refugees held offshore must go to America – if accepted – or stay offshore.

Grandi said Australia must end its "harmful practice" of outsourcing its legal responsibilities to refugees to poorer countries in the region.

"Australia's policy of offshore processing in Papua New Guinea and Nauru ... has caused extensive, avoidable suffering for far too long," Grandi said from Geneva. "Four years on, more than 2,000 people are still languishing in unacceptable circumstances. Families have been separated and many have suffered physical and psychological harm."

At the weekend, both the Labor opposition and the Coalition government reaffirmed that no refugee under Australia's control on Manus Island and Nauru would ever be considered for resettlement in Australia.

The Guardian understands that between 12 and 20 refugees held on Australia's offshore islands have close relatives currently living in Australia – including husbands, wives, children, siblings and parents.

A significantly larger number, however, have been split for medical reasons – where one or several family members have been moved to Australia after suffering serious injury or illness, while family members remain offshore.

Families will be permanently split by the policy shared by the Coalition and Labor. The unity and protection of the family unit is a fundamental principle of international law.

Last November, the UNHCR reluctantly agreed to assist in the relocation of refugees from Australia's offshore islands to the US but Grandi said it did so "on the clear understanding" that vulnerable refugees with close family ties to Australia would ultimately be allowed to settle there.

"UNHCR has recently been informed by Australia that it refuses to accept even these refugees and that they, along with the others on Nauru and Papua New Guinea, have been informed that their only option is to remain where they are, relocate to Cambodia or to be transferred to the United States," he said.

"This means, for example, that some with serious medical conditions, or who have undergone traumatic experiences, including sexual violence, cannot receive the support of their close family members residing in Australia."

The UNHCR said that – in order to avoid prolonging the ordeal of those on offshore islands – it had been left with no other choice but to support the relocation of all refugees on PNG and Nauru to the US, even those who had close family members living in Australia.

"There is no doubt these vulnerable people, already subject to four years of punishing conditions, should be reunited with their families in Australia. This is the humane and reasonable thing to do.

"The Australian government's decision to deny them this possibility is contrary to the fundamental principles of family unity and refugee protection, and to common decency."

It is unusual for the high commissioner to personally comment on Australia's asylum policies: Grandi's previous comments have been on displacement and violence in Myanmar and large-scale forced migration in Africa.

Grandi reiterated the UNHCR's long-held position that resettlement in PNG or Nauru was "wholly inappropriate" and did not meet international standards for protection.

He urged Australia to clear both Manus Island and Nauru of the refugees it has sent there, and to abandon the policy of offshore processing. He said Australia had a proud humanitarian tradition and that the UNHCR recognised and supported the need to save lives at sea and provide alternatives to dangerous journeys and exploitation by smugglers.

But he said offshore processing was neither a feasible nor legal solution.

"There is a fundamental contradiction in saving people at sea, only to mistreat and neglect them on land," he said. "I urge Australia to bring an immediate end to the harmful practice of offshore processing, offer solutions to its victims, for whom it retains full responsibility, and work with us on future alternatives that save lives at sea and provide protection to people in need.

"At a time of record levels of displacement globally, it is crucial that all states offer protection to survivors of war and persecution, and not outsource their responsibilities to others. Refugees, our fellow human beings, deserve as much."

Professor Jane McAdam, director of UNSW's Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, and the recipient of the 2017 Calouste Gulbenkian Prize for human rights, said the high commissioner choosing to personally comment on Australia's policies was evidence of the seriousness of the UNHCR's concern.

"The right to family life is universally recognised in human rights law, and the right to family unity is an inherent part of this. Australia's offshore processing policy violates this right, and in addition is causing extreme psychological suffering that may amount to inhuman or degrading treatment, which also violates international law.

"As the High Commissioner notes, Australia's refusal to let family members reunite is not only legally wrong, but is also unreasonable and contrary to common human decency."

The Guardian has approached the Australian government's department of immigration and border protection for comment.

Despite consistent revelations of physical violence – including murder – sexual abuse of women and children, allegations of torture by guards, medical neglect leading to death and catastrophic rates of mental health damage, self-harm and suicide attempts, both of Australia's offshore processing centres remain operational after four years.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/24/unhcr-says-australia-must-end-offshore-detention-and-stop-dividing-families>

16. Federal Government broke promises over refugee resettlement deal with US, UNHCR says

ABC News Online

By political reporter Stephen Dziedzic

Monday July 24, 2017

The United Nations' refugee agency has accused the Federal Government of a breach of trust over the United States refugee deal, saying it has broken a promise to resettle refugees with close family ties to Australia.

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Filippo Grandi, said the organisation had "exceptionally" agreed to help resettle refugees on Nauru and Manus Island in the US because of the "dire" humanitarian situation they faced.

"We agreed to do so on the clear understanding that vulnerable refugees with close family ties in Australia would ultimately be allowed to settle there," Mr Grandi said.

"[But] UNHCR has recently been informed by Australia that it refuses to accept even these refugees.

"This means, for example, that some with serious medical conditions, or who have undergone traumatic experiences, including sexual violence, cannot receive the support of their close family members residing in Australia."

The Federal Government has always maintained that no refugees on Manus Island or Nauru will ever be allowed to resettle in Australia.

But Catherine Stubberfield from the UNHCR's Canberra mission said they had a "clear understanding" that some people would be able to come here.

"We've maintained from the beginning that allowing people with close family being able to come to Australia is a minimum, and unfortunately that's not being honoured," Ms Stubberfield said.

Ms Stubberfield was not willing to say exactly who from the Australian Government gave this undertaking, or when it was given — citing diplomatic conventions.

But she insisted the Federal Government made its position clear in multiple meetings over several months, and it was detailed in written correspondence as well.

She said refugees with close family in Australia may now face a difficult choice if offered a new life in the US.

"Families are being separated. We've spoken with people who are distraught who are forced to now make impossible decision, who are telling us they love their families but they don't what to do because they fear they'll be left behind indefinitely," Ms Stubberfield said.

She said the UNHCR would continue to review and endorse the cases of refugees due to travel to the US under the agreement — but only with reluctance.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton reiterated on Sunday that no-one currently on Manus Island or Nauru would ever be allowed to come to Australia.

A spokeswoman for Mr Dutton said "the position of the Coalition Government has been clear and consistent: those transferred to regional processing centres will never settle in Australia".

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-24/unhcr-says-federal-government-agreed-resettle-refugees-us-deal/8738540>

17. United Nations claims government had agreed to resettle some refugees in Australia under US deal

The Age

July 24 2017 - 5:41PM

David Wroe

The United Nations refugee agency says it struck a "clear understanding" over several meetings - which included direct discussions with Immigration Minister Peter Dutton - that some refugees from Manus Island and Nauru would be resettled in Australia.

In a statement jarringly at odds with the Turnbull government's public position that no refugees now in offshore detention would set foot in Australia, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said the agency had agreed to help administer the deal

between Australia and the United States on the understanding there would be exceptions for vulnerable people with family ties in Australia.

The angry statement accusing the government of failing to honour the understanding has led to an extraordinary public standoff between the UN agency and Mr Dutton, whose office on Monday dismissed the UN claim, saying the government had been clear about its position all along.

"Last November, UNHCR exceptionally agreed to help with the relocation of refugees to the United States following a bilateral agreement between Australia and the US," UN commissioner Filippo Grandi said in a statement released on Monday.

"We agreed to do so on the clear understanding that vulnerable refugees with close family ties in Australia would ultimately be allowed to settle there."

He said that the UNHCR had "recently been informed by Australia that it refuses to accept even those refugees".

"This means, for example, that some with serious medical conditions or who have undergone traumatic experiences, including sexual violence, cannot receive the support of their close family members residing in Australia."

A spokeswoman for the UNHCR's regional representation in Canberra subsequently told Fairfax Media: "An understanding was clearly reached over a number of months, and over a number of meetings, including with Minister Dutton himself."

A spokeswoman for Mr Dutton referred Fairfax Media to a weekend television interview in which Mr Dutton said there was no contingency in which the government might change its mind and make exceptions and said that "people will not be coming to Australia".

She added that "the position of the Coalition government has been clear and consistent: those transferred to [regional processing centres] will never settle in Australia". When pressed further on details of the meetings with UNHCR she said the office had nothing further to add.

Under the deal struck between Mr Turnbull and former US president Barack Obama, the US would take people from Australia's offshore detention system who were found by the UN agency to be refugees and who did not pose security risks.

The agency now had "no other choice but to endorse the relocation of all refugees on Papua New Guinea and Nauru to the United States, even those with close family members in Australia", Mr Grandi said.

There are roughly 2000 people across Nauru and Manus Island. They include what is believed to be a relatively small number who have immediate family in Australia, in some cases because they were separated from their relatives during their travels to seek asylum.

"There is no doubt these vulnerable people, already subject to four years of punishing conditions, should be reunited with their families in Australia. This is the humane and reasonable thing to do," Mr Grandi said.

Refugee and human rights groups raised concerns over family separations.

Jane McAdam, director of the University of NSW Kaldor Centre, which is devoted to international refugee law, said that all evidence showed refugees resettled and integrated much more successfully if they were united with their families.

She also said the significance of the stoush between Australia and the UN "cannot be overstated".

"That the High Commissioner himself has commented on these policies, and in such strong terms, is a sign of the gravity of the situation," she said.

Graham Thom, refugee coordinator at Amnesty International, said this was "another measure designed to punish people, including parents separated from their children".

Daniel Webb, director of legal advocacy with the Human Rights Law Centre, said children deserved to be with their parents. "Permanently ripping apart families is fundamentally wrong," he said.

Liberal senator Eric Abetz questioned on Sky News why the UNHCR didn't raise this "when they gave their imprimatur all those months ago" to the Australia-US deal.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/united-nations-claims-government-had-agreed-to-resettle-some-refugees-in-australia-under-us-deal-20170724-gxhi1o.html>

18. Dutton agreed to consider asylum resettlement in Australia, UN official says

Minister agreed UNHCR could put 'compelling humanitarian cases' held in offshore detention up for resettlement in Australia, then went back on the understanding, senior official says

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Tuesday 25 July 2017 08.04 AEST

Peter Dutton agreed to allow the United Nations to put cases for especially vulnerable refugees held in offshore detention camps to be resettled in Australia, but then reneged on the understanding, a senior UN official has said.

Volker Türk, the assistant high commissioner for protection within the UN's refugee agency, told the ABC's 7.30 program the immigration minister agreed in a meeting last year that the UNHCR could present "compelling humanitarian cases with strong family links in Australia" for resettlement in Australia without fanfare or public acknowledgement of any exception to government policy.

The UNHCR has identified 36 people – of the 2,000 people held offshore – it wanted to present for resettlement in Australia. Those refugees have spouses, children or parents living in Australia.

Türk met Dutton in November last year, as the UNHCR considered what role, if any, it would play in Australia's deal to resettle refugees held on its offshore islands in the US.

At that meeting, Türk said: "There was no doubt in our mind – and this is what we put forward to the minister at the time – that we would present to him cases that are compelling humanitarian cases with close family links to Australia.

"We were hoping that, indeed, Australia would consider them favourably within the discretion that the minister has at his disposal."

Türk said there was no agreement to the resettlement of specific refugees, "because we hadn't presented cases yet".

"But he [Dutton] did agree that we would be able to present such cases and, in subsequent meetings with the department, it was very important for us to ensure precisely that the verification of close family links was ascertained by our officers so that we could present such cases.

"Of course, we went into this agreement on the understanding that Australia would be part of the solution for a handful of compelling humanitarian cases with strong family links in Australia."

On Monday the UN's most senior refugee agency official, the high commissioner for refugees Filippo Grandi, issued an extraordinary statement, saying Australia had failed to honour a "clear agreement" with the UN on family reunification.

Grandi said offshore processing caused "extensive, avoidable suffering", deliberately split families and was contrary to "common decency".

"There is a fundamental contradiction in saving people at sea, only to mistreat and neglect them on land," he said.

The suggestion of an agreement for Australian resettlement runs contrary to all the government's public pronouncements on the refugees it has sent to its offshore detention centres. Publicly the government has unflinchingly maintained, over years, that no one sent to Manus or Nauru would ever be resettled in Australia.

But the UNHCR took notice of the vociferous public debate around asylum in Australia and was seeking to give the government the opportunity to quietly resettle those compelling cases in Australia without public fanfare or acknowledgement.

In response to questions on Grandi's statement, a spokeswoman for Dutton directed the Guardian to a Sunday television interview where the minister was asked whether there was any contingency under which the government might allow any refugees held offshore to come to Australia.

"No. People will not be coming to Australia," Dutton said.

But the government is facing renewed and concerted pressure to end offshore processing for a second time.

FULL STORY AT <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/25/dutton-agreed-to-consider-asylum-resettlement-in-australia-un-official-says>

19. Bishop says boats policy clear and consistent

Sky News / With AAP

Updated: 12:07 pm, Tuesday, 25 July 2017

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop insists Australia has been clear and consistent about its boats policy despite being urged to clarify any promises it made to the United Nations refugee agency.

The UNHCR says it agreed to help administer the deal to send refugees to the United States on the condition that Australia would consider resettling vulnerable refugees on Manus Island and Nauru who have close family in the country.

It said the understanding was reached over months in a number of meetings with senior government officials, but would not identify exactly who.

UNHCR's assistant high commissioner for protection Volker Turk said about 36 people had been identified for resettlement in Australia.

But Ms Bishop insists Australia's position has been clear.

'If people seek to arrive illegally, if they pay criminal smuggling networks, they will not be resettled in Australia,' she told reporters in Canberra on Tuesday.

Asked if that means the UN agency was making it up, she said she was not casting aspersions.

The UN's claim has been rejected by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, with his office reiterating that those transferred to regional processing centres will never settle in Australia.

Fellow frontbencher Michael Sukkar echoed their defence.

'I think what we say privately and what we say publicly is always the same here,' he told Sky News.

Labor frontbencher Jim Chalmers said Mr Dutton and Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had big questions to answer.

'There seems to be a bit of a disconnect between the claims that Peter Dutton is making about the arrangement and the claims that the UNHCR are making,' Mr Chalmers told Sky News.

'The government has made a mess of this deal since day one and if there's a different account between themselves and the United Nations, then they owe it to the Australian people to come clean on what the arrangement is and was.'

The one-off deal with the US was announced last November.

More than 1600 refugees have expressed interest in the US resettlement deal, but only about 1200 places are expected to be on offer.

<http://www.skynews.com.au/news/top-stories/2017/07/25/un-accuses-govt-of-backtracking-on-refugees.html>

20. UN says immigration officials helped screen Manus and Nauru refugees for family reunions

Canberra Times

July 26 2017 - 12:15AM

David Wroe

Immigration officials helped interview refugees on Nauru and Manus Island for possible family reunions, the United Nations refugee agency has said, appearing to bolster its claim the Turnbull government was considering resettling some refugees.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees stepped up its fight with the government on Tuesday, saying it had been speaking weekly with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection about plans to exempt a small number of people from the tough stance that no one from offshore detention would be resettled in Australia.

It launched a fiery attack on the government on Monday, accusing it of failing to honour a "clear understanding" that exceptions would be made for vulnerable people with family ties in Australia, 36 of whom had so far been identified.

The agency said it only agreed to help administer the deal between Canberra and Washington to resettle refugees from Nauru and Manus Island in the United States on this understanding so that families were not separated.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's office has dismissed the UN claims, saying the government had never wavered from its publicly stated position that no one from offshore detention would be settled in Australia.

But on Tuesday, a spokeswoman for the UNHCR's regional representation in Canberra provided more detail on the agency's claim, revealing to Fairfax Media that department officials had helped conduct interviews to verify family links.

"We have been working to verify the links of refugees and their families and, since February, this has been a standing agenda item in our weekly co-ordination with the department," she said.

"These confirmed, closely linked families have been brought to the attention of the department for consideration by the minister. In fact, DIBP conducted joint interviews with UNHCR to verify family links on 16 March 2017.

"Despite this, UNHCR has recently been informed by Australia it refuses to accept even these refugees."

The spokeswoman said the interviews had been of refugees on Nauru and Manus Island.

A spokeswoman for Mr Dutton declined to confirm or deny that department officials had helped with interviews on that date.

She said the government's position remained that people on Nauru and Manus Island would not come to Australia and "this has been directly conveyed to the UNHCR on a number of occasions".

The UNHCR has not specified how exactly the exemptions were supposed to work. As minister, Mr Dutton has broad discretion to grant visas.

The UNHCR's assistant high commissioner for refugees Volker Turk told the ABC's 7.30 on Monday that Mr Dutton had personally agreed that the UNHCR would be able to present cases for exemptions and "we were hoping that ... Australia would consider them favourably within the discretion that the minister has at his disposal".

The UNHCR spokeswoman said there was no sign the individual cases had been considered on their merits but rather there had been "a blanket decision that these families would not even be considered".

She said the cases included "parents kept apart from their children, wives kept apart from their husbands, and refugees who arrived alone as minors unable to join the rest of their family in Australia".

Daniel Webb of the Human Rights Law Centre said Mr Dutton could easily make the exemptions given his broad powers.

"With the stroke of a pen he could do the sensible, humane and obvious thing and reunite this handful of families in Australia tomorrow," he said.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/un-says-immigration-officials-helped-screen-manus-and-nauru-refugees-for-family-reunions-20170725-gxiui.html>

21. Two criminals win bid to stay in Australia as Dutton deportation ruling overturned

The Age / AAP
July 24 2017 - 3:30PM

Two men with links to outlaw motorcycle gangs and long criminal records have won a last-minute court bid to stay in Australia.

The Full Court of the Federal Court on Monday overturned a decision by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton to deport the two men.

The three judges ordered the two men - Tomasi Taulahi and Helder Agapito Carrascalao - be immediately released from immigration detention and Mr Dutton to pay their legal costs.

The judgment set aside Mr Dutton's decision to cancel the men's visas on December 16 last year.

Mr Taulahi and Mr Carrascalao claimed Mr Dutton had not spent enough time considering their cases before making his decision and the judges agreed.

They said Mr Taulahi was a Tongan citizen who first arrived in Australia in December 1988 and had held a series of visas since then.

Mr Taulahi, whose wife and two young daughters are Australian citizens, had run a successful earthmoving business employing about 20 people before being arrested and taken into immigration detention.

His criminal history began with a conviction for malicious damage in 1993, when he was 16.

He was also convicted as a minor for offences including assault, resisting police, and breaking, entering and theft.

His first offence as an adult was cocaine possession in 1997.

But the main reason Mr Dutton decided to cancel Mr Taulahi's visa in the national interest was because he did not pass the character test given his association with the Lone Wolf bikie gang.

The three judges said father of two Mr Carrascalao, who was born in East Timor and is a Portuguese citizen.

Mr Carrascalao was granted an entry permit in 1976 to remain permanently in Australia with his mother and seven siblings.

The judges said Mr Carrascalao's criminal history dated back to when he was found guilty of stealing at age 13 but no conviction was recorded.

His record includes convictions in May 2007 for common assault, contravening an apprehended domestic violence order and driving while disqualified.

Mr Dutton's decision to cancel Mr Carrascalao's visa was based on his assault conviction in 2007 and his past involvement with the Bandidos bikie gang.

The three judges said this was despite Mr Carrascalao claiming he was no longer associated with the bikie gang.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/two-criminals-win-bid-to-stay-in-australia-as-dutton-deportation-ruling-overturned-20170724-qxhvj3.html>

22. Peter Dutton to head merged ASIO, AFP and Border Force super security department

Canberra Times
July 17 2017 - 3:32PM
David Wroe

The Turnbull government is poised to go ahead with the creation of a national security super-department that would bring together ASIO, the Australian Federal Police and Australian Border Force, according to reports.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton is tipped to head the new super-portfolio, which will be debated by cabinet on Tuesday and would be based on Britain's Home Office, while current Immigration boss Michael Pezzullo would likely head up the new agency.

After months of speculation, Mr Turnbull is expected to announce the long-mooted changes as soon as Tuesday.

But the plan – arguably the biggest shake-up in the structure of Australia's national security apparatus in decades – is likely to be fiercely debated in cabinet. Attorney-General George Brandis, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, Justice Minister Michael Keenan and Defence Minister Marise Payne are all understood to oppose the idea. Defence Industry Minister Christopher Pyne is understood to lean against the idea.

A source familiar with the expected changes said Mr Turnbull had consulted at length with cabinet colleagues over the machinery of government changes and stressed that no one would lose their ministerial portfolio.

However Senator Brandis, currently responsible for ASIO, and Mr Keenan, responsible for the AFP, would be the big losers out of the change.

In London last week, Mr Turnbull met with British Home Affairs Minister Amber Rudd and her predecessor in the role, current Prime Minister Theresa May, to discuss how the British Home Office worked and hinted changes were imminent.

On Monday, he said "these administrative matters are often under discussion and considered".

"We have got outstanding arrangements in Australia. We are always open to improving them. Again, there is no place for set and forget."

However, Mr Keenan said only on Monday morning during a press conference that "I don't believe any country is as well equipped to deal with the terrorism challenges as Australia".

"Australians should feel confident that the arrangements we have in place at the moment do serve us very well," he said.

The Immigration Department will lose responsibility for border protection and instead concentrate on issues such as integration and citizenship.

Mr Dutton is known to be in favour of the idea, while Treasurer Scott Morrison and Finance Minister Mathias Cormann are also understood to back the move, which was considered by former prime minister Tony Abbott.

Mr Turnbull is expected to announce the change as he unveils a review of national security arrangements by former Department of Foreign Affairs head Michael L'Estrange.

However that L'Estrange review – part of a routine reassessment of national security arrangements – is understood not to specifically recommend such a super-portfolio.

Mr Turnbull has been dropping strong hints lately that he is inclined to make a significant change, rejecting what he's branded a "set and forget" policy on national security and warning that Australia must keep up with an evolving set of threats from terrorism to foreign political influence.

Security and intelligence agencies themselves are also believed to have concerns about such a change, while some former intelligence heads have publicly said they do not see any need for change.

However, a well-placed source in the intelligence community said a Home Affairs office - as opposed to a US-style Department of Homeland Security - was the preferred options for police and intelligence agencies.

That was because a Home Affairs department would potentially be broader, including agencies such as the Computer Emergency Response Team, the Australian Cyber Security Centre, Crimtrac, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission and the new Critical Infrastructure Centre, rather than just police and intelligence agencies.

Opponents argue that national security agencies already share information effectively and there is no need for a super-portfolio. Australia has prevented 12 terrorist attacks, they argue. Britain has suffered considerably more casualties in Islamist terror attacks though it has larger problem with Islamic extremism.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/peter-dutton-to-head-merged-asio-afp-and-border-force-super-security-department-20170717-gxcpgl.html>

23. MEDIA: Advocates call to sack Dutton. Detention regime corrupt from top to bottom

Tuesday July 18, 2017
Refuge Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

In the light of the revelations of drug-running in Christmas Island, refugee advocates have called for the sacking of Peter Dutton, an end to mandatory detention and to holding 501's, so-called criminal deportees, in immigration detention. "The Christmas Island Serco manager and guard filmed supplying drugs are being made scapegoats for a detention regime that is out-of-control. Mixing 501's and asylum seekers has always been a recipe for disaster. Neither groups of people should be in detention," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Minister Dutton is trying to sweep the issue under the carpet. Drugs are rife in detention. There needs to be a full inquiry into Australia's detention regime. It is a breeding ground for despair. Detention is the crime, drugs are just an inevitable symptom.

"Peter Dutton was Immigration Minister when there were drug raids at the Villawood detention centre in 2015. But little has changed since then. There are surveillance cameras all over the detention centres that will have recorded numerous instances of guards pushing drugs. The suggestion that it is one percent of officers responsible for the drug trade inside detention is not credible. How do the drugs get into Christmas Island?

"Asylum seekers have become addicted inside detention. Dutton is responsible for that. IHMS run detox programs inside the detention centres. The factories of mental illness also create the victims that are vulnerable to drug use.

"The Minister has spent tens of thousands of dollars on a court case trying to ban mobile phones from the detention centres to cut asylum seekers off from families and community support. This small glimpse into the reality of Christmas Island shows that banning phones would just drive a market in phones underground. All the Minister's arguments about security inside the detention centres have come back to bite him.

"Peter Dutton presides over a system of abuse, and a culture of lies and cover-up. He should be sacked, not elevated to a super Ministry of security."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

24. Gillian Triggs warns Dutton's 'super ministry' endangers separation of powers

Triggs also says campaign to change section 18C of Racial Discrimination Act has been exhausted due to public support

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Monday 24 July 2017 14.01 AEST

The outgoing Human Rights Commission president, Gillian Triggs, has said the creation of a new “super ministry” of home affairs was part of a hastening trend towards centralised and unchallengeable government power.

In a wide-ranging valedictory interview on ABC radio in Melbourne, Triggs also said a concerted campaign to amend section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act had faded in the face of resolute public support for the section and that she felt she became a “lightning rod” for controversial rights issues.

Triggs, who finishes her five-year term as Human Rights Commission president on Wednesday and will take up a post at the University of Melbourne next month, said the consolidation of power within the executive represented a “very serious incursion into the separation of powers, the power of the judiciary to make independent judgments”.

Home affairs – to be immigration minister Peter Dutton’s portfolio from next year – will combine the Australian federal police, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation and border force in a new ministry broadly modelled on the UK’s home office.

“Over the last few years, and particular during my time as president, we’ve seen this initially quite slow movement, piece of legislation by piece of legislations, that centralises administrative and ministerial decision-making,” Triggs said.

“But the last few weeks are seeing almost a galloping move towards a centralisation of government but most particularly of expanded ministerial discretion without proper judicial supervision and control.”

Triggs said she did not oppose government reorganisation or consolidation on principle but that the case had not been made by the government that Australia was on a “war footing” against the forces of international terrorism that required extraordinary powers.

“I think the public would accept certain restrictions on freedom in order to ensure Australia has a very safe set of laws to ensure national security,” she said. “My concern is primarily is that there is no public information or discussion about this and no processes in place to ensure protection of those rights.”

She said many ministerial discretions, particularly around counter-terrorism and immigration decisions, were not subject to judicial review, a “very serious incursions into the separation of powers, the power of the judiciary to make independent judgments”.

Triggs said the attacks levelled at her during her term as commission president had been “exceptional, possibly even unprecedented” but that those were the public front of a more fundamental ideological assault on the commission itself. Triggs said the ad hominem attacks were wasteful and failed to progress the issues.

“I’ve simply been chosen as a lightening rod for issues, obviously asylum seekers, where we took the inquiry, but also 18C,” she said. “I think that there’s been a strategic advantage in attacking the individual rather than the point at issue.

“And I think that’s particularly unfortunate because I would much rather prefer a full-on debate about the issue where we could get on the table what is working and what’s not about 18C and D, why we are not meeting our legal obligations in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. I would much rather a healthy debate about that ... rather than turn it into an attack against me, a highly personal one. It just doesn’t achieve anything.

“The issues remain unresolved and nothing’s been achieved.”

Triggs’s term as AHRC president has been marked by profound and consistent disagreement with members of the government, in particular over the commission’s inquiry into children in immigration detention and her defence of section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

She said the campaign to change 18C appeared to have been exhausted.

“It was clearly being run by a small number of people absolutely determined that there would be change,” she said. “What I think they failed to understand and, indeed, both the Abbott and Turnbull governments failed to understand, is the very strong support within not only the multicultural or ethnic communities but within the Australian community generally.

“I think there’s a distrust of government and a concern that amendments as were being suggested were actually not going to ensure that Australia maintains some level of social harmony on questions of racial abuse.”

Triggs reiterated her position that strictures of 18C was sufficiently counterbalanced by the protections of 18D and said she hoped to see an Australian bill of rights or human rights charter in her lifetime. Victoria and the ACT already have human rights charters and the Queensland government is debating the issue.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/24/gillian-triggs-warns-duttons-super-ministry-endangers-separation-of-powers>

25. Home affairs-style super-ministry a 2001 vision of Immigration secretary Michael Pezzullo

ABC Online - Analysis
By 7.30 political correspondent Andrew Probyn
Posted Friday July 21, at 12:12pm

Malcolm Turnbull may have turned his brain to the concept of a gigantic national security framework in recent months, but it certainly wasn't the Prime Minister who came up with the idea.

It wasn't Peter Dutton either.

And, it turns out, nor was it the recommendation of Michael L'Estrange and Stephen Merchant, the former top mandarins tasked in November last year to review the intelligence system.

No, it was none of them.

It was Michael Pezzullo, who must have been the happiest chap south of Lake Burley Griffin when the Prime Minister announced what he called the, "most significant reform of Australia's national intelligence and domestic security arrangements and their oversight in more than 40 years".

"Mike" Pezzullo is the secretary of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

He is also the fellow Mr Dutton, the soon-to-be home affairs minister, will undoubtedly want to head the new department — which would make him one of the most powerful public servants Australia has ever had.

A cog in the bureaucracy for 30 years, Mr Pezzullo has been advocating creation of a home affairs ministry for more than half of his career, first when he was deputy chief of staff to former opposition leader Kim Beazley.

Back then, in 2001, Labor needed a political parry to John Howard's electoral advantage on national security.

Having started the election year behind in the polls and Mr Howard had clawed his way back.

The Tampa affair, which saw a Norwegian freighter carrying 433 rescued asylum seekers denied entry to Australia, and the September 11 terrorist attacks 18 days later had placed border protection and national security at the forefront of the political contest.

Mr Beazley proposed an armed Australian Coast Guard, enhanced counter-terrorism units within the military and federal police, strengthened aviation security and stronger defences against cyber-terrorism.

ASIO, Australian Federal Police, National Crime Authority, Customs, telecommunication intercepts and the new Coast Guard would all come under a "powerful, cabinet-level ministry of home affairs".

"The home affairs ministry will be the most powerful and focused peacetime ministerial arrangement for co-ordinating Australia's domestic security in our history," Labor's policy document stated.

It is spookily similar to Mr Turnbull's plan, isn't it? Which may explain why Bill Shorten is shy to criticise it.

Immigration secretary's divisive reputation

Labor's original proposal, devised by Mr Pezzullo all those years ago, showed particular foresight in establishing cyber-terrorism and cyber-warfare as a priority — an area now being given particular attention by Mr Turnbull.

Mr Pezzullo is both the reason why a super national security ministry has been so persistently pursued by our leaders over the past two decades, and one of the reasons why the shake-up has been hard to land.

He is what the Americans call a hard ass; exactly the sort of bloke you would deploy to oversee Operation Sovereign Borders to stop asylum seeker boats, which he did with ruthless efficiency for Tony Abbott and Scott Morrison, gladly doing so under a media blackout that saw journalists subjected to police investigation.

But those who have worked with and alongside Mr Pezzullo wonder whether he is the right person to run a new super-ministry comprising such massive powers over intelligence, surveillance and policing. "Pezzullo concentrates power, he does not disperse it," says one veteran bureaucrat who stridently opposes establishing a home affairs ministry.

Even senior figures in the Canberra establishment who see virtue in the concept believe the home affairs edifice must be matched by equally high towers of oversight and review. If anything, one said, to curb Mr Pezzullo's tendencies. He is an extraordinarily hard-working, driven and intelligent fellow, admired and loathed in unequal proportions. He is considered brilliant but divisive.

Stories about Mr Pezzullo are legion in Canberra. Some are apocryphal but reflect his uncompromising reputation in Canberra. One such story alleges to be from Mr Pezzullo's time as a staffer for former Labor foreign minister Gareth Evans, a man with a notoriously volcanic temper. The minister, it is said, struck one of his furies and reached for the nearest object.

That object happened to be a stapler which flew across the room hitting Mr Pezzullo on the noggin. The wound bled profusely, all over his crisp white shirt. He wore the bloodied shirt for the rest of the day, proud of his war wound. Or so the story goes.

Mr Pezzullo told this correspondent he had heard the story too. But alas, dear readers, it wasn't him who was struck by the stapler. Gareth Evans himself told ABC's Matt Peacock: "I think I threw one small stapler on a desk, not at anyone, but from these small acorns large oak trees of reputation will grow."

Mr Pezzullo's reputation has similarly grown. But, having secured his home affairs vision after many long, hard years, could that reputation undo his desire to oversee its implementation?

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-21/man-behind-super-ministry-mike-pezzullo-and-his-reputation/8731488>

26. Peter Dutton's home affairs ministry will investigate itself for corruption

The Age
July 21 2017
Nick McKenzie & Richard Baker

When Malcolm Turnbull unveiled the biggest shake-up to the nation's security establishment in years, Australia's key anti-corruption body was mentioned just once, in passing.

This was despite the government's emphasis on accountability and integrity when announcing Peter Dutton's Department of Home Affairs. Unsurprisingly, the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity has featured in none of the ensuing public discussion, a fact that appears to be in keeping with tradition.

In his almost four years as Justice Minister, Michael Keenan has not once requested that the commission hold public hearings to examine corruption – a move guaranteeing the agency's virtually non-existent public profile.

Fairfax Media is aware of several major investigations under way into the integrity of people or operations within agencies set to form part of Mr Dutton's new super-ministry. These investigations are being conducted behind closed doors by the integrity commission and the federal police.

The creation of Home Affairs means that the Australian Federal Police will now come under the same departmental umbrella as the people and agencies they are investigating in partnership with the integrity commission.

Experts warn the arrangement risks putting such integrity probes even further out of the public eye.

"Institutionally it is a weakness. The arrangements should be such that this is not an option," says Australian National University security expert John Blaxland.

Professor Blaxland has been critical of the proposed Home Affairs ministry because it may reduce the "high degree of healthy contestability" between agencies, which sees the AFP eager to scrutinise Border Force, and vice versa, when necessary. This is disputed by senior officials.

What is incontestable is that since its inception in 2006, the integrity commission has not held a single public hearing into any of the agencies it oversees: the AFP, the Criminal Intelligence Commission, Border Force and the Immigration Department.

Due to a lack of resources, Australia's least-known corruption fighting body relies on one of the agencies it oversees, the AFP, to actually carry out its major investigations.

Several of these joint investigations are under way. They include a probe into a Melbourne-based government agency insider suspected of helping an international criminal syndicate bypass border controls.

A second ongoing inquiry is targeting a network of Sydney contraband traffickers who have had highly irregular dealings with government officials. An associated case involves a government official who authorities suspect tipped off a notorious Sydney drug importer about a police operation.

Other major inquiries have been shelved for lack of evidence. These include a case in 2014 involving a now-former official from a government agency and a money launderer connected to a senior Asian politician.

In its most recent corporate plan, the integrity commission, known by its acronym ACLEI, says the corruption risks it confronts have "high potential impacts on individuals, Australian society and the economy – including by: aiding the illicit drug, counterfeit and contraband trades [and]... facilitating money laundering and terrorism financing".

The impact on the joint investigations of the reforms unveiled by Turnbull is unclear. One senior official says the shake-up is "logical" and likely to enhance the integrity commission's focus as it shifts from Justice Minister Michael Keenan's portfolio to that of the Attorney-General, George Brandis. But several officials in Canberra say there appears to have been limited thought, if any, about what the reforms will mean for the fight against corruption.

Professor Blaxland proposes an alternative: "I find the idea of a national ICAC [independent commission against corruption] attractive. There is a compelling case for it."

Senior staff inside Border Force also believe the current oversight model is failing. The agency referred serious allegations to the integrity commission two years ago. Since then, it has been left in limbo, unable to conduct its own internal inquiries and remove suspected staff.

"We want to get rid of them or do our own investigations, but we can't," says one senior official.

Despite intensive investigation work over many months, the two most serious corruption cases being investigated by the integrity commission and the federal police have yielded no public hearings and no criminal charges.

A report released on Saturday by the Australia Institute claims corruption commissions which hold public hearings are far more successful at exposing and prosecuting corruption. The biggest user of public hearings is the NSW ICAC. Since 2012, it has held 123 public hearings and referred 76 people to the state Director of Public Prosecutions, far more than any other state commission.

The institute's figures are open to interpretation. Queensland's corruption commission (which held its first public hearing this year) has referred 32 people for prosecution without the use of a single public hearing.

Former NSW director of public prosecutions Nicholas Cowdery argues the lack of accountability in the existing model is grounds for a national ICAC. So too is the fact that no agency has dedicated responsibility for investigating those outside of ACLEI's jurisdiction, including federal politicians. ACLEI also has no oversight over the Australian Tax Office, defence or other public sector agencies.

Mr Cowdery says concerns about the unfair smearing of reputations via public hearings can be managed by a commissioner who exercises his discretion carefully.

"Any half-competent commissioner can do it. Public hearings are vital because they give the public confidence that this work is being done," he says.

Senior officials who back the existing system of secret federal police and integrity commission investigations say it safeguards the reputations of those suspected of corruption but later cleared.

The Coalition opposes an ICAC, with politicians wary of the risk of a corruption commission chasing political scalps.

Veteran corruption fighter Tony Fitzgerald, QC, who is working with the left-leaning Australia Institute as it campaigns for a national ICAC, says those opposed to public hearings "demonstrate a fundamental ignorance of democracy".

"In a truly open society, citizens are entitled to full knowledge of government affairs. Information about official conduct does not become any less important because it diminishes official reputations," says Mr Fitzgerald.

Under the Turnbull security reforms, it is likely the attorney-general will retain the power to direct ACLEI to hold public hearings in the interests of exposing corruption.

Until that happens, or until the existing integrity commission lays charges or decides on its own accord to use its public hearing powers, some of the most serious corruption cases in Australia will remain hidden.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/peter-duttons-home-affairs-ministry-will-investigate-itself-for-corruption-20170721-gxfwov.html>

27. Imran's story: arriving on Manus was 'one of the most excruciating days in my life'

Sydney Morning Herald
July 18 2017 - 11:45PM
Imran Mohammad Fazal Hoque

I will never forget the day I arrived on Manus Island. It was October 29, 2013, and one of the most excruciating days in my life. After what seemed like an eternity, I was given a number, assigned to a compound called Delta and allocated a room, C3.

What I remember most is pulling the blanket over my head that first night and crying. I was just 19, I had been separated from my family in Myanmar for four years and I had no idea what was to come.

It is difficult to describe the horrendous suffering I have observed since that night, some of which is conspicuous, but most is hidden and happens daily.

The only reason I survived is that I have kept a journal of everything I have seen since that first week, a book about who I am and where I come from and why I am here.

I wasn't a writer before I came here. In fact, I didn't really speak any English. But after a few days being here I went to a class and there was a teacher who told me to find something to do to help get through each day.

She told me that writing something about my daily life would help me to survive and help me improve my English. So I started writing every day.

I wrote about the fear of death during the 2014 riot, when I saw Reza Barati being murdered, others begging for their lives and our shipping container bedrooms coloured red with blood. I had never slept peacefully, but it got much worse after that.

I wrote about the plight of others, those who suffered medical conditions and were not given adequate treatment, like Faysal Ishak Ahmed, who died on Christmas Eve.

I wrote about the lies we were told, the videos we were shown to accelerate the uncertainty of our future and force us to return. And I wrote about the emptiness and hopelessness that engulfs you when you cannot see your family.

I recently received the devastating news that my father has been missing for six months. Not knowing whether he is alive or dead is heartbreaking, but I cannot even cry openly.

My mother used to tell me that if a poor person knocks on our door, don't ever refuse to give what we can. I always saw that she fed them and told them to come back again if they needed anything. She told me "what comes around, goes around". When I was young, I didn't understand what she meant.

But now that I have left my country and I am older, I do understand and, if I get a chance in my life, I will play my role to protect other people. That is what I am passionate about. That is why I want to realise my father's dream for me and become a doctor.

My aim was to go to Australia with an open heart, hoping I would go to school without the fear of death. I crave a country which will give me the opportunity to be the person I know I can become. I yearn for a family that can be formed in a society where people share love with each other. My hope has been deliberately ruined again and again. But I don't know how to be hopeful any more.

More than two years ago, most of us were recognised as genuine refugees, but we are still suspended in the middle of nowhere. There was no need to imprison us in this isolation for four long, wasted years as we have committed no crime. A day is like a decade in this gruesome place.

Now the suffering is greater because the centre is due to be demolished by October 31 and the Australian government has no proper plans for our future. On top of everything else, we hear that the annual US refugee intake has been filled and the US may not take any more refugees before October 1. We feel like there is no place for us on this earth.

It is time Australia made the right decision for our future. I am beseeching, on behalf of all the refugees and asylum seekers, Australia, America and New Zealand to give us the opportunity to be part of your great nations. We will give you our blood and sweat. We will love your country and its people like our own family. It's time for me to finish my book, too, but the final chapter will not be written until I am free and safe.

Imran Mohammad is a refugee from Burma who was just 19 when detained on Manus Island.

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/imrans-story-arriving-on-manus-was-one-of-the-most-excruciating-days-in-my-life-20170718-gxdfcz.html>

28. The Saturday Paper Editorial: Four years on Manus

The Saturday Paper
Editorial
Edition No. 166 July 22 – 28, 2017

Four years on, they're cutting off the power and water. Inside the detention centre, men are still waiting to find out what is happening. The minister maintains everything will be resolved. These buildings will be demolished by October.

"Our emotions fluctuate between despair and, occasionally, a faint flicker of hope," Imran Mohammad wrote this week. "There is great sadness and the feeling of anticipation of moving somewhere safe is overwhelming. Our days begin on a happy note, but by evening the realisation of our situation has caused absolute devastation and hopelessness among the detainees."

Mohammad is a Rohingya refugee. Wednesday marked the end of his fourth year of indefinite detention on Manus Island. It is four years since Kevin Rudd negotiated the imprisonment of refugees on the island. The deal has since been ruled illegal by Papua New Guinea's Supreme Court. More people have died under the arrangement than have been resettled.

"Over the past four years, we have seen rioting, during which one of our men was beaten to death," Mohammad writes. "We have been shot at with live ammunition. Simple illnesses have been neglected, resulting in death. We have been beaten by locals using machetes. We have seen an accidental drowning, after which the body lay in a morgue for almost a week until his friends, who kept vigil, could pay for embalming using their cigarette allowance, which they swapped for cash."

Mohammad was 19 when he arrived. He has learnt English while in detention. He has no documents and nowhere to go.

"We are begging for permanent safety to our stateless lives," he writes. "Although Australia is pushing us to settle in Papua New Guinea, there is still so far as we know no visa category or any permanent settlement plans in place for refugees. We have been dumped by the Australian government and for these past years used for its own political motives..."

FULL STORY AT <https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2017/07/22/four-years-manus/15006456004950>

29. Kevin Rudd contradicts his 2013 pledge to ban asylum seekers as part of Papua New Guinea deal

ABC News Online
By political correspondent Louise Yaxley
Thursday July 20, 2017

Former prime minister Kevin Rudd has contradicted his 2013 vow to ban asylum seekers arriving by boat from ever settling in Australia.

When Mr Rudd returned to the Labor leadership four years ago, he struck a deal with Papua New Guinea for asylum seekers to be processed there.

"From now any asylum seeker who arrives in Australia by boat will have no chance of being settled in Australia as refugees," he said at the time.

Mr Rudd said those found to be refugees would be resettled in Papua New Guinea and those not granted refugee status would be sent back to their country of origin, or a safe third nation other than Australia.

But on the fourth anniversary of that deal being announced, Mr Rudd has repeatedly claimed the asylum seekers in PNG should have been brought to Australia three years ago.

And this morning he insisted that the agreement expired after a year and that if no appropriate place had been found for asylum seekers, then Australia would have had a responsibility to locate them elsewhere including Australia if other places could not be identified.

But there are more than a dozen examples of Mr Rudd insisting in 2013 that people who arrived by boat would not be settled in Australia.

He told journalists in Victoria that his message to people smugglers was "if you are going to put someone onto a boat to come to Australia, we, the Australian government, are not going to allow you to settle in Australia. Everything else is secondary to that. That is the absolute core message".

And in a doorstep interview in Perth in July 2013, he said "we have a clear-cut policy which says that if you're a people smuggler and you're going to try and get a person to Australia by boat, that your business model is over because that person will never settle in Australia".

There are still 816 men in Papua New Guinea who were sent there as asylum seekers under the deal Mr Rudd struck.

While Mr Rudd refers to the 12-month review of the deal, the memorandum of understanding that was formally signed between the two governments two weeks later says that the arrangement remains in effect until terminated by mutual agreement.

Labor frontbenchers who served under Mr Rudd, Anthony Albanese and Richard Marles, have both said that the deal did not mean asylum seekers would be able to be brought to Australia.

But both men said that the Coalition government should have done more to find appropriate resettlement for the asylum seekers and to ensure their living conditions were appropriate.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-20/kevin-rudd-png-asylum-seekers/8726470>

30. 'Enough is enough': human rights group calls for end to Manus, Nauru

Sydney Morning Herald
July 19 2017 - 12:00AM
James Massola

The more than 2000 asylum seekers on Manus Island and Nauru should be "evacuated immediately" to Australia, according to Human Rights Law Centre legal advocacy director Daniel Webb.

Wednesday marks the fourth anniversary of former prime minister Kevin Rudd's announcement, alongside PNG Prime Minister Peter O'Neill, of a refugee deal that would ensure "any asylum seeker who arrives in Australia by boat will have no chance of being settled in Australia as refugees".

At the time, Mr Rudd said the arrangement would be reviewed annually.

Since then, subsequent Coalition governments have looked to strike resettlement deals with third countries including Cambodia and the US to shift people in detention off the islands.

And the refugee swap deal with the US looks to have been delayed again, though the Turnbull government insists it remains on track.

Meanwhile, the Manus Island detention facility is due to close on October 31 after the PNG Supreme Court ruled it illegal, and the refugees still using the facility face an uncertain future.

Mr Webb, who has visited the Manus centre three times, said that four years since the deal was announced – and after violence and shootings on the island – "enough is well and truly enough".

"Every single person warehoused by our government on Manus and Nauru must immediately be evacuated to Australia. If people then go to America or New Zealand – fine. But they can't be left in danger or limbo any longer," he said.

A report from the Law Centre to be released on Wednesday highlights statistics from the Department of Immigration for 2017 that show a critical or major incident in the Manus Island camp or surrounding community has taken place almost every day.

The report argues that the Department's own statistics "make crystal clear that conditions on Manus remain truly desperate, harmful and abusive".

"[Mr] Rudd had some political challenges when he announced the deal and, yes, [Malcolm] Turnbull will surely face some if he tries to end it. But ending it is the right thing to do. Whatever the question, deliberately destroying the lives of innocent people is not the answer," Mr Webb said.

"It's no secret that [Donald] Trump hates the deal. It's looking shakier by the day. The bottom line is that no one is likely to go to the US any time soon and many now seem unlikely to ever go at all; 2000 lives remain on a painful pause with no end in sight, 169 childhoods are being spent surrounded by suffering and despair.

The offshore immigration detention program has cost the federal government at least \$5 billion since 2012, according to figures recently released by a senate committee.

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/enough-is-enough-human-rights-group-calls-for-end-to-manus-nauru-20170718-gxdp58.html>

31. Offshore detention cost taxpayers \$5bn in four years – and asylum seekers remain in limbo

Vigils to mark anniversary of Kevin Rudd's banning of asylum seekers who arrive by boat from ever settling in Australia

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Wednesday 19 July 2017 04.01 AEST

Four years since the then prime minister, Kevin Rudd, announced that “any asylum seeker who arrives in Australia by boat will have no chance of being settled in Australia”, offshore detention has cost Australian taxpayers almost \$5bn and the future of those held on Nauru and Manus Island remains critically uncertain.

On 19 July 2013, Rudd announced all boat-borne asylum seekers would be subject to indefinite detention offshore and would never be eligible to settle in Australia.

Despite consistent revelations of physical violence – including murder – sexual abuse of women and children, allegations of torture by guards, medical neglect leading to death and catastrophic rates of mental health damage, self-harm and suicide attempts, both of Australia's offshore processing centres remain operational.

Roughly 2,000 people remain on Australia's offshore processing islands of Nauru and Manus, and figures released under Senate estimates questioning show that the two camps have cost \$4.895bn to build and run.

All of the costs are borne by Australia, which maintains effective control over both centres.

The Manus centre – ruled illegal by Papua New Guinea's supreme court 15 months ago – will close on 31 October under pressure from the PNG government and from the private contractors running the centre, who have refused to continue working there.

The Nauru camp will continue to run but that country's government has consistently refused to offer permanent resettlement to refugees, instead offering 20-year visas with restrictions on travel.

The proposed resolution for Australia's offshore refugee population, the US deal to resettle refugees from Australia's Nauru and Manus operations in America, has foundered, with the US hitting its 50,000 cap for refugee resettlement this year and officials abruptly leaving their on-island interviews on Nauru two weeks early.

Both the US and Australian governments have said the deal remains on track but details of the agreement are unknown.

No one held under Australia's offshore regime has been resettled under the US program and the deal does not commit the US to taking a single refugee if it deems they have not passed “extreme vetting”, a threshold that has never been defined.

Australian officials have conceded that, even if the US resettlement program does go ahead, it will not clear the detention centres, leaving “a balance” on the two islands.

The Manus detention centre is being progressively shut down with more than 800 men still housed there. Buildings have been closed off, power shut off, activities stopped and people forcibly moved from their dormitories. There are reports there is no more running water in parts of the camp and those within are reliant on bottled water.

Despite the camp closing around them, many of those in the detention centre are refusing to leave, saying they will not be safe in the community.

The PNG prime minister, Peter O'Neill, said the American deal remained a viable solution to close the camp but said his government was “looking at all options” for the men in the camp.

The Human Rights Law Centre's Daniel Webb said offshore detention had run “four years too many”.

In a series of interviews with Webb and with Iranian journalist and Manus detainee Behrouz Boochani, men in detention have said they faced uncertain futures.

I feel like everything the Australian government is doing is designed to force us to go home or go into PNG. They are squeezing us out of the camp but not to the airport where they will take us to safety. They are squeezing us into the PNG community where we are not safe.

– Amir, 23, Iran

The situation here is getting worse and worse. They have shut down classrooms. Closed the gym. They tell us every day that we can't stay here. They say go back to your country or go to the transit centre. But we aren't safe out there in the community. That is the worst thing – they are trying to push us somewhere where we will not be safe.

– Madu, 23, stateless Rohingya

We've had so many hard times. We've been attacked, we've been punched and we've been fired at with shotguns. My friend, Reza, was killed. He was a gentle man. But they didn't care who we were.

– Farhard, 36, stateless Kurd

Webb said the US deal initially gave those on those islands some hope that "finally our government was conceding it couldn't just abandon them there forever".

"But it's now eight months since the deal was announced and not a single refugee has been resettled," he said. "Most of the men on Manus haven't even had an initial interview.

"The bottom line is that no one is likely to go to the US anytime soon and many now seem unlikely to ever go at all. Two-thousand lives remain on a painful pause with no end in sight. One hundred and sixty-nine childhoods are being spent surrounded by suffering and despair.

"After four years, enough is well and truly enough."

The foreign affairs minister, Julie Bishop, said on the weekend the US deal was "progressing as we expected", saying there had not been any delay.

"The United States is upholding the agreement," she said.

Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition said the US deal had stalled and those held on Australia's offshore islands had been "living on false hopes for eight months already".

"Now those hopes have been dashed again," he said. "It is time for the Turnbull government to end the pretence of the US deal and act immediately to bring them all the asylum seekers and refugees to Australia."

Paul Ronald, the chief executive of Save the Children, the child welfare agency that formerly worked on Nauru, said that, even if the US deal remained a possibility, the current situations on Nauru and Manus were untenable.

"The Australian government is undeniably responsible for the health and welfare of those who it has transferred offshore," he said. "Refugees on Nauru and Manus Island can no longer remain in limbo. Prime minister Turnbull should immediately bring them to safety in Australia while they await resettlement in the US or until another safe and sustainable alternative can be secured."

Last month, the Australian government agreed to pay \$70m in compensation to the Manus Island detainees, who sought damages in the Victorian supreme court for illegally detaining them in dangerous and harmful conditions.

In agreeing to the record payout, the government did not concede liability.

There is a hastened effort under way to get the payout money to the 1905 men enjoined to the class action before Manus is closed, because it may be difficult to find them after that time.

The Manus and Nauru processing centres were re-opened in 2012 under the Gillard government, but July 13 marks the date of the policy shift - under Rudd - prohibiting any asylum seeker who arrived by boat from ever resettling in Australia.

Vigils will be held across the country to mark four years since the alteration to Australian policy.

<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jul/19/offshore-detention-cost-taxpayers-5bn-in-four-years-and-asylum-seekers-remain-in-limbo>

32. Cost for Australia's offshore immigration detention near \$5 billion

Canberra Times

July 18 2017

Tom McIlroy

Australia's offshore immigration detention program has cost the federal government at least \$5 billion since 2012, new figures have confirmed.

Ahead of Wednesday's four-year anniversary of Kevin Rudd's move to reinstate hardline rules to send any asylum seeker arriving in Australia by boat to offshore detention, Senate committee figures show the total operational and infrastructure costs for Australia's detention facilities on Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island has reached \$4.89 billion.

The latest overall price tag for offshore detention includes departmental costs and capital works on Manus and Nauru, peaking in 2015-16.

Figures provided to Senate estimates hearings show more than \$230,000 has been paid out to public servants and detainees for personal injury and wrongful detention claims in Australia and the offshore centres, including \$69,108.96 in payouts to Immigration Department staff and sub-contractors in 2016-17.

Insurer Comcare and Department of Finance compensation claims averaged \$6443 for injuries in Australia and \$12,003 for injuries in Papua New Guinea.

Last year a report by Save the Children and Unicef found taxpayers had spent as much as \$9.6 billion on offshore immigration enforcement since 2013, while a Parliamentary Library report released in 2016 found Manus Island had cost taxpayers about \$2 billion since it was reopened – more than \$1 million for each of the 2000 people who have been imprisoned there.

The Gillard government's moves to reopen the Manus Island detention centre in late 2012 saw Australia spend \$358.77 million on operating and capital costs for the two centres.

Those costs dramatically increased to \$1.1 billion in 2013-14, following Mr Rudd's pre-election announcement and the Abbott government's election on the back of promises to turn back asylum seeker boats and significantly ramp up border protection.

In 2014-15, the two offshore centres cost taxpayers \$1.31 billion, increasing to \$1.38 billion in 2015-16.

Last financial year the cost fell to \$980 million as the number of detainees reduced.

In June, the government agreed to pay \$70 million in compensation to about 1900 asylum seekers currently or formerly held on Manus Island, considered one of Australia's largest ever human rights court settlements.

About 1200 people remain in the two offshore processing centres, the most recent figures from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection show.

The department told Senate estimates the nationalities of those being held in detention or in the community on Manus included nationals from Iran, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq and Afghanistan.

There were 233 people found not to be refugees at the end of May, of which 193 were living within the processing centre including six who were receiving medical treatment in Port Moresby.

A further 32 had returned to their country of origin voluntarily, while six had been returned against their will.

Detainees on Nauru included nationals from the same countries, as well as Nepal, India, Syria, Indonesia, Somalia, Sudan and at least two people found to be stateless.

As of May 23, no transferee has been determined not to be a refugee in Nauru, the department said, noting 175 were "determined to have indicative negative outcomes".

"All transferees still have avenues within the refugee status determination process; as such none are classified as failed asylum seekers."

The department said at the end of April, the average time spent in onshore detention in Australia for people found to be stateless was 836 days.

The longest period in onshore detention was 1345 days, more than three and a half years.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/public-service/cost-for-australias-offshore-immigration-detention-near-5-billion-20170716-gxci97.html>

33. MEDIA RELEASE: Time to evacuate Manus and Nauru: Too Long; No Safety; No Future

Tuesday July 18, 2017
Refuge Action Coalition
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

In November 2016, Prime Minister announced that the US government had agreed to resettle an unspecified number of refugees from Nauru and Manus Island.

The first interviews took place on Nauru in December 2016. But, since then, not one refugee has been resettled in the US.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop, told the media on Monday, 17 July, that 'processing of asylum seekers on Nauru is progressing as expected'; except there is no progress.

Refugees on Nauru have now been told that no-one will be going to the US before October. But no-one has even been told that they have been accepted. In all that time, hundreds who expressed an interest have not even been interviewed.

The situation is even worse on Manus Island where proportionately far fewer have had interviews. The announcement that the US has filled its refugee quota until October, makes it doubly unlikely that the Border Force will be able to make good on its announced October closure deadline.

"Refugees have been living on false hopes for eight months already," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "Now those hopes have been dashed again. It is time for the Turnbull government to end the pretence of the US deal and act immediately to bring them all the asylum seekers and refugees to Australia."

The Manus refugees are not safe -- on Manus or anywhere else in PNG. And PNG has no intention of resettling any of them.

Similarly on Nauru, assaults and robberies are on the increase, while Nauruan police turn a blind eye or worse. Meanwhile, with the end of the Ferrovial contract to run detention on Nauru, the Nauru government is turning the screws on refugees in the community. Their fortnightly payments are being cut and Nauru companies taking the place of existing service providers are gouging refugees. Water and electricity previously provided free to refugees is now being charged for.

"The horrors of Manus and Nauru will hang like the proverbial millstone around the neck of the Australian government as it seeks to take up a seat on the UN Human Rights Council," said Ian Rintoul.

"Four years after then Labor PM Kevin Rudd, desperately hoping for re-election, declared, that no-one arriving by boat would be settled in Australia, it's time for Labor to repudiate its shameful decision and commit to ending offshore detention.

"Vigils around Australia will mark the fourth anniversary of the day of shame and call for the immediate evacuation of Manus and Nauru. It time to bring all the asylum seekers and refugees to Australia."

Sydney vigil: Four Years Too Many; 19 July 2017 6:00 PM

Hyde Park North 100 Elizabeth St, Sydney NSW

Speakers include: Sarah Dale from RACS and Ming Yu from Amnesty International, refugee speaker, and messages from Manus.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

34. DHS confirms refugee program will continue

Sky News

With Reuters

Updated: 1:17 pm, Sunday, 16 July 2017

The US Department of Homeland Security has confirmed the Manus and Nauru refugee program is continuing, after officials left a detention centre abruptly, casting doubt over the resettlement plan.

'The Nauru/Manus refugee program is continuing,' a statement released by the US Department of Homeland Security said.

'We do not discuss the exact dates of USCIS' circuit rides to adjudicate refugees' applications; however, we are planning return trips.

'It is not uncommon for the dates of tentatively-planned refugee circuit ride trips worldwide to change due to a wide variety of factors.'

US officials halted screening interviews and departed the Pacific island of Nauru on Friday, two weeks short of their scheduled timetable and a day after Washington said the US had reached its annual refugee intake cap.

'US (officials) were scheduled to be on Nauru until July 26 but they left on Friday,' one refugee told Reuters, requesting anonymity as he did not want to jeopardise his application for US resettlement.

In the US, a senior member of the union that represents refugee officers at US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), a Department of Homeland Security agency, told Reuters his own trip to Nauru was not going forward as scheduled.

Jason Marks, chief steward of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 1924, told Reuters his trip has now been pushed back and it was unclear whether it will actually happen.

The Australian Immigration Department declined to comment on the whereabouts of the US officials or the future of a refugee swap agreement between Australia and the US that President Donald Trump earlier this year branded a 'dumb deal'.

An indefinite postponement of the deal would have significant repercussions for Australia's pledge to close a second detention centre on Papua New Guinea's Manus island on October 31.

Only 70 refugees, less than 10 per cent of the total detainees held in the camp, have completed US processing.

'The US deal looks more and more doubtful,' Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition said. 'The US deal was never the solution the Australian government pretended it to be.'

Former US President Barack Obama agreed a deal with Australia late last year to offer refuge to up to 1250 asylum seekers, a deal the Trump administration said it would only honour to maintain a strong relationship with Australia and then only on condition that refugees satisfied strict checks.

In exchange, Australia has pledged to take Central American refugees from a centre in Costa Rica, where the US has taken in a larger number of people in recent years.

The swap is designed, in part, to help Australia close both Manus and Nauru, which are expensive to run and have been widely criticised by the United Nations and others over treatment of detainees.

<http://www.skynews.com.au/news/top-stories/2017/07/16/refugee-swap-with-us-in-doubt.html>

35. US may deny resettlement of hundreds of Tamils on Nauru, Manus amid anti-terror laws

ABC News Online

By South Asia correspondent James Bennett and political reporter Stephen Dziedzic

Thursday July 20, 2017

Australia will need to find an alternative home for a large number of Tamil asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus expected to be denied entry to the United States under sweeping anti-terror laws.

There are roughly 240 Tamils on Nauru and Manus Island, from where America has agreed to take up to 1,250 refugees.

Earlier this year, US President Donald Trump described the agreement as a "dumb deal", and his administration said it would only honour it to maintain a strong relationship with Australia and then only on condition refugees satisfied strict checks.

But America's post 9-11 anti-terror legislation, the Patriot Act, will likely disqualify a large number of the Tamils.

Because the since-defeated Tamil Tiger rebels were so heavily enmeshed in the Tamil-dominated north, they would be captured a provision which excludes people deemed to have provided "material support" to terror groups.

Kathy Newland, co-founder of the Washington DC Institute for Migration Policy, described material support as a "really broad" category.

"Its everything from money, food, shelter, almost anything, training, to someone associated with a terrorist group," she said.

At her home near Jaffna in Sri Lanka's Tamil-dominated north, a mother and widow Mala (not her real name) waits anxiously news from her son.

The 24-year-old man is on Nauru, having tried to reach Australia by boat five years ago.

He had gone there to seek help for his sister, a Liberation of Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cadre injured in the last days of the war. The family said they were denied proper help.

The man's mother worries what will happen to her son if he is to be sent back to Sri Lanka.

"If he [is] deported to Sri Lanka, I don't know what will happen," she said.

"The villagers say the people who [are] deported [are] arrested and detained."

Last week, the United Nations found she had good reason to be fearful.

Ben Emmerson, the UN's special rapporteur on counter terrorism's impact on human rights, said the Tamil community had "borne the brunt of the State's well-oiled torture apparatus," something he said remained the case today.

"Any person suspected of association, however indirect, with the LTTE remains at immediate risk of detention and torture," Mr Emmerson said.

The envoy said meetings with prisoners detained under anti-terror laws had revealed disturbing details of ongoing mistreatment.

"I heard distressing stories of extremely brutal methods of torture," he told a media conference in Colombo last Friday.

Mr Emmerson said the methods being used included "beatings with sticks, the use of stress positions, asphyxiation using plastic bags drenched in kerosene, the pulling out of fingernails, the insertion of needles beneath the fingernails, the use of various forms of water torture, the suspension of individuals for several hours by their thumbs, and the mutilation of genitals".

'I was beaten during detention'

The ABC spoke yesterday to one Tamil deportee — who did not want to be identified — who also said he had been abused by authorities.

After being deported from Europe in April, the man said police arrested him, and over the course of two weeks in jail he was beaten and robbed because his friends were suspected of having Tiger links.

"I was detained after my deportation," he said.

"I was beaten up during my detention — they beat me using shoes and sticks. I have the scar marks."

The new allegations raise questions about the value of assurances given by Sri Lanka that returnees will not be targeted or mistreated.

Under the refugee convention, receiving countries are not allowed to send someone back into danger.

Australia has previously been given assurances by Sri Lanka that potential returnees would not be mistreated.

But the new allegations raise questions about those guarantees, and what alternatives Australia has for the detainees in its care.

"We're continuing to work with Nauru and with Papua New Guinea to find third countries to take them, otherwise they do have options to be resettled in PNG," Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said on Wednesday.

Ms Bishop is in Colombo meeting Sri Lankan officials today, and said Australia sought to "encourage" Sri Lanka to live up to its human rights commitments.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-20/us-may-deny-resettlement-of-hundreds-of-tamils-on-nauru,-manus/8726034>