

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Sunday, 25 January 2015

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1. Richard Ackland: Companies suing critics, the real enemy of free speech

Tasmania wants to break ranks with uniform defamation laws to allow companies to take action against individuals. Where's Tim Wilson when we need him?

The Guardian
Richard Ackland
Friday 23 January 2015 12.42 AEST

here was moment in his political life when Philip Ruddock became a mini-hero. Within a short time of shifting from minister for immigration to attorney general in 2003, he set about giving a blood transfusion to an item that had long languished on the agenda of the standing committee of attorneys general – a uniform defamation law.

From the Pacific Solution to freeing up speech in one bound.

It was a difficult process getting the states and territories to line up for a defamation regime that was principally the same across the wide brown land.

There were numerous holdout issues, one of which was whether companies should be permitted to sue for defamation. In NSW the Defamation Act of 2002 didn't allow corporations to bring actions in defamation. In other states, they could. Also, the NSW court of appeal had decided that public bodies, like shire councils and government authorities, could not sue.

It is an article of faith in the Liberal party that the reputations of corporations and their delicate "feelings" be fully protected by the law. The Business Council of Australia was adamant. Hugh Morgan – the council's president in 2005 – said the very idea that corporations should not be permitted to sue for defamation was an "outrageous attack on the corporate sector ... The proposal remains an abomination."

The Coalition government fought hard to give the captains and cabin boys of industry what they wanted. Ruddock insisted that companies be able to sue their detractors in the courts, but the Labor state governments wanted the prohibition against corporate libel actions to be the rule across the nation. It was one of the sticking points during the negotiations and, in the end, to get agreement Ruddock relented.

There was a weird sort of compromise, whereby only very small corporations, of less than 10 employees, could sue in their own name. This was a crumb tossed off the table so the commonwealth attorney general could save face.

Full story at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/23/companies-suing-critics-thats-the-real-enemy-of-free-speech>

2. AFP's role in Bali Nine case a 'gross error', lawyer says

AFP's role in Bali Nine case a 'gross error', should be cited when pleading for Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran's lives, lawyer says

ABC Radio CAF - The World Today
By Peter Lloyd
Updated Mon 19 Jan 2015, 11:49am

One of the lawyers involved in the Bali Nine drug case says Australian police should never have cooperated with Indonesia given the likelihood of death sentences being imposed.

Brisbane lawyer Robert Myers said the Abbott Government should cite the role played by Australian Federal Police (AFP) in providing intelligence on the trafficking conspiracy when it makes a bid to save the lives of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran.

The pair are set to face the firing squad this year after a decision by the Indonesian government to go ahead with executing all 64 death row drug traffickers.

Mr Myers became involved in the case after receiving a phone call from his friend Lee Rush, the father of now convicted drug trafficker Scott Rush who is serving a life sentence, before his son left Australia.

"He called me one evening before the boys, well, particularly before Scott left Australia, with a concern that he had received a call to say Scott had an overseas ticket, he had a passport," Mr Myers said.

"And so I said, 'Well look, if you've got a concern, I'll call a friend of mine in the Federal Police'. I knew a police officer who was on secondment and that really started the entire thing."

The AFP's liaison officer in Bali, Paul Hunniford, then wrote a three-page letter to the Indonesian police.

"It really said words to the effect of whatever action you see fit to take is quite alright with us, and it seemed to be an open-ended invitation to the Indonesian authorities," Mr Myers said.

"If they wanted to take it beyond surveillance, if they wanted to arrest these people, even wanted to charge them, even wanted to subject them to Indonesian law, that the Australians weren't going to have any problems with that."

Australia in a 'terribly embarrassing situation'

Mr Myers said the AFP's involvement could help assist in saving the lives of Chan and Sukumaran.

"I suspect it may be their only hope now because, as I understand it, the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister have appealed to Indonesia; it sounds as if the appeals have fallen on deaf ears," he said.

"It just struck me as though if the Government, if the Prime Minister could say on behalf of the Australian Government, [that] we find ourselves in a terribly embarrassing situation because this should never have happened in the first place."

He said had the AFP asked for cooperation from the Indonesian authorities about the groups' movements and when they were returning to Australia, the matter could have been dealt with on home soil.

"And if there's an appeal made on a personal basis you'd hope that the president of Indonesia might say, 'Look, I can see you're in an embarrassing situation where our countries are allies... we'd hate to see the Australian Government terribly embarrassed by really a very bad error, a gross error on behalf of the AFP', which was completely contrary to its own restrictions and guidelines.

"There is no doubt that the Attorney-General would have to personally approve the cooperation between foreign entities that could result in the death of Australian citizens, and there was no doubt that by allowing the Indonesians to really have cart blanche in relation to the Bali Nine, that all of the Bali Nine were being exposed to the death penalty."

Mr Myers said he did not know at what level the AFP's decision was made.

"[Mick] Keelty was obviously the officer in charge of the entire show at the time.

"I don't even know if this decision was made by Keelty but one would have thought the buck would have stopped with ... well, the buck stops with the Attorney-General and my understanding is the Attorney-General knew nothing about it."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-19/afps-role-in-bali-nine-case-a-gross-error-lawyer-says/6025152>

3. Graeme Hugo, distinguished demographer and academic, dies aged 68

ABC News Online

First posted Tue 20 Jan 2015, 1:48pm

Updated Tue 20 Jan 2015, 2:02pm

One of Australia's most distinguished demographers, Professor Graeme Hugo, has died at the age of 68 after a short illness.

Regarded by his peers and students as an academic giant, the University of Adelaide professor was also director of the Australian Migration and Population Research Centre.

Professor Hugo was named an Officer of the Order of Australia for his services to population research in 2012.

He was also recognised as a generous public intellectual and was a regular contributor to ABC local radio.

Some of Professor Hugo's most recent research focused on the problems, including discrimination, faced by jobseekers from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Tributes from fellow academics and politicians have flowed on social media.

Acting deputy vice-chancellor of research, Richard Russell, said Professor Hugo's death came "very suddenly" and said he would be sorely missed.

"He was a prolific writer. I think he logged up somewhere over 400 articles in books and chapters and the like," he said.

"He leaves a very big hole. He was, I think, probably one of the eminent Australian geographers and demographers and sadly he's left us rather sooner than we would have hoped for."

Professor Russell said Professor Hugo was an inspiring lecturer who had supervised more than 50 PhD theses.

"He really did share his knowledge with a lot of young people from all around the world," he said.

"His interests ranged far beyond Australia. He had interests in migration all around the world. He had a very deep connection into a large part of Asia, particularly Indonesia.

"He was also interested in things that impact on population such as climate change, health and living standards.

"I think his legacy will live on through his students and that's not such a bad way to be remembered in this world."

Premier Jay Weatherill also expressed his sadness, calling Professor Hugo's death an "enormous loss to South Australia and the nation".

"[Professor] Hugo was an international thinker of the highest calibre and was greatly respected," Mr Weatherill said in a statement.

"I regarded him as a friend and I am deeply saddened at his passing."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-20/graeme-hugo-demographer-and-academic-dies-aged-68/6028850>

4. MPs face off over hero asylum seeker's deportation

Annika Smethurst
Herald Sun
January 16, 2015 10:00PM

FEDERAL Liberal MP Sarah Henderson is facing off against Immigration Minister Peter Dutton over the future of a heroic asylum seeker who faces deportation.

Ms Henderson has made a plea to the minister to intervene in the case of Kurdish Iranian refugee Homayon Hatami, who could be sent back to Iran when his bridging visa expires in April. Yesterday Ms Henderson weighed into the fight to keep Mr Hatami in Australia after his request for ministerial intervention was rejected.

The 25-year-old fled Iran four years ago and arrived in Australia aboard an asylum seeker boat, and has lived in community detention in Geelong for the past three years.

Last year the former karate champion was given a bravery award from the Royal Humane Society of Australasia for rescuing a woman who was attempting suicide at a Geelong beach.

Ms Henderson said Mr Hatami had made "a very significant contribution to the Geelong community" and there was strong support for him to remain in Australia.

"Obtaining a ministerial intervention is very difficult but I will continue to advocate very strongly for Mr Hatami," she said.

But a spokesman for Mr Dutton said a second request for intervention would not usually be considered unless there was new information.

"Where the minister has previously considered a case and has declined to intervene, that case would generally only be referred to the minister again if there is new information or the circumstances of the case have changed," he said.

Geelong priest Father Kevin Dillon, who has been assisting Mr Hatami, said it was "unbelievable" that he could be deported and called for "common sense to prevail".

"This bewildering and bizarre situation ought not become a debate about Australia's immigration policy. It is about exercising justice, common sense."

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/mps-face-off-over-hero-asylum-seekers-deportation/story-fni0fiyv-1227187366925>

5. MEDIA RELEASE: Fifteen Darwin asylum seekers on hungerstrike

AS "MARTIN" MOVES CLOSER TO DEATH, FIFTEEN IRANIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS IN DARWIN HUNGER STRIKE

Friday January 23, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

While the mass hunger strike at Manus Island has drawn main media attention, 15 Iranian asylum seekers have entered their sixth day of hunger strike in the Wickham Point detention centre near Darwin.

The 15 are all aged between 25 and 30. Although all of them arrived in Australia at different time between 2010 and 2012, all of them had been on bridging visas, living in the community with work rights.

All of them have been re-detained since August 2014. They are among a group of 40 Iranians in Wickham Point who face being held indefinitely as Australia is unable to forcibly return them to Iran.

One of the asylum seekers told the Refugee Action Coalition, "Case managers told us, 'You go back to your country or you stay in detention forever'."

The plight of such asylum seekers has been highlighted by the Iranian asylum seeker, "'Martin', who has staged longest hunger strike so far in history of Australia's detention regime.

"Martin" has said his hunger strike was for all those already in a similar situation to his in Darwin detention, and for all those in the community who potentially face the same fate.

Now, fifteen more asylum seekers have begun their own protest.

"It is hard to imagine a more pointless exercise by the Immigration department," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "They know they cannot be sent to Iran, yet they are being deliberately held in indefinite detention.

"It is urgent that the Minister intervene, Each days that passes brings Martin closer to his death. All of the 15 hunger strikers, have partners, and had jobs. To punish them because Iran will not accept forced deportations makes no sense. The Minister has the power to release them from immigration detention; he should use it. Or is he going to deny this is happening, too?"

For more information, contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713

6. Australian-run asylum detention centres see sharp rise in serious incidents

Documents obtained under FOI reveal self-harm, assaults and infectious medical conditions among the hundreds of injuries sustained in past year by staff and asylum seekers

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Wednesday 21 January 2015 08.41 AEST

Serious incidents in Australian-run detention centres – including self-harm, assaults and infectious medical conditions – have risen sharply, with hundreds of injuries sustained by staff and asylum seekers reported to the federal workplace authority.

Documents obtained by Guardian Australian under freedom of information laws reveal the number of dangerous incidents reported to Comcare jumped from 298 in 2012-13 to 449 in 2013-14.

Most of these incidents – 83% – relate to injuries sustained by asylum seekers in immigration detention centres on the mainland and on Manus Island and Nauru.

Eight deaths were reported to Comcare by the immigration department during this period. A number of asylum seekers died during the year - including Reza Barati, who was killed on Manus Island during unrest in February 2014, and Hamid Kehazaei, who contracted septicaemia on Manus and died in September.

The logs highlight serious hazards at detention centres onshore and abroad, including one instance in which unexploded ordinance was found on Nauru in April 2014.

The incidents reveal previously unreported serious injuries and illnesses sustained by asylum seekers, including:

- Asylum seekers who drank insect repellent, blister medication, soap and attempted to overdose on Panadol in a series of self-harm attempts. In one incident an asylum seeker on Christmas Island attempted to self-immolate by wrapping toilet paper around his legs and setting it on fire.
- Diagnoses of tuberculosis, Japanese encephalitis and malaria at the Manus Island processing centre.
- Guards and caseworkers who have been injured while restraining asylum seekers.

Tensions remain high at the Manus Island detention centre, with asylum seekers continuing to stage protests and hunger strike over their treatment.

In the department's latest annual report, the rise in incidents is attributed to "continued focus on improving the quality of guidance materials, training and support to help staff make decisions in accordance with the legislative requirements and to ensure all notifiable incidents are reported immediately".

"Consequently, the department appears to have over-reported, although this ensures that all serious incidents are visible to Comcare."

During 2014 Comcare carried out inspections on Manus Island, Nauru, Christmas Island, Yongah Hill (at Northam, WA), Pontville (outside Hobart) and Melbourne immigration detention centres.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/21/australian-run-asylum-detention-centres-see-sharp-rise-in-serious-incidents>

7. Asylum seeking children to remain in WA private schools

The Age
January 21, 2015 - 9:27AM
Aleisha Orr

Asylum seeking children in Western Australia will continue to attend private schools after negotiations to bring the state in line with the rest of the country broke down.

In 2013, Fairfax Media revealed that WA was the only state without a funding agreement with the federal government that allowed asylum seeking children to attend public schools.

The WA and federal governments had been in negotiations for an arrangement to cover the cost of asylum seeker students to attend public schools - like in every other state - since mid 2012.

But negotiations between the two are understood to have ceased at the tail end of 2014 with the federal government deciding to abandon plans for a funding agreement.

This means the federal government will continue to pay for WA primary and secondary students, who are on bridging visas, to attend private schools.

In October 2013 a spokeswoman for the WA government said the election of a new federal government had "delayed the establishment of an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)".

And on Tuesday a spokeswoman for the Department of Premier and Cabinet told Fairfax Media, "the Commonwealth Government, late last year, indicated it did not wish to pursue an MoU for the provision of state school services to asylum seeker children".

"The Commonwealth indicated this was based on an assessment of costs per student.

"These costs included essential support such as intensive English language development and literacy and numeracy programs.

"WA spends more per student on public schools than other jurisdictions."

Refugee Council of Australia's information and policy coordinator, Lucy Morgan, said while most families were just glad their children were given the opportunity to receive an education, the council does believe asylum seeker children should have the opportunity to be "given as normal a life as possible".

She said most of those on bridging visas were likely to become refugees and settle permanently in Australia at which time families would likely not be able to afford private schooling, meaning children may then have to change schools.

Ms Morgan said while the council's main concern was with people's well-being over financial arrangements, she "can't imagine it'd be less expensive to send a child to a private school over a public school".

<http://www.theage.com.au/wa-news/asylum-seeking-children-to-remain-in-wa-private-schools-20150120-12u9nm.html>

8. The Saturday Paper: Inside Peter Dutton's asylum-seeker endgame

The Saturday Paper
Jan 24, 2015
Mike Secombe

Ten days after they wrote their sadly hopeful messages to the new minister, the asylum seekers on Manus Island have surely realised nothing substantial is about to change under Dutton.

His handling of the Manus crisis this month came straight from the Morrison playbook.

When word filtered out to Australian refugee advocates and the media that there was trouble on Manus, the first response was denial.

And then, when it became impossible to deny that things were bad and rapidly deteriorating, a lot of duck-shoving and tough talk.

Full story at <http://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2015/01/24/inside-peter-duttons-asylum-seeker-endgame/14220180001417>

9. Mike Baird tells Prime Minister: 'do more' to help refugees

NSW Premier Mike Baird tells Prime Minister Tony Abbott: 'do more' to help refugees

The Age
January 23, 2015 - 7:53PM
Nicole Hasham

Premier Mike Baird has called on Prime Minister Tony Abbott to "do more" to accept refugees, saying Australia's economic strength means nothing unless we help the world's vulnerable.

Mr Baird's critique of Coalition refugee policy came as Fairfax Media established Mr Abbott has been quietly ringing backbenchers since the start of the year as he manages growing anxiety over his government's performance.

Speaking at an Australia Day Council of NSW lunch on Friday, Mr Baird said Australia was the lucky country, and should "open our arms to those around the world who are much less fortunate than us".

Mr Baird, a committed Christian, congratulated Mr Abbott on recently increasing Australia's humanitarian intake for refugees, but said he should "do more".

"[There are people] in incredibly difficult circumstances with nowhere to turn," Mr Baird said.

Under the former federal Labor government, the humanitarian program was set at 20,000 places, however the Abbott government dropped this to 13,750 places in 2013-14.

In December the government pledged to increase the annual humanitarian intake to 18,750 over the next four years.

The federal government has also attracted the ire of refugee advocates with its controversial "stop the boats" policy of offshore detention for any arrivals by boat people.

Federal Labor's acting immigration spokesman Matt Thistlethwaite seized on the comments, saying it was clear the Abbott government had "turned its back on refugees".

Fairfax Media has learned Mr Abbott's calls have been made to selected backbenchers seen as influential in the party room or whose judgment Mr Abbott respects.

Two of those involved said the talks had been both free-ranging and constructive with the Prime Minister eager to hear the unvarnished truth about voter and party-room sentiment.

The revelation comes as discontent tending towards outright anger simmers within the Liberal party room over what many MPs see as government bungling and political mismanagement.

More than 20 MPs have confirmed privately that they harbour grave concerns over their government's botched handling of Medicare reform, higher education changes, and over unscripted "kite flying" exercises such as talk of changes to the politically toxic, goods and services tax.

"These announcements come and go with no warning and no instruction or explanation to the backbench as to how to explain them to voters," complained one marginal seat MP.

But a source close to Mr Abbott denied the calls were an attempt to shore-up flagging support, insisting they were for information-gathering purposes and had always been part of Mr Abbott's plan for wider prime ministerial consultation in 2015.

The insider said the Prime Minister had flagged a "reset at the end of 2014" which would inevitably involve a broader advisory structure than had been the case last year and that he planned to use the feedback to inform his political strategy to be outlined at the National Press Club in just over a week.

Mr Abbott offered a sharper defence of his leadership and of government policy on Sydney's 2GB radio on Friday, name-checking four ministers as stand-out performers but conspicuously leaving out his top economic minister, Treasurer Joe Hockey.

"I'm incredibly proud of the work of my ministers, all of them, whether it be Scott Morrison or Julie Bishop or Malcolm Turnbull or Andrew Robb, I'm very proud of all of them," he told 2GB's Ben Fordham.

He said he could always do better but criticism was exaggerated.

"We haven't jeopardised our relationship with our neighbours, we haven't put people at risk in leaky boats on open seas, our main fault is that we haven't been able to get legislation past the opposition-dominated Senate," he said.

"Maybe if I'd had more dinners with the cross-benchers, maybe if I'd spoken more sweetly to Bill Shorten, this would've been different but in the end, this country does have to live within its means."

Mr Baird said Australia was part of a global community and "as a lucky country we have a responsibility to play in helping others as part of that community".

"NSW stands ready ... to take more than our fair share. Yes, we have strength in our finances but my strong sense is that means nothing, unless we offer help to those who are vulnerable amongst us."

Mr Baird's father, Bruce, was a former federal Liberal MP who objected to the Howard government's mandatory detention of asylum seekers. Mr Baird snr is now chair of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council, which advises the federal government on refugee and humanitarian settlement in Australia.

Refugee Council of Australia spokeswoman Lucy Morgan welcomed Mr Baird's call.

"In the current global context, it's really imperative that countries like Australia start stepping up and providing more places to people fleeing persecution," she said.

"We are really at a point now, internationally, where needs are multiplying and there is a need for a more targeted and comprehensive response from countries like Australia, which are not at the front line of these crises and are not yet doing the heavy lifting."

Mr Abbott's office did not respond to request for comment.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said the government was "strongly committed to a well-managed humanitarian programme and Australia remains one of the top three refugee resettlement countries in the world".\

<http://www.theage.com.au/nsw/nsw-premier-mike-baird-tells-prime-minister-tony-abbott-do-more-to-help-refugees-20150123-12wwcj.html>

10. Deal to transfer refugees from Nauru to Cambodia a step closer

Cambodia refugee resettlement: Asylum seeker deal a step closer as International Organisation for Migration agrees to oversee transfer from Nauru

ABC News Online
By South East Asia correspondent Samantha Hawley
First posted Tue 20 Jan 2015, 3:51am
Updated Tue 20 Jan 2015, 4:13am

Australia's refugee deal with Cambodia looks set to take a vital step forward with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) signalling it is willing to assist in the transfer of refugees from Nauru.

Almost four months since the \$40 million deal was signed, the IOM gave in-principle agreement to facilitate the transfer of refugees to Cambodia.

The Cambodian government asked the IOM to oversee the transfer process.

A spokesman said the IOM had written to the Cambodian government agreeing to assist if four conditions were met.

He said the conditions were applied to all IOM deals but would not detail what they were.

The IOM observed meetings between Nauruan, Australian, and Cambodian officials in Nauru last week.

Last year Australia's then-immigration minister Scott Morrison described the deal as a long-term arrangement which would begin with four or five refugees in the early stages and build over time.

He said Cambodia would decide how many refugees it would accept.

The agreement also stipulated refugees would only be sent to Cambodia on a voluntary basis.

The Australian Government made a \$40 million aid down payment and would also pay for associated costs for housing and educating refugees who go there.

Mr Morrison last year said he did not know the total cost of the arrangement.

At the time the arrangement was condemned by the United Nations' refugee agency and human rights advocates.

Protesters also gathered outside the Australian embassy in Phnom Penh after the deal was signed saying the poverty-stricken country was unable to look after its own people and should not be taking in Australia's refugees.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-20/deal-to-transfer-asylum-seekers-from-nauru-to-cambodia-closer/6026604>

11. MEDIA RELEASE: Cambodians' Nauru visit ends in protest

Tuesday January 20, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

The International Organisation of Migration may have signed a deal with Cambodia to assist transferring refugees from Nauru to Cambodia; but no-one is interested.

The visit by three Cambodian officials to the Nauru detention ended last weekend without any asylum seekers or refugees expressing an interest in going to Cambodia.

The Cambodian officials came to view one refugee camp but made no attempt to even speak with the refugees.

"IOM has long willingly collaborated with the Australian government to violate the rights of refugees. IOM actually managed the Nauru detention centre under the Howard government," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

Nauruan refugees staged a protest at their camp on Saturday, 17 January (photos attached).

The protest was also prompted by a break-in by local Nauruans into the house of single Somali refugees - the latest targeted attack by vigilantes against refugees on the island.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

12. Cambodian refugee deal uncertain as almost all refuse offer

Australia's refugee deal with Cambodia uncertain as almost all refuse offer

Even if no refugees are resettled, the agreement still commits Australia to pay an extra \$40m in aid to Cambodia

The Guardian
Ben Doherty in Sydney and Lauren Crothers in Phnom Penh
Thursday 22 January 2015 18.27 AEST

Australia's controversial \$40m deal to resettle refugees in Cambodia may founder because almost all are refusing to go.

All but three of the more than 170 refugees on Nauru refused to meet with a delegation from the Cambodian government last week, and it appears uncertain whether even those three will agree to be moved.

Guardian Australia understands from a senior immigration department source that even if no refugees are resettled, the agreement still commits Australia to pay an extra \$40m in aid to Cambodia, promised to Hun Sen's government as a quid pro quo for agreeing to the deal.

“We have not decided yet,” Cambodia’s interior minister Sar Kheng told the Phnom Penh Post, when asked whether refugees would be resettled. “The principle remains, but whether they will come or not, we do not know.”

Kheng said government officials would travel to the Pacific island nation again – funded by Australia – in order to further pitch the resettlement deal.

“We are preparing our officials to visit [Nauru], but during the last visit only three refugees came to meet with our officials. The others refused to meet us, so we don’t know what to do. It’s still unclear whether the three who met us will come [to Cambodia] or not.”

Cambodia has been adamant that only people who volunteer to be moved will be resettled.

The deal to move refugees, who have been taken from Australia to Nauru, on to Cambodia to be resettled has been mired in controversy since it was first announced last February.

The deal was inked in September, but many of the details are still unknown or unclear. It was originally slated, by former immigration minister Scott Morrison, to resettle 1,000 refugees, but this has since been forecast down.

Australia has pledged to provide refugees with settlement support for 12 months, including basic needs and daily subsistence, language and vocational training, education in local schools, and health services.

Australia has promised an additional \$40m in aid over four years to Cambodia for taking responsibility for the refugees from Australia. Australia is already providing \$79m in aid to Cambodia this financial year. The additional \$40m does not appear to be contingent on the number of refugees accepted, if any.

Cambodian officials have been mum on the specifics of the \$40m and what it is intended for, and a request was left for further information with the Australian embassy in Phnom Penh.

The office of the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, did not return calls on the matter on Thursday. A spokeswoman for his department pointed Guardian Australia towards earlier statements from the minister, in which he described his discussions with Cambodia as “very productive”.

“They are a very significant partner for us, they are very credible to deal with,” he said. He did not discuss the additional payments to Cambodia.

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

In five years of processing a small number of refugees, Cambodia has not resettled a single one.

In addition to the more than 170 people already recognised as refugees, nearly 900 asylum seekers remain in immigration detention on Nauru, awaiting assessment.

Elsewhere in Australia’s immigration detention system, several hundred detainees are still on hunger strike on Manus Island. Almost all detainees held in Foxtrot camp have been refusing food and water for several days. More men in the compound collapsed on Thursday and were taken for medical care. Two men who attempted to commit suicide on Wednesday afternoon remain on the island, under supervision.

Video and pictures of the men – which Guardian Australia has chosen not to publish – show other detainees restraining the men and intervening to stop them.

“The situation is very awful, all of us hunger strike,” one detainee told Guardian Australia.

Up to 40 detainees are in Lorengau jail. They have not been charged with any offence, according to PNG police.

On 2UE radio on Thursday afternoon, the immigration minister said the government’s commitment to offshore processing and resettlement would not be swayed by protests.

“They will not be coming to Australia, that’s the very firm message – if they riot, if they act in a way that would not be acceptable in Australian society, that will not change their outcome,” he said.

Dutton said a change to government policy would reopen routes to Australia by boat. “We are not going to allow the people smugglers to reignite their business.”

Dutton's allegation that some of the protesters on Manus were armed has been consistently denied by detainees, and also contradicted by a PNG government spokesman, who told the ABC the men were not carrying weapons, only that some weapons were found on a later sweep of Delta compound.

"Obviously, some of the information I received by way of intelligence reports is not publicly disclosed," Dutton said. "I think the PNG authorities are doing a good job on the ground. They dealt with this incident in a short period of time, there were a number of ringleaders, taken into police custody."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/22/australias-refugee-deal-with-cambodia-uncertain-as-almost-all-refuse-offer>

13. No enthusiasm for resettling in Cambodia among Nauru asylum-seekers

The Age
January 22, 2015 - 5:44PM
Lindsay Murdoch

Bangkok: Australia's controversial agreement to send refugees to Cambodia is in doubt, because of an apparent lack of interest from refugees on the small Pacific island of Nauru.

Only three of more than 800 refugees or asylum seekers on the island agreed to meet a Cambodian delegation to discuss the possibility of resettling in the impoverished South-East Asia nation.

"The others refused to meet us, so we don't know what to do. It's still unclear whether the three who met us will come [to Cambodia] or not," Cambodia's Interior Minister Sar Kheng was quoted by the Phnom Penh Post as saying.

Mr Sar Kheng said "we have not decided yet" on whether the agreement, under which Australia has already pledged almost \$40 million, would go ahead.

"The principle remains but whether they will come or not, we don't know," he said.

Cambodia is planning to send another delegation to Nauru at Australia's expense to try again to speak to refugees.

Officials have made it clear they would not spin what would be in store for any refugees who went to Cambodia, one of Asia's poorest nations. They would be compelled to settle outside Phnom Penh after an initial 12 months, where they would be provided accommodation and some training.

"This is not a trip to advertise and to attract tourists to Cambodia. This is a trip to tell them about Cambodia," Interior Ministry spokesman Khieu Sopheak said in October.

The first visit last week was monitored by senior Australian officials and officers of the refugee agency International Organisation for Migration, which has agreed to take part in the resettlement program if four conditions are met. The IOM has refused to say what the conditions are.

In September Mr Sar Kheng sipped champagne with Australia's then Immigration Minister Scott Morrison to toast the agreement, which has been condemned by Cambodia's opposition and human rights and refugee activists.

Australia's new Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said earlier this week he planned to travel to Cambodia soon to discuss the agreement.

Under the agreement announced in September, Cambodia will decide the timing and number of refugees who will go voluntarily to the country, while Australia will pay all costs, in addition to the \$40 million in "development assistance".

Human Rights Watch reported in November that Cambodian authorities often extorted money from asylum seekers already living in the country, most of whom wanted to leave.

"This [Cambodia] is a corrupt country," one refugee said. "You will not find jobs. We have been here more than two years and we have no money and not enough to eat. It's better to wait in Nauru. It's a very, very bad life in Cambodia ... there is no future."

<http://www.theage.com.au/world/no-enthusiasm-for-resettling-in-cambodia-among-nauru-asylumseekers-20150122-12w382.html>

14. The logic of terrorism and the treatment of asylum seekers

The government uses the logic of terrorism in its treatment of asylum seekers

The public has much to fear from politicians who haven't flinched before the sadism of their refugee policies. We must speak up now

The Guardian

Nick Riemer

Monday 19 January 2015 16.25 AEST

even-hundred men taking part in a week-old hunger strike and protest; unconscious bodies strewn over the ground from lack of stretchers; between 30 and 40 cases of stitched lips; parched asylum seekers desperately grabbing for the water bottles placed tauntingly just beyond their reach. The scale of the humanitarian disaster on Manus Island now defies our basic capacity to imagine it.

In the Howard years, shocking images of refugees stitching their lips in protest at the inhumanity of their treatment triggered widespread horror. Now, more than a decade later, those same images – and others even more terrible – seem to have lost their power to move us.

Following both the Sydney siege and the Charlie Hebdo attacks, politicians lined up to mourn the victims of blind fanaticism. Jihadism, Abbott declared after Martin Place, goes “against our common humanity”. All people, he said, “are diminished when something like this takes place”.

How selective we are in the victims that provoke our outrage. Manus, where attacks are not inflicted by extremists on westerners, but by the Australian government on asylum seekers, is not presented as an affront to our collective humanity, but as a necessary response to an existential border threat that undermines the very essence of the “peaceful and generous society” Abbott claims Australia is.

Everything in our political imagination leads us to see a yawning gulf between the unbridled zealotry of terrorists and the civilised, democratic rationality of our own elected governments.

But how clear would that contrast be to a complete outsider? How might it seem to a Martian observer objectively comparing the behaviour of Australia's political leaders to that of Man Haron Monis or the Kouachi brothers?

Australian politicians do not storm buildings to summarily execute members of the public. But for 15 years now, both sides of politics have harnessed the full coercive power of the state to inflict needless, intense and protracted suffering on vulnerable people who have done nothing more than ask us for our help. The feared PNG mobile squad, funded by Australia, has been accused of “extreme and excessive force” against Manus asylum seekers; it is only a matter of time before it intervenes in Delta compound – to what effect, we can only speculate.

The crimes committed in our name are nothing short of chilling. Coalition and ALP immigration ministers have imprisoned thousands of people without charge, sometimes indefinitely. They have orchestrated a living hell for detainees, whether onshore or off, that is directly responsible for numerous tragic and unnecessary deaths. Governments' barbaric “asylum” regime severs people from their loved ones, dashes hope and breaks lives.

People have mutilated, starved, poisoned, harmed and killed themselves from desperation. They have swallowed razor blades and set themselves on fire. They have died from medical neglect. Reza Barati was murdered. Throughout, government ministers have remained callously and pathologically indifferent. In relentlessly compounding asylum seekers' suffering, governments have ignored the advice of the highest medical and legal authorities here and overseas. They and their morally bankrupt lawyers have spared no ingenuity or chicanery to foil attempts made through the courts to discipline their brutality. And they have justified their actions by cynically calling into question the bona fides of refugees fleeing oppression, and by consistently lying to the public that coming to Australia by boat is illegal.

These are serious crimes. Terrorists attack selected victims in order to cow an entire population. How, in principle, is this different from Australia's cold-blooded persecution of boat arrivals? Our vicious campaign of imprisonment and deprivation against asylum seekers exists to deter people fleeing persecution from coming here. The logic is strikingly close to that of Paris or Martin Place: violently attack the few to intimidate the many.

Australia faces a choice. Peter Dutton's comments that refugees had been coached into acts of self harm by refugee advocates, and that he would not change his position on asylum seeker policy, have made it clear that the government is contemplating no let-up in its assault on refugees.

How long will we remain silent? At the end of last year, insistent calls for the release of children from detention had some minimal effect, with Scott Morrison freeing minors detained on Christmas Island. Limiting those calls to the release of children was a mistake, since refugee advocates' silence about adults tacitly suggested that harming them could be justifiable. Calls for freedom and justice for refugees must now no longer be arbitrarily restricted to children. It's not just children who don't deserve the hell of detention: people don't.

Australia's refugee policy doesn't just affect refugees. The public has much to fear from politicians who are ready to countenance the barbarism to other human beings we have been witnessing. Steeled by his period as immigration minister,

Morrison is now in charge of social services. It's hard to believe that the indifference to suffering honed in immigration will somehow be magically suspended as he oversees the government's obligations to needy people in the community at large.

Do Australians really want to be governed by politicians who have not flinched before the sadism of their refugee policies? What possible prospect can there be of a just society for all of us when its most desperate members – asylum seekers – are made the objects of the systematic state violence whose effects we are seeing on Manus?

It's not just for refugees' sake that we must cauterise this wound on our society. We must do so for our own sake too, so that the violence with which refugees are met does not set the tone for the way that governments treat everyone.

---->>> Nick Riemer is a member of the Refugee Action Coalition Sydney, which is in close contact with asylum seekers on Manus Island.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/19/manus-island-the-government-uses-the-logic-of-terrorism-in-its-treatment-of-asylum-seekers>

15. Christmas Island children still waiting for release into community

Christmas Island asylum seeker children still waiting for release into community

The Age
January 22, 2015 - 1:28PM
Sarah Whyte

Children who were promised to be moved off Christmas Island and into the community by former immigration minister Scott Morrison remain in a Darwin immigration facility.

The 94 children and 100 family members are being held in the Blaydin Point Alternative Place of Detention in Darwin, where they have been held since late December.

In negotiations with Senate crossbenchers, namely Motoring Enthusiast senator Ricky Muir, late last year, Mr Morrison promised that every child would be removed from the remote island by Christmas Day. In return, the crossbenchers agreed to pass Mr Morrison's wide-ranging and controversial Migration Act through the Senate.

At the same time Mr Morrison said: "It has always been the government's policy to place as many children into the community as possible, especially young children."

A spokesman for the new Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton, acknowledged the children were yet to be placed in the community, but said the families would be moved in "early 2015".

"These families still have some processes to go through before they can be released on bridging visa or into community detention, but the [Immigration] Department is working to make this happen in the near future," the spokesman said.

Family members of the children will also be granted a temporary protection visa if they arrived after January 2014 and are found to be needing protection, the spokesman said.

The Blaydin Point facility comprises shipping container accommodation of six metres by 2.4 metres, a pool, playground and a medical centre. It is considered less restrictive than a detention centre, but its occupants are still confined within its perimeter.

There are currently 420 children in immigration facilities in Australia, according to December's immigration statistics. This number has declined significantly from December 2013 where 1028 children were being held in detention facilities.

However the number of children being held in the offshore processing centre in the Pacific island of Nauru has increased from 116 in December 2013 to 135 in December 2014.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/christmas-island-asylum-seeker-children-still-waiting-for-release-into-community-20150122-12vn1t.html>

16. Senators seek 'urgent answers' from minister over detained children

Senators seek 'urgent answers' from minister as children remain in detention despite deal

The Age
January 23, 2015 - 12:13PM
Sarah Whyte

Senators Ricky Muir and Nick Xenophon are seeking urgent answers on why children who were removed from Christmas Island are still being held in a detention facility in Darwin, despite former immigration minister Scott Morrison's promise that they would be living in the community.

The former immigration minister had promised in December all children would be removed from Christmas Island by Christmas and placed into the community, in return for the crossbenchers' support of Mr Morrison's wide-ranging and controversial changes to the Migration Act.

Senator Muir, who was the final senator to agree to the changes of the Act, said he had immediately rung the minister's office after discovering that the children were still being detained at Blaydin Alternative Place of Detention, as revealed by Fairfax Media on Thursday.

"Early 2015 is not good enough and I am currently seeking an urgent update on when the children and families will be released in to the community," Senator Muir said.

Senator Xenophon said he was "completely unhappy" about the fact children were still in detention.

"It was clearly our understanding that the children would be moved into the community as soon as possible," Senator Xenophon said. "I have put an urgent call to the minister."

"Our support was contingent on the children being in the community and I am completely unhappy about it. It must be resolved immediately."

On Thursday a spokesman for new Immigration Minister Peter Dutton acknowledged the children were yet to be placed in the community, saying the families would be moved in "early 2015".

During a press conference on December 21, Mr Morrison said: "It has always been the government's policy to place as many children into the community as possible, especially young children."

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young, who opposed the Senate deal last year, said senators who voted for the new laws "must feel pretty conned".

"It's clear the Abbott government can not be trusted. They have no care for the welfare of these children and no regard for the promises they make to the public or the parliament."

There are currently 420 children in immigration facilities in Australia, according to December's Immigration Department statistics. This number has declined significantly from December 2013 where 1028 children were being held in detention facilities.

However the number of children being held in the offshore processing centre in the Pacific island of Nauru has increased from 116 in December 2013 to 135 in December 2014.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/senators-seek-urgent-answers-from-minister-as-children-remain-in-detention-despite-deal-20150123-12woqr.html>

17. Journalists reporting on asylum seekers referred to Australian police

Exclusive: Journalists covering the Australian government's asylum seeker policies are repeatedly reported to federal police in bid to uncover sources

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Thursday 22 January 2015 07.15 AEST

Journalists reporting on the federal government's asylum-seeker policies have been repeatedly referred to the police in attempts to uncover confidential sources and whistleblowers, a Guardian Australia investigation can reveal.

Over the past 12 months federal government agencies have referred stories by journalists from Guardian Australia, news.com.au and the West Australian to the Australian federal police (AFP) for their reporting on the government's asylum seeker operations during the time Scott Morrison was immigration minister.

Almost every referral made to the AFP by federal government agencies "for unauthorised disclosure of commonwealth information" since the Coalition took office in September 2013 has been directly related to immigration reporting by journalists.

At least eight referrals to the police were made on the subject of asylum seeker stories, and active police investigations continue into a number of the referrals. One referral related to a non-immigration matter was made by the integrity commissioner.

West Australian journalist Nick Butterly was referred twice – once in February 2014 for a story about people smugglers struggling to fill boats and once in May 2014 for a report on an intercepted asylum seeker vessel – by the head of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Services, Michael Pezzullo.

“On review of the article, it appears that several of the claims may have drawn upon classified information. This suspected disclosure of this classified information relates specifically to operational and assessment activity that is not available through open sources or authorised media releases,” Pezzullo wrote in one letter sent in February 2014, obtained by Guardian Australia.

“I would be grateful if your agency would accept the responsibility for investigating this matter with a view to identification and, if appropriate, prosecution of the persons responsible.”

Guardian Australia’s report that an Australian customs vessel entered much deeper into Indonesian waters than previously disclosed was also the subject of a referral by Pezzullo. A police investigation is still active.

“The AFP can confirm it has received a referral in relation to this matter from the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service,” a spokesman said.

“The investigation is ongoing and while this process is occurring, the AFP will not be providing further comment.”

In a third referral, on 9 December 2013, the defence department referred to the AFP a news.com.au article by Ian McPhedran about an Australian patrol boat sinking an asylum seeker boat after it was towed from Christmas Island.

“This incident constitutes a potential breach of operational security and potentially the commission of a criminal offence under the commonwealth Crimes Act,” an officer from the defence security authority wrote.

There have been several other referrals by the immigration department and customs – with some investigations still active – but both agencies have refused to release further details about the nature of those investigations.

Guardian Australia understands that one of the other reports referred to the AFP by Pezzullo concerned the vessel holding 157 asylum seekers that was diverted to the Cocos islands in July. An AFP spokeswoman would not confirm the referral concerned that report, saying it would not be appropriate to comment on an “ongoing investigation”.

A spokeswoman from the Department of Immigration and Border Protection said: “Any unauthorised disclosure of information is an offence, the portfolio will continue to refer any matters to relevant agencies for consideration and investigation.”

The details of the referrals have emerged from freedom of information requests to customs and the AFP, and separate investigations by Guardian Australia.

The requests sought from immigration, customs, the AFP and defence every instance in which the federal police were asked to investigate unauthorised disclosures of information under the Crimes Act.

This is the section used to prosecute whistleblowers and leaks by federal government employees and private contractors.

The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) has previously recommended this offence be wound back because it had “real concerns” that “disclosure of any information regardless of its nature of sensitivity” could be caught by the offence.

The chief executive officer of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Paul Murphy, told Guardian Australia the attempts to prosecute sources undermined legitimate reporting.

“What we see in these disclosures is a brutal, heavy-handed response by government agencies to legitimate news stories,” he said. “The aim is to punish and silence those who inform the wider community of what is being done in their name. It aims to capture legitimate reporting by journalists and media organisations of activities in the public interest.

“Rather than moving in line with recommendations we’ve made or the ALRC made, the disturbing thing is that the government is moving in the opposite direction to further criminalise public interest disclosures.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/22/journalists-reporting-on-asylum-seekers-referred-to-australian-police>

18. Journalism is not a crime. So why are reporters being referred to police?

The referral to the federal police of journalists covering asylum seeker policy raises serious questions about the freedom of the press in Australia

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Thursday 22 January 2015 11.53 AEST

Journalism in Australia is not a crime. Despite this, journalists who have reported on immigration and asylum seeker issues have been referred to the Australian Federal Police for investigation in a series of attempts to prosecute confidential sources and whistleblowers.

This is a move that should alarm all citizens. It's not an attack on any particular news outlet. It's an attack on those who have reported on matters of significant public interest in the increasingly secretive area of asylum seeker policy.

Journalists from Guardian Australia, News.com.au and the West Australian have all had their stories sent to the AFP by customs, the immigration department and the defence department to ask the AFP to track down their sources. There may be journalists from other news outlets involved.

All journalists have confidential sources to help gather information and build their stories. Sometimes those sources speak out at great risk, and that confidentiality must be protected. The free flow of information is the bedrock of a journalist's work.

These kind of attacks severely damage the confidence between reporters and their sources and pose a grave threat to effective and responsible journalism. When the federal police go knocking on the doors of a reporter's sources, sources will soon dry up. People will be scared. And that is exactly the point.

Part of the problem is that the laws surrounding leaks are so broad. The Commonwealth Crimes Act criminalises essentially any disclosure of government information, regardless of the seriousness, regardless of the intent, and regardless of the public interest. Despite recommendations by the Australian Law Reform Commission to amend these laws, we have yet to see any change.

The whistleblower protection scheme introduced in 2013 under the previous Labor government provides limited protections for disclosures to the world at large, and favours protected disclosures internally or to oversight agencies instead. This means that whistleblowers who provide information to journalists can still be left with little protection from the law.

This can't be viewed in isolation. There is a much broader series of measures at play that all point towards an increasing overreach by the federal government into legitimate reporting and public interest disclosures.

Any of the journalists that are listed in the AFP referrals could have had their phone and web records accessed. It doesn't take a warrant, just a short one-page form. And there is no privilege or special protection for journalists, a consideration that is being debated right now in the UK. The looming mandatory data retention legislation will compound the problem by ensuring a much greater range of web data is consistently available to government agencies for up to two years.

The insertion of a new offence into the Asio Act that criminalises any form of disclosure about "special intelligence operations" could see journalists jailed for reporting on important intelligence related stories. Harsher penalties for intelligence whistleblowers in Australia will also attempt to deter future whistleblowers like Edward Snowden from speaking about Australia's surveillance and intelligence gathering.

The Australian government has shown great concern for the awful plight of Peter Greste and his Al Jazeera colleagues who have been jailed in Egypt. They have shown great concern for freedom of the press in the wake of the terrible Charlie Hebdo attacks in France.

That concern must extend to the work of serious public interest reporting in Australia.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jan/22/journalism-is-not-a-so-why-are-reporters-being-referred-to-police>

19. Asylum seekers offer organs to Australians: letter

Asylum seekers on Manus Island want to donate organs to Australians if they die in centre: letter

ABC News Online
By PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane
Posted Sun 18 Jan 2015, 5:21pm

Asylum seekers want to donate their organs to Australians if they are killed at the Manus Island detention centre, one detainee says, adding the move would mean at least part of them would taste freedom.

The message comes in the form of a letter written by an asylum seeker at the Australian-run facility in Papua New Guinea and obtained by the ABC after six days of protests.

"All asylum seekers on Manus Island in hunger strike ask you to hand over our medical records to organ donation organisation in case of our fatalities inside the cage," said the letter, addressed to service providers Transfield and International Health and Medical Service.

"This way at least a part of us may one day feel sweet taste of FREEDOM."

Photographs and footage have been sent to the media by asylum seekers showing men being carried away on stretchers who have reportedly fainted after days of hunger striking.

In one video, a man is lifted into what appears to be a dormitory at the centre.

On the back of the door graffiti reads: "The Aussie Nigga."

The asylum seeker who sent the footage said he did not know which compound it was from or what it meant.

Separate photographs of graffiti written on doors read "Help us!!" and "Where is the humanity?" and "They killed our soul!!!".

Banners hung at the centre asked for assistance from the United Nations and Red Cross.

The asylum seekers are protesting about the prospect of refugees being resettled in PNG.

Asylum seekers have barricaded Delta compound and are not allowing staff to enter. It usually accommodates more than 200 men.

Other compounds remain open but asylum seekers are engaging in protest activities, with the situation at Oscar compound reportedly becoming volatile on Sunday evening.

An asylum seeker told the ABC two people drank mosquito repellent and another two drank detergent as part of their protest on Saturday night.

He said others were threatening suicide.

The Australian and PNG governments have said "non-compliant behaviour" would not change the outcomes for those seeking asylum, with resettlement in PNG the only option.

Asylum seekers said earlier they were being denied food and water and had sent photos of men burrowing beneath a fence to reach crates of bottled water placed just outside the compound.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said the Government had been "advised that food and water continue to be available".

"However, normal services and supplies in certain areas of the centre have been affected by the disruptive behaviour of some transferees. Normal services are ready to resume in those areas as soon as the situation allows," the spokesman said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-18/asylum-seekers-offer-organs-to-australians-manus-island-letter/6023954>

20. Asylum seekers in solitary confinement as tensions escalate

Manus Island: four asylum seekers placed in solitary confinement as tensions escalate

- Refugee advocates request UN intervention
- More than 200 hunger strikers allegedly receiving medical treatment
- Reports security police have begun rounding people up in bid to end protest
- ABC reports asylum seekers have barricaded two compounds

The Guardian

Helen Davidson and Ben Doherty

Sunday 18 January 2015 17.18 AEST

Amid escalating tensions inside the Manus Island detention centre, four men have been taken to the notorious "Chauka" solitary confinement unit, two for the second time since July when the men – who say they witnessed the death of Reza Barati – claim they were tied to chairs and beaten.

An urgent petition to the UN special rapporteurs on human rights, seen by Guardian Australia, was lodged overnight by refugee advocates. It describes multiple reports from staff and detainees who say the men were taken to Chauka. It urges the special rapporteurs intervene and raise the matter with the Australian government.

The France-based International Federation for Human Rights has also been contacted.

More than 200 detainees are now allegedly receiving medical treatment after going on hunger strike, and there are reports security police have begun rounding people up in a bid to end the ongoing protest.

ABC News reports that asylum seekers have barricaded the Delta and Oscar compounds with boxes and are preventing staff from entering.

The acting prime minister, Warren Truss, said on Sunday he could not confirm reports but immigration minister Peter Dutton would be seeking to do so.

"Minister Dutton has made a number of statements about what he believes to be happening at the present time. The flow of information is not always reliable," said Truss in Brisbane.

"I wish that there weren't tensions on those islands, but I wish the people weren't there in the first place," he said. "I wish we didn't have a situation where people have paid people smugglers to try and come to this country to get around our immigration laws."

He said the government wanted to ensure detainees were appropriately cared for, but reiterated that people who arrived by boat without a visa would not be resettled in Australia.

Ben Pynt of the advocacy group Humanitarian Research Partners, told Guardian Australia multiple separate reports had come in that the two men were taken mid-Saturday morning after going for a medical appointment.

In similar circumstances another two detainees from Foxtrot compound were taken on Saturday night.

Pynt said the first two men fear for their safety because they witnessed Barati's death more than a year ago, allegedly at the hands of PNG nationals who invaded the centre and attacked detainees.

They also believe they are targeted because they are seen as instigators of unrest in the centre. In these most recent disturbances one has taken part in the hunger strike but the other has not been involved at all, they claim.

Chauka is a solitary confinement unit inside Manus Island detention centre. It is not on official infrastructure maps. It consists of three shipping containers arranged in a triangle, each with just a single bed and no windows. It has been criticised by human rights advocates and doctors who say the place is used for punishment and causes psychological harm.

The two men taken there on Saturday allege that they were cable-tied to chairs and beaten during their last stint inside Chauka in July, and forced to sign documents withdrawing their witness accounts of Barati's death. The allegations are also detailed in the submission to the special rapporteurs. The Australian federal police declined to investigate in July, saying it was a matter for PNG police.

Dutton's office has not returned a call for comment.

More than 200 asylum seekers in Mike compound are receiving medical care after beginning a hunger strike on Tuesday, according to the Refugee Action Coalition. Most are being treated for dehydration.

A detainee said in a text message that others had been beaten by guards while being transported in cars, and he alleges poor medical care.

Protests have spread to other compounds and those not on hunger strike spent Friday night clapping and cheering and shouting "What do we want? Freedom."

They are protesting against the length of their detention, the conditions under which they are being held, and against the threat of being forcibly sent to live in the PNG community, where they fear they will be attacked.

Some of the men protesting now have been in detention for 18 months and want to be handed over the UN. Others wish to be sent to Australia where they have families – an event which the government has promised will never happen.

A letter released by the Refugee Action Coalition purports to be signed by more than 80 detainees inside Foxtrot compound, expressing their fears of resettlement in PNG. It reads in part:

"Here a disaster is about to happen, please prevent this disaster. The Australian government is planning to resettle us in PNG against our will, by forcing us.

"We are not willing to be resettled in PNG because there is no safety [or] any future for us and our family. Today we consider us to be hostage for the Australian government so they can deter others not to come to Australia."

Video seen by Guardian Australia on Friday shows PNG riot police walking between the compounds and there were unconfirmed reports of clashes between police, locals and detainees.

However a PNG government spokesman told Guardian Australia on Friday evening "it was nothing like that".

He said no police had entered the detention centre but that amid the heightened tensions "security had gone in with workers".

He had not seen the images from Manus Island, but said a senior person from there had conveyed the information. "It wasn't extraordinary but of course with the tension there as we know, I think it was just extra precautions."

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul said "there needs to be urgent discussions about possible third country resettlement".

"The asylum seekers are asking for the UNHCR to be involved with resettlement discussions. The ball is in the minister's court. He can keep pretending that the protests aren't happening or he can act to prevent the unfolding disaster."

For two days last week the immigration minister Peter Dutton denied there was a hunger strike at the Manus Island facility.

On Friday he accused advocates of "coaching" asylum seekers to self-harm and create "volatile" situations. The unsubstantiated accusation was denied by advocates, one of whom provided messages showing a conversation with a detainee in which he tried to discourage the hunger strike.

That night, members of the Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network (Dasaan) held an overnight vigil outside the Darwin offices of the Department of Immigration.

Emma Murphy from Dasaan denied Dutton's claims of "coaching".

"I can't imagine anybody advocating anything that's going to cause harm to such vulnerable people, such desperate people," she told Guardian Australia.

"I think it's sort of taking away from the issue which is that some of these people have been in detention for hundreds of days, and they are at their wit's ends. The only thing they have any autonomy over is their body, which they are now harming and which is tragic. I think we need to talk about those push factors that are making them so that."

Murphy said the group of about a dozen protesters were taking the action to send a message to detainees not to hurt themselves.

"They are doing such extreme things but they've already done the extreme thing of having to seek refuge and run for their lives to come here, that's enough," she said.

"We can have an uncomfortable night, we can risk the weather and the mosquitoes to show them that they are supported by people in the community and they don't need to be doing this to themselves. We can take up the fight for them ... We just want them to be safe and know there is hope."

Natasha Blucher said members of the organisation were "highly distressed" at news of the hunger strike. "We wish to demonstrate to those people that we are willing to go to great lengths to fight the injustices that they're currently experiencing by staying here until dawn to convince themselves not to harm themselves anymore and to let us do the fighting," she told Guardian Australia.

The opposition leader, Bill Shorten, said most Australians were "sick and tired of the culture of secrecy surrounding Manus Island".

"We've got to have the right policies in terms of deterring people smugglers, but people who come into the care of Australia must be treated properly. It is long overdue for the Liberal government in Canberra to make it very clear just what exactly is happening on Manus Island."

Asked what responsibility Labor should take for the situation on Manus Island, given the former government reopened the centre, Shorten said: "The Abbott government's now been in power from 2013 to 2015; I don't think it's good enough for the Abbott government to keep blaming everyone else in the past for what's happening now."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/18/manus-island-four-asylum-seekers-solitary-confinement-tensions-escalate>

21. PNG denies asylum seeker claims police 'will enter by force'

Manus Island asylum seekers say police, guards preparing to enter compound by force; PNG denies claim

ABC News Online

By PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane

First posted Mon 19 Jan 2015, 11:02am

Updated Mon 19 Jan 2015, 11:13am

Asylum seekers who have barricaded themselves inside a compound at the Manus Island detention centre say police and guards are preparing to enter the compound by force, a claim the PNG government denies.

Protests at the facility are entering their seventh day, with detainees of Delta compound preventing staff from entering and refusing food and water.

An asylum seeker who said he was inside the compound sent this message this morning: "This is my last message to you. There are a lot of police and guards around the Delta and they want to attack to us."

However a PNG spokesman told the ABC there had been no move to enter Delta compound by force.

He said other compounds remained open, with staff providing medical assistance.

Papua New Guinea's MP for Manus Island Ronnie Knight said tensions at the compound were as high as they were at the same time last year, when Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati was killed.

"The situation there at the moment is very tense. I'd say we have about 300 to 400 mostly young males who are really, really aggressive," Mr Knight told ABC's The World Today.

"They are blocking off areas. The food's available, they don't want to eat it.

"And now that they've blocked it off, they're saying that they are not getting food but they started the hunger strike in the first place so it's a bit confusing."

The ABC received several reports PNG police mobile squad units would be deployed today to break up the protests.

The reports could not be independently verified.

The asylum seekers are protesting about the prospect of refugees being resettled in PNG, with some asking for the United Nations to take custody of them instead.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-19/manus-island-asylum-seekers-say-police-will-enter-by-force/6024962>

22. Manus protesters barricade themselves in, fearing PNG mobile squad attack

Asylum seekers vow to continue their struggle but fear the centre may be stormed by the armed police squads involved in last year's deadly unrest

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Monday 19 January 2015 12.58 AEST

As protests on Manus Island enter their sixth day, asylum seekers in detention have said they fear Papua New Guinea's notorious mobile police squad will be sent in to forcibly put down the resistance.

In Delta compound, the epicentre of the protests, asylum seekers have barricaded themselves behind the high wire fence out of fear that the mobile police – the Australian-funded squad at the centre of last year's deadly riots – will be sent in to arrest protesters sometime on Monday.

One asylum seeker told Guardian Australia by phone on Monday morning: "The guards, they stand at the front fence, they have shields and body armour and weapons, and they tell us: 'We are going to come in, and we are going to fuck you'."

"We are all frightened, because we all remember what happened last year, when they attacked us and killed Reza."

But he said the detainees were determined to continue their protest. "We've been running our whole lives, we are not going to run any more. We have been held here for 18 months, our conditions are terrible, but we are not criminals, we have not done anything wrong," he said.

"We are not safe in here, we are not safe in PNG, but we have to be free. We say we are prepared to die. Give us freedom or give us death."

Another detainee in Delta said by voice message: "This is my last message. There are a lot of police and guards around Delta, and they want to attack to us. Bye."

Some detainees have signed a letter offering their organs for donation in the event that they should die.

There is no running water in Delta compound, and for security reasons, the detainees have had no food for more than 48 hours.

Video obtained by Guardian Australia showed detainees burrowing under the compound fence to get to bottles of water left there.

The protests, which began in Mike compound but quickly spread across the centre, have been boisterous and tense, but so far peaceful.

Detainees who are not hunger-striking have stood at the gates to compounds chanting: "What do you want? Freedom." Police dressed in riot gear have stood in formation at the front gates.

Accommodation and toilet blocks inside the compounds have been daubed with painted slogans such as "freedom", "where is UN", and "where is human rights". Other banners read: "No riot, no fighting. Peacefully freedom."

However, up to 200 detainees who have been refusing food and water have slipped into unconsciousness. They have been taken for medical treatment on the island.

One man in Foxtrot compound said the centre's medical services were overwhelmed by the number of men requiring urgent medical attention.

The staff mess tent has been turned into an overflow medical centre to deal with the number of patients.

The man said: "They lay sick clients on the ground because there is no stretcher, they put some of the sick clients on the kitchen floor. There are 10 unconscious clients lying on the ground now waiting for the ambulance."

At least four detainees, regarded as ringleaders in the protest, have been forcibly removed from the detention centre compounds and taken to the secret isolation unit, Chauka, to be held in solitary confinement.

Several sources on the island said the paramilitary mobile police squad was being mobilised to go into the Manus centre again and breach the barricades.

The squad has a notorious reputation on Manus. Its members have been accused of killing two people in the past year: one man was found beaten and unconscious in a police cell, and a 17-year-old boy was run over and killed by an allegedly drunk officer driving his police vehicle.

The squad's operations at the detention centre, and their ubiquitous 4WD Land Cruisers, are entirely funded by Australia.

A Senate committee report last month into the riots in February last year which killed Reza Barati and injured 70 other asylum seekers found mobile squad members "forcefully entered the centre ... and put down the protests with extreme and excessive force".

"Evidence to the committee indicates that the mobile squad did not simply fire warning shots into the air, but rather fired dangerously into the centre, possibly directly at transferees," it said.

The report found: "Australia was effectively financing the PNG police mobile squad deployed at the centre, both prior to and during the events in which its members assaulted transferees."

But the Australian government failed to act on early warnings about the squad's behaviour. The report said: "The department [of immigration and border protection] clearly failed to respond to the strong concerns raised by G4S [then the security contractor]."

PNG's minister for foreign affairs, Rimbink Pato, said on Monday morning the protests were being carefully managed by the Australian and PNG governments, and by service providers.

He said the number of detainees involved in protests was "relatively few", and that he hoped the protests could be ended "through dialogue".

"Despite claims by agitator groups in Australia ... there has been no attempt by security personnel to bring about an end to the protest through physical confrontation," Pato said.

A spokesman for Australia's immigration minister, Peter Dutton, told the ABC that food and water remained available to detainees, "however, normal services and supplies in certain areas of the centre have been affected by the disruptive behaviour of some transferees. Normal services are ready to resume in those areas as soon as the situation allows."

On Friday, Dutton said Manus Island staff, and refugee advocates in Australia, were encouraging protests and "coaching" asylum seekers to self harm.

"I'm very concerned that somehow, people are conveying a message that through non-compliant behaviour, by refusal to take food or water, that somehow that behaviour will change the outcome for those individual cases in terms of their desire to be settled in Australia," he said.

But staff working with detainees on Manus Island have furiously rejected the claim. One staff member on the island wrote to Guardian Australia:

"This is simply untrue and a direct attempt by Mr Dutton to deflect his responsibility to look after vulnerable people in his care. I feel qualified to make statements about the vulnerability of the asylum seekers on Manus and Nauru as I have worked with these people, witnessed the degradation they are subjected to on a daily basis and listened to their stories of torture and other injustices.

"All of the workers do our best to encourage, support and care for them. We have sung from the government's hymn book and tried to promote resettlement ... but not once, Mr Dutton, have I or other workers supported attempts at self harm, encouraged demonstrations or unrest. It appears that we are your current scapegoats."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/19/manus-protesters-barricade-themselves-in-fearing-png-mobile-squad-attack>

23. MEDIA RELEASE: Immigration removes water from asylum seekers

IMMIGRATION TAKES WATER AWAY FROM MANUS ASYLUM SEEKERS; SECURITY GUARDS OCCUPY FOXTROT COMPOUND

Monday January 19, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

In a shocking development at the Manus Island detention centre, the only drinking water that was available for asylum seekers in Delta Compound, has been taken away.

For two days, asylum seekers have had to dig under the compound fence to try reach the bottled water. But this afternoon (Sunday 18 January), around 4.00pm, a forklift was used to remove the pallets holding the bottled water.

"The government and Transfield have sunk to new depths in their attempts to break the protests on Manus Island. In any conditions, to deprive people of drinking water, is nothing short of criminal; but given the relentless heat on Manus Island, such actions are simply beyond belief," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Most people would not credit that the government would act with such cruelty. The government is also adopting a policy of not returning those who collapse inside the compounds. Thirty-three asylum seekers have not been returned to Delta compound after being taken to the clinic for medical attention."

Delta Compound has also been without running water since Friday 16 January with asylum seekers trying to catch rainwater to be able to wash.

SECURITY GUARDS OCCUPY FOXTROT COMPOUND

Transfield has also upped the intimidation in Foxtrot compound which has been occupied by around 40 members of the Emergency Response Team since around 5pm this afternoon (Sunday 18 January).

"They are trying to provoke a confrontation," one asylum seeker told the Refugee Action Coalition, "But the protest will not stop. We are demanding that the forced transfer of refugee to Lorengau on 22 January be stopped. We need safe resettlement, but PNG is not safe."

Meanwhile more asylum seekers are collapsing because of the effects of the hunger strike. In Foxtrot, they are carried on folded tables to the guard house to be transported to the medical clinic (video available on request). video) .

But as more asylum seekers treated at the clinic are not being returned to the compound, more people are refusing to go.

"The reckless behaviour of the Immigration Department is putting lives at risk," said Rintoul, "The ball is in Peter Dutton's court, but as the situation on Manus Island spirals downwards, the Minister is nowhere to be seen."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

24. PNG government speaks out on Manus Island violence claims

PNG government speaks out on claims of violence at Manus Island detention centre

The Age

January 19, 2015 - 11:07AM
Sarah Whyte

The Papua New Guinea government have denied that local police stormed the Manus Island detention centre as the number of asylum seekers staging a hunger strike grows and water has been reportedly cut off in parts of the facility.

Two-thirds of the population of the Manus Island centre are now refusing food as detainees grow increasingly desperate to avoid the Australian government's plan to resettle them in PNG, which is expected to begin this week.

Refugee advocates say that the water in the Delta compound has now been completely cut off, forcing asylum seekers to drink from drains. It is believed a number of asylum seekers have barricaded themselves inside their compounds as part of the protest.

On Monday morning, PNG's Immigration Minister, Rimbink Pato, confirmed that protesting asylum seekers on the island had sewn their lips together, swallowed razor blades and had also started swallowing washing powder.

But Mr Pato said reports that the local police had entered the facility at the weekend were false.

"Despite claims by agitator groups in Australia, at no time have police been called upon to enter the facility," the minister said in a statement.

"Each case of self-harm is being investigated by medical personnel and appropriate action is being offered to the individuals concerned."

Refugee advocates claimed that PNG police had entered the centre in riot gear over the weekend, but Fairfax Media understands it was the emergency response team from Wilson security.

Fairfax Media has also confirmed a number of protesting asylum seekers were taken to the Chauka compound over the weekend, which is a smaller compound used to discipline asylum seekers acting aggressively.

In a letter obtained by Fairfax Media, asylum seekers from the Foxtrot compound wrote to Federal Immigration Minister Peter Dutton saying: "If you do not wish us to come to Australia, then that's ok. It's your country. But it does not mean you have the right to settle us in PNG."

Many of them have been imprisoned in the centre for more than 18 months, the letter said.

"We are not toys for you to play with and not animals to imprison us here.

"If you send us back to where you found us, it is better for us to live with sharks and sea whales than to stay one more day with inhumane people.

"We can say that when we woke up today, we are resolved to die here in order to bring back our dignity and our freedom."

The Immigration Department and Mr Dutton's office have been contacted for comment.

On Saturday, Mr Dutton said the escalating hunger strike would not change the government's resolve to resettle the men found to be refugees in the PNG community. He also denied security guards had "violently engaged" with the asylum seekers at the weekend.

"I reiterate that while people have the right to protest peacefully, the government will not waver on its successful border protection policies which have saved lives and restored integrity to our humanitarian programme," Mr Dutton said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/png-government-speaks-out-on-claims-of-violence-at-manus-island-detention-centre-20150119-12t1nx.html>

25. Manus Island protest escalates, up to 700 detainees on hunger strike

The Age
January 18, 2015 - 11:00PM
Stephanie Peatling and Chloe Booker

As many as 700 detainees on Manus Island have joined a hunger strike that doctors say the detention centre will be ill-equipped to manage amid fears that lives could be lost.

Two-thirds of the population of the centre is now refusing food as detainees grow increasingly desperate to avoid the federal government's plan to resettle them in Papua New Guinea.

The men are refusing to eat, and some are also refusing water. They say they fear for their lives if they are moved from the centre to temporary accommodation on the outskirts of Lorengau, the major town on the island.

Doctors for Refugees convenor and Sydney-based general practitioner Barri Phatarfod said her "immediate concern" was that there would be deaths among the detainees as a result of the hunger strike.

"My overriding concern is how desperate people must be to feel that death is a better alternative than the situation they're in now," she said.

Ms Phatarfod said Manus Island did not have the infrastructure to cope with a 700 person hunger strike.

"They don't have the capacity to handle a hunger strike of even one tenth of that size," she said.

"They have very little in the way of intravenous fluids. They have very little in the way of staff that are on all the time and they also don't have a lot in the way of pathology to test people's electrolytes to see whether they have kidney failure."

Ms Phatarfod said the group of Australian doctors held particular concern for a man who already lost 20 kilograms on 78 days hunger strike.

"He's already experiencing an element of organ failure and there are concerns that he may not survive," she said.

"He's lost a lot of weight very rapidly and is severely dehydrated. He really should be evacuated to Australia."

The action escalated at the weekend after hardline comments made by the new Immigration Minister Peter Dutton who said on Friday the Manus Island detainees would "never arrive in Australia".

The protest has been building over the past week with participants shouting "Freedom" and whistling and chanting.

Late last week refugee advocates in contact with detainees estimated the protest involved more than half the 1035 detainees.

On Sunday they said the figure had grown to as many as 700.

Up to 14 people have sewn their lips together.

There has been no running water in the centre for several days with detainees being given bottled water to drink, wash with and to use to flush the toilets.

People participating in the protest who have fainted have been intravenously rehydrated in the medical centre and sent back to their compound.

The medical centre is housed in the centre's kitchen but lacks beds or mattresses.

People who are treated there are forced to lie on the floor and refugee advocates in contact with the men say the centre is not adequately equipped to deal with the situation.

Security staff were sent in early on Sunday morning and at least two men seen as leaders of the protest were moved to the Chauka compound.

Fairfax Media revealed last year that asylum seekers alleged they had been tortured in the compound, which is an isolation area within the detention centre.

Men housed in the centre's Foxtrot compound have written to Mr Dutton saying the situation "is a disaster about to happen".

"We are not willing to be resettled in PNG because there is no safety [or] any future for us and our family (sic). Today we consider us to be hostage for the Australian government so they can deter others not to come to Australia."

Detainees had apparently been hoping their situation would be seen differently by Mr Dutton and wrote to him saying: "We know you are different, not cruel".

Mr Dutton at first denied the hunger strike was taking place but was later forced to acknowledge it.

He said his approach to protesting detainees would be the same as his predecessor, Scott Morrison.

"Whilst there has been a change of minister the absolute resolve of me as the new minister and of the government is to make sure that for those transferees they will never arrive in Australia," Mr Dutton said.

Ian Rintoul, from the Refugee Action Coalition, called on the federal government to intervene.

"Taking leaders hostage or using the riot squad won't stop the hunger strike protest," Mr Rintoul said.

"The tactics are eerily similar to those that ended in tragedy last February [when Iranian detainee Reza Barati died from horrific head injuries after a violent protest]. The Minister must act urgently to prevent a tragedy on Manus Island."

The acting prime minister, Warren Truss, warned on Sunday that "unreliable" information could be coming out of the Manus Island detention centre.

People participating in the protest were being "appropriately cared for", Mr Truss said.

The government would not change its position on relocating detainees at the Manus Island centre to Papua New Guinea, he said.

Sally Thompson, from the Refugee Rights Action Network, said the men in detention on Manus Island no longer wanted to come to Australia.

"They asking to go somewhere safe and PNG is not safe," Ms Thompson said.

"They want the United Nations to intervene."

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/manus-island-protest-escalates-up-to-700-detainees-on-hunger-strike-20150118-12sszu.html>

26. MEDIA RELEASE: End the Immigration siege of Delta Compound now!

END IMMIGRATION'S SIEGE OF DELTA COMPOUND: WATER NEEDED NOW

Monday January 19, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Delta Compound has gone 24 hours without drinking water, after Transfield removed the water bottles from outside the fence.

Pictures attached show Delta detainees catching rainwater to try and relieve the water shortage on Monday 20 January. Also pictured are slogans inside Delta proclaiming their peaceful protest.

"Depriving the asylum seekers of water is simply barbaric," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition. "It is wildly reckless of the immigration department to deprive asylum seekers of water. Watching Delta Compound is reminiscent of a medieval siege, as Immigration draws a metaphorical noose tighter around the compound, waiting until thirst takes its inevitable toll."

"The Minister is trying to create a phoney crisis by depicting the detainees as "aggressive" . There is no evidence for that. There are no threats by asylum seekers against staff. The threats are being made by security and immigration staff against asylum seekers."

"The protests have always been entirely peaceful. The Minister seems to be creating a pretext for the use of force against the asylum seekers.

"At 2.30 Manus Island time, all Transfield staff were ordered to withdraw from Foxtrot Compound. Security staff have been patrolling Foxtrot Compound with impunity since early last night (Sunday).

"Asylum seekers are growing progressively weaker.

"Tragically, there are more self-harm incidents. Five asylum seekers self-harmed by drinking shampoo; one of them has been medivaced to Port Moresby for emergency treatment."

"Manus Island is a disaster in progress with greater tragedy waiting to happen. Reckless comments from the Minister don't help. Peter Dutton has tried to blame everything but the government's own policies.

"The asylum seekers have a genuine fear for their physical safety. Safe resettlement on Manus or in PNG is impossible. Until that is addressed the protests will continue."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

27. Manus Island guards storm detention centre and seize alleged ringleaders

Authorities attempt to end week-long unrest at centre by taking away up to 30 men from Oscar and Delta compounds, with some reportedly sent to isolation

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Monday 19 January 2015 19.20 AEST

Guards in riot gear have stormed Delta and Oscar compounds at the Manus Island detention centre, attempting to end the week-long protest by force and taking away alleged ringleaders.

Pictures from Oscar compound, obtained by Guardian Australia, show several detainees being walked out of the compound flanked, and in some cases manhandled, by guards.

Just after 4.15pm, guards forced their way first into Delta compound – which had been barricaded since Friday – and arrested several men. How many is unknown.

Guards then moved to Oscar compound, which stands across a narrow roadway from Delta.

Delta and Oscar have been the two compounds where protest has been most vociferous. Delta has been without food or water for two days.

Reports that some men were handcuffed, or dragged along the ground could not be verified.

One detainee told Guardian Australia: "First they attack Delta, then they came to Oscar, they catch people and took out of compound, just right now.

"Out of Oscar I saw them taken away, maybe they take them to PNG police."

Another detainee reported up to 30 men were taken away, and several were injured.

Some men have also reportedly been taken to Chauka, the isolation unit on Manus, where "non-compliant" detainees are held in solitary confinement.

Over the last two days, the medical situation had grown steadily worse inside the two compounds, with men on hunger strike dangerously ill.

Up to 200 men were suffering severe dehydration across the Manus detention centre, the limited medical centre at the centre was overrun, and at least one detainee has been taken from the island after he reportedly swallowed four razor blades in protest.

Both the Australian immigration department and the immigration minister Peter Dutton have not responded to questions on the raid.

A spokesman for Papua New Guinea's government told ABC that Mataio Rabura, the country's chief migration officer, entered Delta compound and negotiated an end to the barricade, which allowed dehydrated protesters access to medical treatment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/19/manus-island-guards-storm-detention-centre-and-seize-alleged-ringleaders>

28. Manus Island stand-off resolved, PNG official says

Manus Island asylum seeker stand-off resolved without serious injury after negotiations, PNG official says

ABC News Online
First posted Mon 19 Jan 2015, 2:59pm
Updated Mon 19 Jan 2015, 5:34pm

A stand-off between asylum seekers and guards at a compound inside the Manus Island detention centre has been resolved, according to a Papua New Guinea government spokesman.

The spokesman said chief migration officer Mataio Rabura entered Delta block and negotiated an end to the blockade, allowing dehydrated protesters to get medical treatment.

The spokesman also said security guards were involved, and that police were in attendance but stayed back.

There were no serious injuries, according to the spokesman.

Asylum seekers in other compounds who did not witness the confrontation reported people being beaten, dragged on the ground and handcuffed.

Discussions are continuing between leaders of the protest and Mr Rabura.

Detainees of Delta compound were preventing staff from entering and refusing food and water on what was the seventh day of protests at the facility.

Asylum seekers who barricaded themselves inside the compound at the Manus Island detention centre earlier said police and guards were preparing to enter the compound by force.

The asylum seekers were protesting against the prospect of refugees being resettled in PNG.

'It's been almost two years and nothing happened'

One asylum seeker, David, has been at the centre for 18 months.

"Every day the government of Australia, they're telling us something like 'tomorrow, we are going to release some people tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, the day after now' - it's almost two years and nothing happened," he told the ABC's 7.30 program.

He said if Australia was not willing to take them, the United Nations should find other countries, but Papua New Guinea was not an option.

"Here is not a safe country. The reason I say that - we were inside the compound every single day, we witnessed something terrible happening outside."

Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Peter Dutton earlier urged protesters to "cease their aggressive actions and allow service providers to enter compounds and provide services especially to those not participating in protest activity".

But Opposition Leader Bill Shorten criticised the Government for not being transparent enough about the situation on Manus Island.

"Whatever one's perspective, I think all Australians are unhappy about a culture of secrecy," he said.

"These people are directly or indirectly in the care of Australia, and the Government just needs to come clean about what is happening."

'Drunk PNG defence force personnel 'threatened people'

While the Delta block has reportedly calmed, protests are continuing at Oscar compound, Mike and Foxtrot. These are lower-key protests: men chanting, hanging up banners with slogans and, in some cases, engaging in self-harm.

Former Manus Island security guard Steve Kilburn said he could not see how the detention centre could function in a harmonious way.

"There is a big cultural difference that needs to be overcome between particularly the PNG locals and the transferees," he said.

"I think there are things that could be done to make life better and easier for everyone and my understanding is that some of those things have been done - there has been some improvements.

"But at the end of the day, and as I clearly stated, I can't see how this is ever going to work."

He said there would be resentment among locals on the island if detainees found to be refugees were released into the community.

"I raised a couple of those issues where we had members of the PNG defence force who were drunk turning up, threatening people. We had people with guns, we had clashes between the PNG police and the PNG defence force."

Mr Kilburn said there were many issues on the island that needed addressing.

"And for the locals ... adding this into the mix - I don't think anyone's safe up there."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-19/manus-island-standoff-resolved/6025994>

29. Dutton accuses protesting asylum seekers of 'aggressive behaviour'

Peter Dutton accuses protesting Manus Island asylum seekers of 'aggressive behaviour'

The age
January 19, 2015 - 4:28PM
Sarah Whyte

Protesting asylum seekers on Manus Island have been labelled "irresponsible" by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, who urged them to stop their hunger strike.

In a statement on Monday afternoon, Mr Dutton accused some asylum seekers of engaging in "aggressive behaviour", rather than a peaceful protest.

"A number of transferees have regrettably engaged in aggressive behaviour over the weekend at the Manus Regional Processing Centre and that protest action is ongoing," he said.

"This behaviour is irresponsible and not only puts service provider staff in danger, but also other transferees."

An asylum seeker in the Mike compound at the centre confirmed that other asylum seekers had begun fighting with security guards over the weekend.

He said the compound had become much quieter on Monday afternoon as the protesting asylum seekers grew weaker without food or water, but remained resolute in their protest for freedom.

"We don't need food or clothes, we need freedom," the asylum seeker said.

Two-thirds of the population of the Manus Island centre are now refusing food as detainees grow increasingly desperate to avoid the Australian government's plan to resettle them in PNG, which is expected to begin this week.

Mr Dutton also denied claims that the water in the centre had been "cut off", but said protesters were preventing the delivery of food, water and medical services.

Refugee advocates had reported that the water in the Delta compound had been completely cut off, forcing asylum seekers to drink from drains.

It is believed a number of asylum seekers have barricaded themselves inside their compounds as part of the protest.

Fairfax Media has also confirmed a number of protesting asylum seekers were on the weekend taken to the centre's Chauka compound - a smaller compound used to discipline asylum seekers acting aggressively.

Mr Dutton's statement came as the Papua New Guinea government also released a statement on the situation, denying local police stormed the Manus Island detention centre on the weekend.

On Monday morning, PNG's Immigration Minister, Rimbink Pato, confirmed that protesting asylum seekers on the island had sewn their lips together, swallowed razor blades and had also started swallowing washing powder.

But Mr Pato said reports that the local police had entered the facility at the weekend were false.

"Despite claims by agitator groups in Australia, at no time have police been called upon to enter the facility," the minister said in a statement.

"Each case of self-harm is being investigated by medical personnel and appropriate action is being offered to the individuals concerned."

Refugee advocates claimed that PNG police had entered the centre in riot gear over the weekend, but Fairfax Media understands it was the emergency response team from Wilson security.

In a letter obtained by Fairfax Media, asylum seekers from the Foxtrot compound wrote to Mr Dutton saying: "If you do not wish us to come to Australia, then that's ok. It's your country. But it does not mean you have the right to settle us in PNG."

Many of them have been imprisoned in the centre for more than 18 months, the letter said.

"We are not toys for you to play with and not animals to imprison us here.

"If you send us back to where you found us, it is better for us to live with sharks and sea whales than to stay one more day with inhumane people.

"We can say that when we woke up today, we are resolved to die here in order to bring back our dignity and our freedom."

Labor's acting spokeswoman for immigration Amanda Rishworth said the party had "serious concerns" about the developing protest.

"The Australian people deserve to know exactly what is happening at the Australian-funded facility," Ms Rishworth said

"The lack of information coming from Peter Dutton is unacceptable. We simply must have the full facts of what is going on at the Manus Regional Processing Centre."

The Greens' immigration spokeswoman Sarah Hanson-Young called for the government to use mediators in the centre, to help calm the situation.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/peter-dutton-accuses-protesting-manus-island-asylum-seekers-of-aggressive-behaviour-20150119-12t1nx.html>

30. MEDIA RELEASE: Fears for welfare of captured Delta asylum seekers

FEARS FOR THE WELFARE OF CAPTURED DELTA ASYLUM SEEKERS BUT MANUS HUNGER STRIKE CONTINUES

Monday January 19, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Security guards surrounded the Delta compound on Monday afternoon, but broke through the barricaded front gate.

Around 170 asylum seekers from Delta Compound have been taken out the Manus Island Detention Centres in the aftermath of the raid on the barricaded compound. Up to 17 people were also arrested in Oscar compound as the Immigration department continues its hunt for "ring-leaders".

There are also reports of a number of people being injured in the raid and subsequent arrests.

Around 60 of the asylum seekers are being held in Lorengau Prison.

Police truck returned a number of times to Delta Compound carrying away piles of the asylum seekers' property.

This use of force has confirmed the worst fears of the asylum seekers that they are not safe on Manus Island.

"We are extremely concerned for the safety of the asylum seekers taken from Delta Compound. Given the history of PNG police violence on Manus, there is an urgent need for independent supervision of those in police custody," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"The attack on Delta Compound has resolved nothing, except increase the determination of the asylum seekers to continue their protest."

As of Monday night - over 600 people in the detention centre remain on hunger strike.

Attached is some video footage of the attack on Delta as seen from Oscar compound.

The commentary accompanying the video say, "Who is responsible for these people? They only want freedom. Now they are being bashed by Wilson's and nobody can help them. Whoever is watching this video, please help us."

Some voices can be heard in the background asking for help.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

31. Video footage emerges of guards rushing protest compound

Australian immigration minister admits 'a degree of force' was used to end protest amid claims some protesters have been taken to prison and beaten

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Tuesday 20 January 2015 12.30 AEST

Video footage emerging from Manus Island detention centre appears to show guards in riot gear forcefully breaching Delta compound, which was the epicentre of the recent protests.

And pictures have emerged of up to a dozen detainees reportedly in Lorengau prison. They were apparently taken there from detention and have alleged mistreatment by authorities.

Sources on Manus Island told Guardian Australia seven more men were arrested on Tuesday morning.

Guardian Australia has been told they were arrested because they were filming the protest on mobile phones and sending them to the outside world.

More than 100 men remain on hunger strike on the island.

The Papua New Guinean and Australian governments have not confirmed that men have been taken to Lorengau prison.

A spokesman for PNG's government told the ABC that Mataio Rabura, the country's chief migration officer, entered Delta compound and negotiated an end to the barricade, which allowed dehydrated protesters access to medical treatment.

On Tuesday morning, the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, told Sky News there was "a degree of force" used in ending the protest.

"There was a degree of force, if you like, that was used, and I think that's appropriate, but there wasn't, it didn't escalate to a point where police had to present themselves and be in conflict with the people that are in the centre," he said.

?Tony Abbott said the protest was a challenge to government policy. "That blockade has now been broken, thanks to good work by Transfield and their incident response team, and of course backed up by the Royal PNG constabulary," he said.

Video footage, shot from inside Oscar compound, shows guards, dressed in masks, riot gear and carrying shields, appearing to force their way into Delta compound, which had been barricaded for more than 48 hours.

Loud banging and shouting can be heard from the compound. Detainees in Oscar compound are shown watching the events and shouting.

After securing Delta compound and arresting up to 40 men, guards then entered Oscar compound. The arrested men were then taken to Lorengau prison.

Some have since been returned to the detention centre, and placed in Charlie compound, while others remain in prison.

Photographs reportedly taken inside the prison show more than a dozen men sitting and lying on the floor of a cell. Most are without shirts.

At least four of those arrested are Iranian men – whom ?Guardian Australia has chosen not to name – who are among the longest-held on Manus. They have been on the island since August 2013, more than 500 days ago.

One detainee said: "They attack on Delta compound and beat us very harshly. Tied our hands and bring all of us in different jails."

Another said: "We are not safe ... they beat us like dog."

Allegations of violence or mistreatment ?could not be confirmed. A PNG government spokesman said there were no serious injuries.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/20/manus-island-video-footage-emerges-of-riot-police-rushing-protest-compound>

32. Asylum seekers claim mistreatment by PNG police

Asylum seekers claim mistreatment by PNG police following detention centre raids

The Age
January 20, 2015 - 1:12PM
Sarah Whyte

Asylum seekers being detained in jail on Manus Island following raids in the detention centre on Monday have said they were mistreated by the Papua New Guinea police, as security staff prepare to raid further compounds on Tuesday.

Staff on the island say there are 58 men being held in Lorengau prison on the island, while another 20 men are being detained "elsewhere" on the island after they were found to have "weapons, accelerant and petrol" in the compounds on Monday afternoon.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton confirmed on Tuesday morning that "PNG authorities" and Wilson security staff had entered the compound to "provide support" for those asylum seekers who were in need of medical assistance.

"We send a clear message, particularly those ring leaders on Manus at the moment, and over the course of the last few days that have been causing significant disruption, that those people will not be settled in our country and I have said that publicly before and I repeat it again today."

A message sent by an asylum seeker detained in the jail contained claims the men in the Delta compound were "beaten like dogs" by PNG police and this was witnessed by Wilson security.

"1st they attacked in delta compound and beats us like dog and tied our hands back," the asylum seeker said. "Take from our compound and put into [Chauka compound]. In front of Wilson PNG police beat and abuse us."

Photos obtained by Fairfax Media shows at least 12 men sitting down in a room in the jail. Another photo seen by Fairfax Media shows a man's face that is bruised.

On Tuesday morning, the Immigration Minister, Peter Dutton, told Sky News there was "a degree of force" used in ending the protest.

"There was a degree of force, if you like, that was used, and I think that's appropriate, but there wasn't, it didn't escalate to a point where police had to present themselves and be in conflict with the people that are in the centre," he said.

A statement from PNG immigration minister Rimbink Pato says civilian security staff restrained some "agitators" who tried to stop sick people being removed but there were no serious injuries.

A source on the island said a number of protesting ringleaders who continue to stage a hunger strike and chant for freedom would be removed from other compounds on Tuesday.

The stand-off between asylum seekers and security guards in the Delta compound in the centre on Manus Island came to a dramatic halt on Monday when Wilson guards stormed the compound.

Delta compound, which had been barricaded by asylum seekers who were refusing to eat or allow security guards inside, was forced open by the Emergency Response Team from Wilson Security carrying riot equipment.

It is believed that hunger strikes continue in three other Manus Island compounds - Foxtrot, Mike and Oscar.

The protests came after asylum seekers were told they would be resettle in Lorengau this week with minimal security. They claim they will be killed by locals if they are forced to live in the community.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/asylum-seekers-claim-mistreatment-by-png-police-following-detention-centre-raids-20150120-12ty40.html>

33. Peter Dutton praises PNG authorities for ending Manus Island standoff

Immigration minister dismisses reports that asylum seekers were denied food and water and criticises 'irresponsible reporting'

The Guardian
Daniel Hurst, political correspondent
Tuesday 20 January 2015 10.51 AEST

Australia's immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has praised Papua New Guinean authorities for "professionally" moving to end the standoff at the Manus Island detention centre by taking away alleged ringleaders.

Dutton dismissed reports of authorities denying detainees food and water as "complete and utter nonsense" and "irresponsible", but said some people might continue protests and attempt to harm themselves.

Guards in riot gear reportedly entered the Delta and Oscar compounds on Monday afternoon to end the week-long standoff by removing alleged ringleaders. The situation had grown steadily worse in recent days, with hunger strikes and dehydration said to be widespread.

A spokesman for PNG's government told the ABC that Mataio Rabura, the country's chief migration officer, entered Delta compound and negotiated an end to the barricade, which allowed dehydrated protesters access to medical treatment.

Tony Abbott said the protest in some parts of the centre "amounted to a blockade".

“There was a major challenge to the policy of the government and I’m pleased to say that that challenge has been defeated,” the prime minister said.

In an interview on Tuesday, Dutton said he wanted to thank the PNG government for managing the situation in a “very impressive” manner.

“The PNG authorities as well as Transfield and my own departmental staff I think have acted in an exemplary way, but nonetheless the threat is ever-present and we are monitoring it,” the minister told the ABC.

“I think we’re handling it exceptionally well in the circumstances.”

Dutton told Sky News “a degree of force” was used to resolve the standoff and the situation remained “volatile”.

Asked about claims by an asylum seeker that he saw guards beating people in Delta compound, Dutton criticised “irresponsible reporting”.

“I think there have been reports that have been repeated for example on the ABC around food that’s been denied. That is complete and utter nonsense on the advice available to me.”

Dutton said reports of water being denied were also “complete rubbish”. Six days ago Guardian Australia published a photo of a sign at the detention centre indicating some of the water equipment had broken down and showers were suspended. There have been subsequent reports about a lack of water.

Dutton said on Tuesday food and water was “not being denied” by authorities, but there had been “some circumstances where ringleaders within the people who are in the processing centre have denied staff access into particular areas for the delivery of food”.

Asked if the conflict continued at the centre, Dutton said: “There will still be some people who refuse to take water or food and will self-harm and we don’t want to see that, but I say to those people that that activity if you’ve been advised by advocates or others to conduct yourself in a non-compliant way ... somehow that that is going to help – it is not.”

Refugee advocates strenuously denied claims first aired by Dutton on Friday that outsiders were encouraging such protests. At the time, Ben Pynt of the advocacy group Humanitarian Research Partners said he was “affronted by this allegation” because he had spent the past week telling people not to self-harm.

Information from the Manus Island centre is often contested. Last week, Dutton’s department initially denied a hunger strike was taking place.

The opposition leader, Bill Shorten, had called on the government to be more upfront about developments on Manus Island.

Dutton said he provided information “as it was available to us” but said releasing details of the operation as it was under way on Monday could have jeopardised safety.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/20/peter-dutton-praises-png-authorities-manus-standoff>

34. Hunger-striking asylum seeker says staff withheld digestible food

Iranian man in Darwin detention centre who has gone more than 70 days without food, says he restarted his hunger strike after staff refused to serve specially prepared food

The Guardian
Helen Davidson
Tuesday 20 January 2015 14.28 AEST

A 33-year-old man who has been on hunger strike in a Darwin detention centre says staff withheld specially prepared food from him after he was persuaded to start eating again shortly before Christmas, which prompted the man to restart his strike.

The Iranian man, who cannot be named, has gone more than 70 days without food. He did not eat for 53 days before advocates and lawyers persuaded him to end his hunger strike.

But just three days later he started again. He says he did so because detention centre staff refused his request to be served digestible food suitable for his malnourished state, including electrolyte drinks, soup, soft bread and soft non-acidic fruit.

Last week he was admitted to hospital for treatment for cellulitis in his foot developed from infected mosquito and midge bites.

In a recorded interview obtained by Guardian Australia, the man said that after returning from hospital he was housed in a part of Wickham Point detention centre more than 20 minutes' walk from medical care. He also said he had been denied medical care in the past.

Serco, the company that runs the detention centre, referred questions to the Department of Immigration. The office of immigration minister Peter Dutton has not returned a request for comment.

The detained man has lost more than 30kg and has vowed to continue his protest. He is in an extremely weakened state and is not expected to survive long.

In the interview he said he was protesting because conditions inside detention were mentally and physically harmful to himself and others.

Asked by the advocate interviewing him what message he was trying to send with his protest, he replied: "[We] just need help. Not for me, for other persons all the same as me, in detention. They stay a long time. They have mental problems, physical problems. It's very bad, they need help.

"Some people are killing themselves, some not talking to others, some not eating. It all plays with the mind. You can't stay here a long time, because it's very bad."

The man began his hunger strike in protest at his detention and treatment by the immigration department through a "protracted" four-year application process. He spent two of those years in community detention.

"Community is the same as detention," he said in the interview. "Every week you have to report, every time immigration is saying to me: go back to your country, if you fight you lose."

He successfully appealed against the first rejection of his application for refugee status, but a second independent merit review again refused his application. An application to appeal will be heard by a Darwin court this week.

During this time the man has also been on medication for the cellulitis. Guardian Australia was told that while his antibiotics continued, pain medication did not because he had stopped eating. Intravenous pain relief was administered when he went to hospital last week and medication prescribed following his discharge on Wednesday.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/20/hunger-striking-asylum-seeker-says-staff-withheld-digestible-food>

35. Claims asylum seekers denied food and water 'complete rubbish'

Claims Manus Island asylum seekers denied food and water 'complete rubbish': Peter Dutton

The Age
January 20, 2015 - 9:14AM
James Massola

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton says it is "complete rubbish" that asylum seekers inside the Manus Island detention centre were denied food and water, while criticising what he deems to be irresponsible reporting of the tense stand off by the media.

On Monday, an Emergency Response Team from Wilson Security stormed the Delta compound at the Manus Island detention centre, bringing to a halt a protest by asylum seekers who had barricaded themselves inside and were refusing to eat.

Mr Dutton praised the Papua New Guinea government and the contractor that runs the centre, Transfield, for bringing the stand off to an end as he dismissed claims from asylum seeker advocates that people were being denied food and water.

"It's [food and water] getting through and not being denied. There are circumstances where ringleaders within - the people who are in the processing centre - have denied staff access into particular areas or the delivery of that food. That is not a refusal of food by authorities," Mr Dutton told ABC radio.

"I think it's quite irresponsible frankly for those claims to be repeated and I've heard them again on the ABC and it should be clarified."

Refugee advocates had claimed water in the Delta compound had been cut off, forcing asylum seekers to drink from drains.

Advocates also claimed on Monday that several asylum seekers and one guard had been injured when Wilson Security guards entered the Delta compound.

It has been claimed up to two-thirds of asylum seekers in the four compounds of the Manus Island centre have been refusing food in protest at the looming commencement of the Australian government's plan to resettle them on PNG, rather than in Australia.

It is not possible to verify these claims independently.

Mr Dutton said authorities wanted to remove the protest ringleaders and that asylum seekers and their advocates were not helping their case by protesting.

Asked if conflict was still underway in the centre, Mr Dutton said there "will still be some people who will refuse to take water or food or will self-harm and we don't want to see that".

"That activity, if you've been advised by people, advocates or others to conduct yourself in a non-compliant way in terms of destructive behaviour or if somebody within the facility, a ringleader is telling you that somehow is going to help, it is not."

The new minister would not comment on the specifics of a deal that will see Cambodia resettle refugees who attempted to come to Australia.

"Our discussions are ongoing with Cambodia and I'll go to Cambodia shortly. I don't want to publicly comment at this point in time about the specific details," he said.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/claims-manus-island-asylum-seekers-denied-food-and-water-complete-rubbish-peter-dutton-20150119-12trb0.html>

36. Manus hunger strikers 'a recipe for disaster': doctor

A Sydney doctor and refugee advocate says the hunger-striking asylum seekers on Manus Island are not receiving proper medical care--?and the results could be deadly.

Crikey
Sally Whyte
Jan 20, 2015 1:04PM

Asylum seekers on hunger strike on Manus Island are failing to receive appropriate medical attention consistent with standards set by the company contracted to provide medical services in detention, a medical expert says.

Dr Barri Phatarfod from Doctors For Refugees says that a person on hunger strike needs to be monitored almost constantly in order for symptoms such as organ failure to be detected, but that this is impossible on Manus Island at the moment as there is not enough staff or facilities to deal with the crisis. Phatarfod says contractor International Health and Medical Services has long had a protocol for dealing with hunger strike, which conforms to international human rights standards, but it's impossible to follow that protocol with the scale of the hunger strike and staff available. Phatarfod says the first action to deal with people who are refusing food is to remove them from their environment, greatly increasing the chance that they can be treated.

"If you take them away from their environment, ideally to a hospital, you can negotiate with them with the help of a psychiatrist. They also need to be monitored--?their blood pressure, heart rate, temperature and urine output," she said.

Manus Island generally has two to three doctors on duty at any one time, as well as a psychiatrist and senior medical officer, according to Phatarfod, which is not enough to monitor the health of the hunger strikers. "This is such a recipe for disaster, what they're doing."

Martin Appleby, a former guard at Manus, said that for an emergency such as this, there is "no ability to scale up staff. I doubt the budget would have increased for any services on Manus."

Phatarfod says the medical care available on Manus Island is "very rudimentary" and Appleby said "I've never even seen IV drips up there, not to say there's not".

According to Phatarfod, "people who are unconscious in residential blocks can't get to the medical centre, so they're lying in the sun waiting for a staff member to come with transport".

The Refugee Action Coalition is today reporting that asylum seekers are refusing to go to the medical compound, as they fear being held in isolation.

With 700 asylum seekers still on hunger strike (though the blockade in one of the compounds has ended), Phatarfod says that asylum seekers need to be taken to the hospital in Port Moresby to be properly treated.

International Health and Medical Services describes what it does as "manages health systems on behalf of governments and international organisations. We provide healthcare in both remote and urban settings, delivering a consistent standard of care even in physically and culturally challenging environments." Its parent company is International SOS, a Singapore-based medical security company with offices around the world. Medical security means that it provides Western-style health

services in countries all over the world for corporations with international offices. Most recently it launched an "Ebola app", which gives advice and news on the disease to users.

Angela Mitropoulos, a Sydney-based academic in cultural economy, says there are fundamental problems with companies like IHMS providing healthcare to asylum seekers.

"The most important thing about IHMS and International SOS is they are not healthcare companies. They are global medical security companies, in that they don't simply deliver healthcare to patients, rather they are contracted to manage the health, financial and other risks that arise from government and corporate activities," she said. Mitropoulos explained:

"IHMS and ISOS are contracted by governments and businesses as a requirement of insurance contracts and as part of risk management procedures. Those companies are the two sides of international people movements from the perspective of insurance, one involving the movements of asylum seekers (which would be treated as an uninsurable risk, except that detention makes it possible for that risk to be calculated and hence become a source of profit), and the other involving those whose movements that are part of government and corporate business. ISOS is business class, IHMS is not even economy class since it's involved with indefinite detention."

IHMS has four contracts with the Australian government that cover running health services at immigration detention centres in Australia, Nauru and Manus Island worth \$1,255,633,652--?behind Serco and Transfield, the company is the third biggest contractor in running detention centres, and as far as we can tell, this is the company's only income. Offshore detention centres cost the government about \$1 billion annually, \$200 million of which is spent on healthcare.

<http://www.crikey.com.au/?p=465163>

37. More than 40 jailed as asylum seekers vow to continue

Manus Island asylum seekers vow to continue hunger strike, more than 40 detainees jailed by PNG police

ABC News Online
By Papua New Guinea correspondent Liam Cochrane
Posted Tue 20 Jan 2015, 3:41pm

Asylum seekers at the Manus Island detention centre have vowed to continue their hunger strike despite the temporary jailing of more than 40 men from Delta compound.

Refugee advocates who have been in contact with asylum seekers from various compounds said hundreds of men have continued their hunger strike, with many also refusing water.

A three-day blockade of Delta compound ended on Monday when civilian security guards working at the centre forced their way in through a gate and PNG's chief migration officer negotiated an end to the protest.

The PNG government said that while some asylum seekers were restrained by guards, there were no serious injuries.

"What happened in Delta, it really scared us but we are not going to stop our hunger strike, it will continue," an asylum seeker from Foxtrot compound told the ABC.

PNG police said more than 40 asylum seekers were detained in the provincial prison and another four were being held in the police cells.

However asylum seekers said a higher number of men were arrested.

"Right now we are 58 people inside the PNG jail and PNG police squad they beat [us] ... they are torturing us in here and they put us here without any judge warrant," said a man who said he was among those detained.

Neither the claims from asylum seekers or government officials could be independently verified because media access is forbidden at the Australian-run centre.

The jailed asylum seekers have not been charged but have been isolated while PNG police carry out a search of their compound, looking for weapons, mobile phones and other contraband.

Conflicting reports on level of force used

There were conflicting reports about the level of force used by guards to break up the blockade at Delta compound on Monday afternoon.

PNG's immigration minister Rimbink Pato said the stand-off at Delta compound was brought under control using "minimal force".

"We did not want to escalate the situation further by forcing entry into this compound, but we knew that there were people inside who needed to get out," Mr Pato said in a statement.

"The unlawful behaviour included damaging property, throwing of rocks and furniture over the fence and prevention of entrance by the lawful authorities [and] had to be brought under control.

Mr Pato said the actions of the most vocal asylum seekers do not necessarily reflect the views of all those detained on Manus Island.

"Most asylum seekers are peaceable people who simply want their refugee claims processed as quickly as possible so they can start rebuilding their lives in PNG," he said.

"They have fled situations of conflict and do not want to be part of the aggressive behaviour that agitators have shown."

However, asylum seekers and their advocates continued to reject the idea of a peaceful intervention to the stand-off at Delta compound.

An asylum seeker from the Foxtrot compound told the ABC that he witnessed police enter a back gate of Delta compound, while the security guards were focused on another entrance.

"When the guys are really busy with the guards, the police start attack them from behind, they start beating them," the asylum seeker said.

"They beat them very seriously actually, we have seen many, many people really bleeding. I have seen 15 guys they carried on a stretcher."

The PNG government confirmed police were in attendance but said they were not needed and stayed back.

Negotiation possible if removed from PNG

Australian-based refugee advocate group Humanitarian Research Partners wrote to the United Nations Special Rapporteurs for Torture, Human Rights and the Rights of Migrants about Monday's incident.

Australian security guards were among those who went into Delta compound and the private contractor that operates the centre received praise from Prime Minister Tony Abbott and Immigration Minister Peter Dutton.

"The PNG authorities, as well as Transfield [and] my own departmental staff, I think have acted in an exemplary way," Mr Dutton said.

One asylum seeker responded directly to the Immigration Minister's words.

"Today we have read what the Minister said to the media but that will not stop us and we will never ever stop our hunger strike," the detainee said.

"If they want to negotiate with us we will accept their negotiation but there's one option ... they have to take us out of PNG... otherwise we will not accept any negotiation."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-20/manus-island-detainees-vow-to-continue-hunger-strike/6028864>

38. Manus Island asylum seekers carry out collapsed detainees

Hundreds of asylum seekers vow to continue their protest as ailing detainees are carried to the gates of Australian-run compound and removed by medical staff

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Tuesday 20 January 2015 16.19 AEST

Several hundred asylum seekers are continuing their hunger strike on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, with many of them severely dehydrated.

Detainees in the Australian-run immigration detention centre are carrying their collapsed fellow detainees to the front gates of compounds to be collected by medical staff.

Ninety percent of the men in Foxtrot compound are on hunger strike. In Mike, 250 of 321 men refused breakfast and lunch on Tuesday.

"Today is too hot," one detainee told Guardian Australia from inside Foxtrot compound. "More than 15 people collapsed before midday. Our situation is very critical today. Our hunger strike will continue."

Following a forceful breach of the Delta and Oscar compounds on Monday, detention centre guards have also swept the Manus Island compounds, run by Transfield Services, searching for mobile phones and other forms of communication.

Seven more men were reportedly arrested for having phones – used to film and photograph events and send images out of the centre – and detainees' personal property was removed from Delta compound after the barricade there was broken.

"The guards took many MP3 and phone in Delta yesterday," a detainee said. "The guards are taking all their property, these people are really peaceful people, they don't have any things, any weapons, in their property, I don't know why they are taking it away."

There is no regulation or law that prevents detainees having a mobile phone.

Transfield's own "rights and responsibilities" sheet, given to detainees, states: "You will be able to communicate freely with family and friends, diplomatic or consular representatives, and other representatives."

Video footage emerging from the detention centre appears to show guards in riot gear forcefully breaching Delta compound, which was the epicentre of the recent protests.

And pictures have emerged of up to a dozen detainees reportedly in Lorengau prison. They were apparently taken there from detention and have alleged mistreatment by authorities.

The Papua New Guinean and Australian governments have not confirmed that men have been taken to Lorengau prison.

The Australian immigration minister, Peter Dutton, praised the PNG government and Australian staff on Manus Island for their intervention into the protests, which he said had degenerated into "an unacceptable and untenable solution".

He said: "Most transferees quickly cooperated with the request to cease their action. Minimal force was used to effect entry into one compound. A number of transferees were restrained and taken to the local watch house after actively attempting to prevent the entry of service provider security staff and the provision of medical aid to fellow transferees."

"I am advised there was no damage to infrastructure or accommodation at the centre and there were no significant injuries sustained by staff or transferees as a result of yesterday's actions.

"A group of transferees reported to International Health and Medical Services with non-serious injuries, largely related to fatigue," he said.

Dutton said there remained underlying tensions at the detention centre, including an ongoing hunger strike, "but this is being closely monitored".

A spokesman for PNG's government told the ABC that Mataio Rabura, the country's chief migration officer, entered Delta compound and negotiated an end to the barricade, which allowed dehydrated protesters access to medical treatment.

On Tuesday morning, Dutton told Sky News there was "a degree of force" used in ending the protest.

"There was a degree of force, if you like, that was used, and I think that's appropriate, but there wasn't, it didn't escalate to a point where police had to present themselves and be in conflict with the people that are in the centre," he said.

Australia's prime minister, Tony Abbott, said the protest was a challenge to the government's policy of sending all asylum seekers arriving by boat for offshore processing and resettlement.

"That blockade has now been broken, thanks to good work by Transfield and their incident response team, and of course backed up by the Royal PNG constabulary," Abbott said.

Video footage, shot from inside Oscar compound, shows guards, dressed in masks, riot gear and carrying shields, appearing to force their way into Delta compound, which had been barricaded for more than 48 hours.

Loud banging and shouting can be heard from the compound. Detainees in Oscar compound are shown watching the events and shouting.

After securing Delta compound and arresting up to 40 men, guards then entered Oscar compound. The arrested men were then reportedly taken to Lorengau prison.

Some have since been returned to the detention centre, and placed in Charlie compound, while others remain in prison.

Photographs reportedly taken inside the prison show more than a dozen men sitting and lying on the floor of a cell. Most are without shirts.

At least four of those arrested are Iranian men – whom Guardian Australia has chosen not to name – who are among the longest-held on Manus. They have been on the island since August 2013, more than 500 days ago.

One detainee said: "They attack on Delta compound and beat us very harshly. Tied our hands and bring all of us in different jails."

Another said: "We are not safe ... they beat us like dog."

Allegations of violence or mistreatment could not be confirmed. A PNG government spokesman said there were no serious injuries.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/20/manus-island-hunger-strike-asylum-seekers-carry-out-collapsed-detainees>

39. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus Island witch-hunt continues on seventh day

MANUS WITCH-HUNT CONTINUES AS MANUS HUNGER STRIKE ENTERS SEVENTH DAY. UN GIVEN MORE EVIDENCE OF TORTURE IN CHAUKA COMPOUND

Tuesday January 20, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Wilson and Immigration officials continue to round-up so-called ring-leaders. Another seven people were arrested in Oscar Compound around 7.00am Manus time this morning.

This is in addition to the 17 that were taken out of Oscar Compound yesterday afternoon following the security raid on Delta.

Fifty-eight asylum seekers from Delta compound, singled out by Immigration officers, are being held in Lorengau prison following yesterday's raid.

However, around 150 asylum seekers were returned to Delta Compound last night (about 9.30pm Manus time), where they are continuing their hunger strike. Delta Compound is still without drinking water.

It has become apparent that a number of other asylum seekers are being captured at the medical centre and being held in isolation rather than being returned to their compounds.

"The raids on Delta and Oscar compounds have only proved to the Manus detainees that PNG is not safe. They are continuing to demand that arrangements are made for them to settle in a safe third country," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

More footage of the security raid on Delta Compound has emerged putting the lie to the official claim that there was a negotiated end to the blockade.

Despite the security crack down, more than 700 asylum seekers are still on hunger strike, and the Manus crisis continues.

Medical staff are overwhelmed by the number of people requiring attention.

More evidence of abuse has emerged from those being held in isolation in Chauka compounds. Asylum seekers detained in Chauka have been interrogated by Australian officials seeking information about "ring-leaders" in various compounds.

An update with further allegations of torture and mistreatment in Chauka and Delta Compound, prepared by Ben Pynt, director of Humanitarian Research Partners, has been sent to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Prohibition of Torture in Geneva. The first complaint, outlining the allegations of abuse was sent to the Special Rapporteur in November last year.

Meanwhile, the conditions of Martin, the hunger-striking Iranian asylum seeker in Darwin, deteriorates by the day.

Protests over the next three days in Brisbane (today, 12.00pm, at Immigration office, Adelaide St; Sydney and Melbourne, Wed 21 January and in Canberra on Thursday, 22 Jan) will be in solidarity with Martin and to support the Manus Island asylum seekers and call for an end to offshore processing.

In Sydney, the Refugee Action Coalition's protest will be Wednesday 21 January, 12.30, Sydney Immigration office, 26 Lee Street (near Railway Square). Speakers include David Shoebridge, NSW Greens MLC, and a sister of Manus Island asylum seeker.

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

40. Manus Island asylum seeker 'ringleaders' held

The Age
January 20, 2015 - 8:24PM
Sarah Whyte

About 20 asylum seekers were found with weapons and petrol when one of the compounds in the Manus Island detention centre in Papua New Guinea was raided by security guards after a week of escalating protests, a well-placed source told Fairfax Media.

Tensions remained high in the centre on Tuesday night, with many asylum seekers remaining on hunger strike. Refugee advocates said there were no plans for asylum seekers to engage in violent behaviour.

Private security guards stormed a barricaded section of the detention centre in riot gear at 3.30pm on Monday, detaining 58 asylum seekers from Somalia, Iran and Sudan and taking some to Lorengau police station, in the island's capital.

They entered the detention centre again on Tuesday and conducted more searches.

It was these men who were considered the "ringleaders" of the protest by authorities and security guards.

An early morning raid on the Oscar compound on Tuesday then removed a small number of other asylum seekers also considered to be "troublemakers".

Prime Minister Tony Abbott thanked personnel associated with the government's Operation Sovereign Borders, which aims to stop asylum seekers arriving by boat.

"There was a major challenge to the policy of the government and I'm pleased to say that that challenge has been defeated. It has been defeated," Mr Abbott said on Tuesday.

A message sent by an asylum seeker claimed men in the centre were "beaten like dogs" by PNG police and said this was witnessed by Wilson security.

"They attacked in Delta compound and beats us like dog and tied our hands back," the asylum seeker said.

"Take from our compound and put into [Chauka compound]. In front of Wilson PNG police beat and abuse us."

The Australian and PNG governments conceded some force was used to end the protest.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said: "There was a degree of force, if you like, that was used, and I think that's appropriate, but ... it didn't escalate to a point where police had to present themselves and be in conflict with the people that are in the centre," he told Sky News.

In a statement PNG Immigration Minister Rimbink Pato said civilian security staff restrained some "agitators" who tried to stop sick people being removed but there were no serious injuries.

A photograph provided to Fairfax Media by refugee advocates shows a man with bruising across his nose and cheekbone.

The asylum seekers had barricaded themselves in the compound protesting against plans to resettle those found to be refugees in PNG.

Some have said they feared that they will be killed by PNG locals if resettled.

Many were refusing to eat, while begging the new Immigration Minister to allow them into Australia. Men also began self-harming.

The PNG government confirmed on Monday that a number of men had swallowed razor blades, had stitched their lips together and had swallowed washing powder.

It led security forces to expect the worst, a source said.

PNG police and fire and rescue teams with 20 extinguishers were on standby on Monday, when security guards moved in to break up the protest. Refugee advocates said the protest was peaceful.

"Every single person I spoke to in Delta stressed over and over again they were being peaceful so there was no excuse for people or security to attack them," Victoria Martin from the Refugee Rights Action Network said.

"The government is engaged in a deliberate attempt to cover up human rights abuses, assaults and denial of access to media."

Timeline of events:

Monday

3pm: Loud chanting for freedom comes from Delta compound which has been barricaded by protesting asylum seekers.

3.30pm: Wilson security staff storm Delta compound, forcing open the blockade. The emergency response team from Wilson staff enter the compound with shields and riot gear. PNG police are used as back-up.

- Asylum seekers say they were taken to the Chauka isolation area before 58 people are taken to Lorengau Police station.
- Another 20 asylum seekers are taken "elsewhere" on the island after the raid finds "weapons, accelerant and petrol" in the compound.

Tuesday

- A small number of other asylum seekers are moved from Mike and Oscar and are taken out of the compound in the early morning.
- Immigration Minister Peter Dutton confirms a "degree of force" was used during the raids.
- Prime Minister Tony Abbott describes the protest as a "major challenge" to the government's policy.
- Asylum seekers claim they were "beaten like dogs" by PNG police.
- Hunger strike continues in Foxtrot, Oscar and Mike compounds.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/manus-island-asylum-seeker-ringleaders-held-20150120-12ubnh.html>

41. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus asylum seekers say: We are on hunger strike

Tuesday January 20, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Manus Island asylum seekers have reacted angrily at suggestions made by the Prime Minister Tony Abbott and the Immigration Minister Peter Dutton that everything was calm on Manus Island. On top of their hunger strike, they have now placed a ban on using the welfare phone in their compound and on talking to their case workers.

A letter signed by 184 hunger striking asylum seekers in Foxtrot compound have sent a letter to show how many are actually on hunger strike (signatures attached). There are others, too weak to sign or some at the medical centre when the signatures were collected.

In Mike Compound there are 250 hunger strikers; in Oscar 150; in Delta 150 - making a total of 734.

"The figures represent the hard facts of the situation on Manus Island," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Even after rounding up 70 people from Delta Compound - the remaining 150 people are on hunger strike. Three people collapsed in Delta this afternoon. Another 11 were rounded up this morning to add to the ten or so, already been held in Chauka isolation unit. But the hunger strike continues. The Minister is running out of a minority to blame."

For more information , contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

42. Manus Island: two more hunger-strikers reportedly swallow razor blades

Several hundred men remain on hunger strike across the Australian-run detention centre as protests continue for eighth day

Ben Doherty
Wednesday 21 January 2015 11.01 AEST

Two more hunger strikers on Manus Island have reportedly swallowed razor blades, as the protests continue for an eighth day.

The two Sudanese men in Foxtrot compound were taken to the detention centre's medical clinic on Tuesday night after being found by fellow detainees bleeding from the mouth.

They are the third and fourth men to swallow razor blades as an act of protest.

Several hundred men remain on hunger strike across the detention centre. In Foxtrot compound, the men are lying under a large shelter on mats on concrete.

Those who collapse or fall unconscious from dehydration are often carried by fellow detainees to the front gate for medical treatment.

Three more men were arrested from Delta compound overnight on Tuesday. Guards are looking for men with mobile phones who are communicating with people outside.

"The security and mobile police came to Delta last night at 11.30pm, they took three guys to the prison again ... they suspect them as trouble-maker," one detainee told Guardian Australia.

After detention centre guards in riot gear forced their way into the barricaded Delta compound on Monday, there were suggestions from PNG authorities that the protest had been ended peacefully.

But staff on the island have told Guardian Australia the mood remains tense, and the protesters apparently unbowed.

Immigration minister Peter Dutton told the ABC's 7.30 program on Tuesday night some of the men in Delta compound "had fashioned weapons, or there was a suggestion of that", when the raids took place on Monday.

Asked what weapons the men had, Dutton said: "I think it's important to point out that we're not talking about firearms, for example, we're talking about homemade or home-fashioned weapons ... I'm not going into detail."

In February last year, PNG mobile squad police and other local employees stormed the Manus detention centre and attacked detainees during riots.

One man, Reza Barati, was killed – allegedly murdered by two workers who dropped a rock on his head - and 70 were injured.

Throughout this week's protests, detainees have said they fear similar violence.

"The clients are afraid that something very horrible happen for them exactly the same that happened in February 2014. We are on peaceful hunger strike and there is no violence, but they [guards] are trying to turn our peaceful strike into riot," the detainee said.

More than 250 of the men on Manus have been in detention there since August 2013, according to immigration department staff on the island.

The vast majority are still waiting on their refugee status determinations. No refugee has ever been resettled from Manus Island detention centre.

Dutton said the processing of refugees on Manus was a matter for PNG.

The Manus Island detention centre is paid for by the Australian government and run by an Australian contractor, Transfield Services.

"There are people within the Manus Island processing centre at the moment who are eligible and who are transitioning, but that is an issue for the PNG government to comment on," Dutton said.

He said the government would not be swayed from its policy objective.

"We have sent a very strong message that we are not going to settle people that have come by boats, that are at Manus at the moment, and that is a very clear message that people should hear."

Detainees have asked to be handed over to the United Nations for processing.

43. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus Island 'not calm', hunger strike will not stop

MANUS ISLAND NOT CALM -- ASYLUM SEEKERS DECLARE HUNGER STRIKE WILL NOT STOP.

TWO MORE ASYLUM SEEKERS SWALLOW RAZOR BLADES

Tuesday January 20, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Asylum seekers in Foxtrot Compound have issued a letter (transcript below, photos of letter and signatures attached) declaring that their hunger strike protest will continue.

Despite more intimidation this morning, with 11 more asylum seekers (1 from Delta, 10 from Oscar) being captured and taken to isolation, more than 700 asylum seekers in every compound maintained the hunger strike.

In at least one compound, people who had previously not been hunger striking joined the protest. Many were angered to hear comments from Tony Abbott and Peter Dutton suggesting that things were "calm" on Manus Island. Video footage (attached) rebutting the comments of the Prime Minister that things are resolved has come out of Manus Island

One message from Mike Compound reads, "We will not stop."

Asylum seekers have also painted a banner, "Peter Duton (sic) Lying, Manus detainees dying."

STOP PRESS: TWO MORE SWALLOW RAZOR BLADES

Two asylum seekers who swallowed razor blades were turned away from the medical centre this morning when they refused to drink before being treated.

They were returned to their compound and were found an hour by other asylum seekers bleeding from their mouths.

They have now been taken back to the medical centre.

"This is the kind of mistake that is made when there are insufficient medical staff and when withholding treatment becomes a way of trying to impose political decisions to end the hunger strike protest. It is too easy to think every collapsed person is another one suffering dehydration," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

The hotter day on Manus Island has meant greater numbers needing treatment at the medical centre.

"Manus Island is far from calm," said Rintoul, "Ill-informed comments from the Minister risks even greater tragedy."

For more information , contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713

Transcript:

The signatories to the following message clearly express themselves to all media, organisations and human rights institutes:

We are writing to you from the heart of Manus, today 20 Jan 2015 our dry hunger strike entered it's (sic) ninth day and it will continue. In here alarms are ringing but heartless politicians are still indifferent. We will continue our push until we reach our ultimate goal which is FREEDOM. Please rescue us from the HITLERS of our time.

44. Two refugees transferred ahead of being resettled in PNG

Two refugees transferred ahead of being resettled in PNG, despite vows from detainees to continue protests

ABC News Online
By PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane
Posted Wed 21 Jan 2015, 1:35pm
Updated Wed 21 Jan 2015, 1:53pm

Two refugees have been transferred from the Manus Island detention centre to a transit facility on the outskirts of Lorengau, Papua New Guinea's provincial capital.

A PNG government spokesman said the first men to be transferred as part of the resettlement process were an Iranian engineer and a Pakistani human resources manager.

The transfer came a day earlier than scheduled.

"We're not going to let the protests undermine the process that is taking place to enable these people to start a new life and make a contribution to the economy and community of Papua New Guinea," the spokesman said.

Plans to move some of the 50 men granted refugee status by PNG to the transit centre were believed to be the main reason for recent protests and hunger strikes.

At the Australian-funded transit facility, refugees will receive language and cultural training while they wait for an employment opportunity elsewhere in PNG.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-21/two-manus-island-detainees-about-to-be-resettled-png/6032066>

45. First refugees moved out of detention as hunger strike continues

Papua New Guinean government threatens to cut off communications for asylum seekers in the Australian-run detention centre as protest goes on

The Guardian

Ben Doherty

Wednesday 21 January 2015 19.23 AEST

The first two refugees have been moved from detention on Manus Island to a purpose-built "refugee transit centre" near Lorengau, as a week-long hunger strike still grips the detention centre, and the Papua New Guinean government threatens to cut off all communication for detainees.

Late on Wednesday afternoon, two other men attempted suicide in Mike compound inside the detention centre. Pictures and video – that Guardian Australia has chosen not to publish – show other detainees rushing to intervene and stop them, and then carrying them to medical care.

Earlier on Wednesday, two refugees, one Iranian and one Pakistani, were moved voluntarily to the new refugee transit centre in Lorengau, the provincial capital.

The purpose-built centre – built at a cost of \$138m by the Australian government – is designed as temporary housing within the Lorengau community for refugees, before they are resettled elsewhere in PNG.

The two men moved have not been a part of this week's protests, and had previously expressed a desire to be released from detention into the community.

However, up to 50 other refugees, who were told they would be forcibly removed to Lorengau on Thursday, are still refusing to go.

Resistance to the move to Lorengau was a key driver of protests that have racked the centre this week, with refugees saying they feared being attacked by the local population.

In February last year, during riots in the centre, PNG police and workers stormed the detention centre and attacked detainees, killing one, and injuring 70.

Threats of violence against detainees remain commonplace, and many detainees remain fearful of the local population.

The men in Lorengau will be guarded, the Australian government has said.

The men will receive a 100-kina-a-week allowance, as well as language training, but they will not be able to work on Manus. The PNG government aims, ultimately, to find them jobs and resettle them elsewhere in the country.

Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition said, despite the men's willingness to move to Lorengau, they remained vulnerable.

"Everybody hopes that that transfer will go safely, but whether they can be kept safe remains a major concern. The whole situation is tense, and insecure.

"It is demonstration of the level of fear amongst these men, that only two men, out of more than 1000 in the centre, of which 71 have been found to be refugees, only two are willing to go."

The office of the immigration minister, Peter Dutton, did not return calls.

Inside the Manus detention centre, several hundred men remain on a hunger-strike.

Many have refused food and fluid for days. Dozens have collapsed from dehydration and have been placed on intravenous drips by medical staff.

Several men have also committed acts of self-harm – four have swallowed razor blades and others have drunk detergent.

Those on hunger strike say they will continue their protest against being moved. In letters, they have asked to be handed over to the United Nations.

At the same time, the PNG government is seeking to control all communications coming from within the detention centre.

Throughout the protests of the last week, detainees have made regular contact with media, refugee advocates, and their families. They have sent out images and videos of the protests, often to the embarrassment of the Australian and PNG governments who have sought to downplay their seriousness.

Papua New Guinea's immigration minister, Rimbink Pato, told Radio New Zealand he wanted to restrict all communications with the outside world.

"Nobody has access to the centre except the PNG and the Australian government, so with the internet and all the other access that is available, they're directly linking in with the asylum seekers, and so how we can control that information is also being addressed by the Australian government and the PNG government so that they will get correct information that is in their best interests."

The regulations imposed on detainees by Transfield specifically allow them free communication with the outside world.

"You will be able to communicate freely with family, friends, diplomatic or consular representatives, and other representatives," says the Transfield "rights and responsibilities" document, obtained by Guardian Australia.

Victoria Martin-Iverson from the Refugee Rights Action Network said efforts to silence men who had not committed any crime was a flagrant breach of human rights.

"RRAN is horrified that people being interned without charge or trial may be held incommunicado as well."

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/21/manus-island-asylum-seekers-moved-detention-hunger-strike>

46. Two Manus Island asylum seekers try to hang themselves

Manus Island: Two asylum seekers try to hang themselves at detention centre

By PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane
First posted Wed 21 Jan 2015, 6:02pm
Updated Wed 21 Jan 2015, 6:06pm

Two asylum seekers have tried to hang themselves at the Manus Island detention centre but have reportedly survived.

The ABC has received video footage appearing to show two men being stopped from hanging themselves.

Other men hold them off the ground, while the material being used as a noose is cut for one man and untied for the other.

Asylum seekers say the attempted suicide happened in Mike compound.

"Many people have decided to do suicide... our situation is critical," one an asylum seeker.

There are unconfirmed reports two men in Foxtrot compound swallowed nail cutters and another swallowed razor blades in separate acts of self-harm.

Protests and hunger strike continue at the Australian-run centre over plans to resettle refugees in Papua New Guinea.

Earlier today PNG's government said weapons were not used by asylum seekers during a standoff with guards at the Manus Island detention centre on Monday, contradicting comments from Australia's Immigration Minister.

Peter Dutton yesterday told the ABC's 7:30 program asylum seekers were armed with makeshift weapons when security guards forced entry into Delta compound to end a three-day blockade.

However, a PNG government spokesman has told the ABC asylum seekers did not use weapons during the intervention on Monday.

The spokesman said police had found "weapons" during a later search of Delta compound, but was waiting for further information about what was found.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-21/manus-island-two-men-try-to-hang-themselves/6032608>

47. PNG may restrict communications at Manus

Radio New Zealand News

Updated at 9:54 pm on 20 January 2015

Papua New Guinea's immigration minister says his government is looking at restricting communications at the Manus Island asylum seeker detention centre.

Rimbink Pato has blamed recent unrest at the centre on Australian refugee advocacy groups, saying they're stoking fear by spreading misinformation about PNG.

As part of an agreement with Canberra, those in Manus who are found to be refugees will be resettled in PNG, and not Australia.

Mr Pato says refugee advocates are interfering in the resettlement process and communications restrictions could be implemented as a result.

"Nobody has access to the centre except the PNG and the Australian government, so with the internet and all the other access that is available, they're directly linking in with the asylum seekers, and so how we can control that information is also being addressed by the Australian government and the PNG government so that they will get correct information that is in their best interests." --- Rimbink Pato.

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/264114/png-may-restrict-communications-at-manus>

48. PNG contradicts Dutton comments about Manus weapons

PNG government contradicts Peter Dutton's comments that protesting asylum seekers used weapons

ABC News Online

By PNG correspondent Liam Cochrane

First posted Wed 21 Jan 2015, 1:35pm

Updated Wed 21 Jan 2015, 3:17pm

Papua New Guinea's government says weapons were not used by asylum seekers during a standoff with guards at the Manus Island detention centre on Monday, contradicting comments from Australia's Immigration Minister.

Peter Dutton yesterday told the ABC's 7:30 program asylum seekers were armed with makeshift weapons when security guards forced entry into Delta compound to end a three-day blockade.

"Some transferrers, as I'm advised, had fashioned weapons or there was the suggestion of that," he said.

He later added: "I think it's important to point out that we're not talking about firearms, for example; we're talking about homemade or home-fashioned weapons."

However, a PNG government spokesman has told the ABC asylum seekers did not use weapons during the intervention on Monday.

The spokesman said police had found "weapons" during a later search of Delta compound, but was waiting for further information about what was found.

There have been conflicting accounts about the level of force used to end the blockade of Delta compound.

Asylum seekers and Australia-based refugee advocates say guards beat the detainees and dragged them on the ground.

The ABC has seen a photograph of a man with a bruised face and nose, who says he was beaten and is now in Lorengau provincial prison.

Mr Dutton said there had been "some physical confrontation" between guards and asylum seekers.

"There would have been some physical confrontation, for example, but I think the fact that it was over within a relatively short period of time and the police who were on standby didn't see a need to intervene would suggest that, I think, that the operation was carried out successfully," he said.

The PNG government spokesman said some asylum seekers were restrained for shouting or not following directions. He said there were no serious injuries.

Protests and hunger strikes continue at the Australian-run centre.

Refugees transferred to transit facility

Meanwhile, two refugees have been transferred from the Manus Island detention centre to a transit facility on the outskirts of Lorengau, Papua New Guinea's provincial capital.

A PNG government spokesman said the first men to be transferred as part of the resettlement process were an Iranian engineer and a Pakistani human resources manager.

The transfer came a day earlier than scheduled.

"We're not going to let the protests undermine the process that is taking place to enable these people to start a new life and make a contribution to the economy and community of Papua New Guinea," the spokesman said.

Plans to move some of the 50 men granted refugee status by PNG to the transit centre were believed to be the main reason for recent protests and hunger strikes.

At the Australian-funded transit facility, refugees will receive language and cultural training while they wait for an employment opportunity elsewhere in PNG.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-21/png-contradicts-dutton-on-weapons-in-manus-standoff/6032066>

49. Manus protesters in jail until refugee status decided

Arrested Manus protesters face jail conditions until refugee status decided

None of the 58 asylum seekers who were arrested following protests have been charged yet face living in prison for an indeterminate time

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Friday 23 January 2015 15.53 AEST

Fifty-eight detainees forcibly removed from the Manus Island detention centre could be held in jail without charge until their refugee status determinations are made.

Video footage obtained by Guardian Australia shows dozens of asylum seekers and refugees held in a single, windowless prison cell.

There is no furniture in the cell. Almost all the men lie close together and motionless in tight lines on the floor.

A man speaking on the video – whose voice has been altered to avoid identification – alleged the men were beaten by security guards employed by Wilson and by police while in custody.

"They have beaten everyone in this camp. We are totalling 58 people, they beat the shit out of all of us," he said.

The video shows marks on some of the men's bodies. It ends abruptly when a noise is heard, apparently outside the cell.

The Australian immigration minister, Peter Dutton, has said previously that the protesters were arrested there was "a degree of force ... that's appropriate", while the Papua New Guinean immigration minister, Rimbink Pato, said some agitators were restrained but there were no serious injuries.

Both governments have denied any improper use of force. Neither minister returned calls on Thursday.

Detainees on Manus Island have had an antagonistic relationship with the PNG police.

An Australian government review last year found that PNG police were the major catalyst for violence during protests in February last year, when they invaded the detention centre and attacked detainees.

Detainees have said they are regularly threatened by police and locals, while police have said detainees often racially abused them.

None of the men arrested at the detention centre this week have been charged with any offence.

Most of the asylum seekers were arrested after detention centre guards in riot gear broke through a barricade in Delta compound. Suspected protest "ringleaders" from other compounds were also arrested.

Guardian Australia has been told some of the men imprisoned were taken from the Manus centre's secret solitary confinement cells, the Chauka isolation unit.

The National newspaper in PNG reported that some of the men would be held in Lorengau prison on Manus Island, while others would be flown to the larger Bomana prison in Port Moresby.

Australia is building a dedicated immigration prison for asylum seekers whose claims for refugee status are not successful at Bomana, but that is not yet ready.

The men moved to Port Moresby will be housed in the existing prison. A PNG government source told the Nation the asylum seekers would be moved to the capital's prison over the next week.

"Forty or 50 asylum seekers will be flown to Port Moresby," he said. "This has caused concern among senior management at Correctional Service because of the security of our own prisoners."

Last month Pato signed documents declaring both the Bomana and Lorengau prisons, and the Manus police lock-up, "to be relocation centres for the temporary residence of asylum seekers pending the determination of their refugee status under Papua New Guinea law", the government source said.

The PNG migration act allows the minister to direct where refugees and asylum seekers must live, including in prisons.

The Australian immigration department refused to comment on the incarceration of asylum seekers.

In the Manus Island detention centre, the hunger strike that started 11 days ago continued across several of the compounds. Two Sudanese men who swallowed nail files have reportedly been taken Port Moresby for further medical treatment. A man who earlier swallowed four razor blades has already been removed from Manus Island.

Several hundred men continue to refuse food and water, and more than 200 people have been taken away to receive medical attention for severe dehydration and other complications.

Some of the men who want to eat reportedly feel pressure from other protesters to maintain the hunger strike.

Meanwhile 15 more Iranian detainees have gone on hunger strike in Darwin's Wickham Point detention centre, protesting against their conditions and detention.

Security contractor Wilson and detention centre manager Transfield have both been approached for comment.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/23/arrested-manus-protesters-face-jail-conditions-until-refugee-status-decided>

50. 'Secrecy-at-any-cost' attempts to uncover sources criticised

Politicians criticise 'secrecy-at-any-cost' attempts to uncover journalists' sources

Labor and Australian Greens respond to revelations journalists reporting on immigration issues were referred to police in a bid to identify their sources

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Thursday 22 January 2015 17.04 AEST

Labor and the Greens have expressed serious concern about federal government agencies asking police to investigate confidential sources and whistleblowers over reports about asylum seekers.

On Thursday Guardian Australia revealed journalists reporting on asylum-seeker policies have been repeatedly referred to the police in attempts to uncover sources.

Greens senator Sarah Hanson-Young said she would move for greater access to detention centres when parliament resumed, and described the referral of journalists to the federal police as an "appalling act".

“The only insurance the public has against this government’s secrecy is granting journalists access to the detention centres and giving those inside the protection to speak freely,” she said.

“That is why when parliament resumes I will be moving for the media to have access to all Australian-funded detention centres and will move to provide protections to people inside to speak freely about what is really happening behind the gates.”

Labor’s acting immigration spokesman, Matt Thistlethwaite, said the reports were “extremely concerning”.

“This government has a woeful track record when it comes to being upfront with the Australian people,” he said. “This irrational secrecy at any cost behaviour leads us to ask what on earth is this government trying to hide?”

“We are simply left with more questions than answers.”

The previous Labor government introduced a media access deed that allowed journalists to visit detention centres under the supervision of immigration staff. But since the Coalition was elected in September 2013, no journalists has been granted access to an Australian detention centre.

Australia has strict laws surrounding leaks of government information, and the Australian Law Reform Commission has previously recommended they be narrowed.

Reporters have been unable to visit the Manus Island detention centre, where hunger strikes and protests have now lasted more than a week.

Australian Lawyers Alliance spokesman Greg Barns told Guardian Australia the report showed the government was trying to intimidate journalists.

“It’s notorious that the AFP does not like to spend its time and limited resources on investigating leaks from Canberra. One, because they never result in a prosecution; and two, because they’re resources intensive” he said.

“There’s a clear pattern here emerging where the government is adopting a Nixon White House strategy of seeking to intimidate journalists who are reporting on what is going on Australia’s immigration detention network.”

The AFP have refused to confirm or deny whether authorisation has been given for any journalists’ phone or web records to accessed.

On Thursday the attorney general’s department said journalists and their sources should not be entitled to privileged communication that would prevent or impose limits on the government’s access to metadata.

In a submission to the joint parliamentary committee on intelligence and security inquiry into the government’s plan to store web and phone data for two years, the department said it rejected arguments that any “special status” should be afforded to particular powers.

“Disclosures of data are available to support the enforcement of the criminal law, administration of pecuniary penalties and the protection of the public revenue,” the submission said. “It is not appropriate to afford a special status to particular types of communications as powers of this type should, by their nature, be applied generally.”

The department argued though that “telecommunications data would not be available” for certain types of whistleblowers who made disclosures under the Public Interest Disclosure regime set up by the Labor government in 2013.

But these disclosures would not encompass leaks to journalists, and would only relate to a limited range of internal disclosures to government agencies and oversight bodies.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/jan/22/politicians-criticise-secrecy-at-any-cost-attempts-to-uncover-journalists-sources>

51. Corinne Grant: Manus Shame: “We Look Like Cowards”

The Hoopla
January 22, 2015
by Corinne Grant

Want to know what’s really happening on Manus Island? Good luck.

With our government refusing to tell us what it is doing, and without journalists and independent observers having access to offshore detention centres, we’ve got absolutely no hope of knowing what is being done to other human beings in our name.

When asked at a press conference two days ago if anyone had been mistreated in the effort to end the protest on Manus Island, Abbott refused to answer the question. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton shed a little more light on the situation, explaining on ABC's 7:30 that detainees had fashioned weapons and that was why force was necessary.

Incredibly, Dutton then qualified his statement by saying there were "suggestions" that asylum seekers had weapons. In other words, Dutton has no proof but is happy to paint asylum seekers as violent and dangerous in order to justify beating them.

It's hard to forget former Immigration Minister Scott Morrison's assured claim that Reza Berati was outside the compound when he was killed, and equally hard to forget he was eventually found out to be making that up.

Dutton may very well find himself in the same situation. Until then, none of us really know what's going on.

The ABC says that food, water and medical supplies were blocked from the centre during the protest. Tony Abbott said that's "complete rubbish". Dutton gave us a different story, stating that the supplies were actually blocked by protesting asylum seekers.

Dutton also complained that journalists should stop reporting on Manus Island because it's "not helpful". You've really got to wonder, not helpful to whom? Abbott and Dutton can't even get their stories straight. Were the stories of the denial of basic necessities "complete rubbish" or not?

If the government is concerned the reports coming out of Manus Island are false, then there's a fairly simple way to remedy the situation: let independent observers into the centre.

Bill Shorten has called for transparency. Greens Senator Sarah Hanson Young has called for an independent mediation team. Both of these demands are entirely reasonable.

Dutton called Bill Shorten "irresponsible" for asking for transparency. He claimed it would have risked national security if we knew what was happening to the detainees. That is ridiculous. These asylum seekers are under lock and key on a remote island. They'd been denying themselves food and water for a number of days before things turned violent.

How exactly were they going to threaten our national security? Were these starving men going to fall into a trance, do a spot of astral travelling and psychically invade our shores?

Dutton whined that asylum seekers were "irresponsible" for going on a hunger strike. That is laughable. If you treat human beings worse than animals, if you lock them up and mistreat them in the most appalling way, then they will react in the only way they can – with desperation. What's irresponsible is knowingly overseeing and condoning the mistreatment of other human beings and then attempting to cover it up.

While Dutton complains about journalists, citizens and other politicians wanting to know the truth, the number of serious incidents in both offshore and onshore detention centres in the past year has quietly risen from 298 to 449.

There's more self harm, an unexploded bomb was found on Nauru, and people are contracting tuberculosis, malaria and encephalitis. Shockingly, eight people have died and guards and caseworkers have been injured. This is definitely not the kind of information Dutton wants us to know.

Two days ago, a gloating Tony Abbott declared that the Manus Island asylum seekers had been "defeated" by security forces. It appears we're at war with innocent people we've locked up in dangerous and disease-riddled prisons, and then mistreated to the point where they are fighting to be set free.

What an utterly stupid bunch of cowards we must look like to the rest of the world.

<http://thehoopla.com.au/manus-shame-look-like-cowards/>

52. Australia's asylum seeker policy is mired in political expediency

Labor and the Coalition are together supporting a policy that fosters gross abuse and untold human misery

The Guardian
Ben Doherty
Thursday 22 January 2015 13.10 AEST

As Manus Island roils from another "eminently foreseeable" outbreak of protest among detainees, both of Australia's major political parties have ignored the festering problem of gross abuses on the island, and chosen instead to use the crisis for their own political gain.

The politics of asylum has, again, overshadowed the policy.

With hundreds of detainees in Australia's care on hunger strike, others driven to suicide attempts and to swallowing razor blades in protest, finally both parties felt moved to comment publicly on the Manus Island detention centre. But they used it only as an opportunity to attack one another.

The immigration minister Peter Dutton, having denied for two days – in the face of photographic evidence – that a hunger strike was even occurring, said the protests on Manus were a result of “Labor’s mess” and the caseload of asylum claims his government had inherited.

He went on to blame the protests on ringleaders and un-named “advocates” who were apparently inciting dissent.

The Labor opposition did no better. For political convenience, Labor has chosen invisibility on asylum – Bob Carr’s “no daylight” doctrine – because the party believes it is an issue on which it can only get beaten.

This week Labor, somewhat remarkably, did put its head above the parapet on the issue. But rather than talk about the 1,000 men shipped into foreign incarceration against their will, held for how long they do not know – despite not being charged with a crime or even alleged to have committed any crime - the Labor leader Bill Shorten instead chose a minor corollary issue, condemning the “culture of secrecy” around offshore detention.

The point is a valid one, but demonstrates a short memory: Manus Island was just as off-limits to journalists and public scrutiny when a Labor government opened it in 2012.

Australia has been badly let down by its major political parties on asylum. The Greens have been a notable voice in opposition, though in Labor-Coalition bipartisan support lies the danger of poor policy uncontested for expediency’s sake.

Neither side, now, wants to address what has become a calamitous policy that has caused untold damage to thousands of people who have tried to come to Australia seeking protection, is a source of huge tension with supposed allies and a massive burden to the Australian taxpayer, and that has significantly damaged Australia’s reputation across the world.

On Manus Island scores of reports, from media outlets, human rights groups, staff whistleblowers and the federal parliament, have revealed a litany of abuses and concerns:

- Some of the men on Manus have been held in detention on the island for more than 500 days. They are no closer to knowing whether they will be found to be refugees.
- Detainees fear being moved from detention “into the community” at Lorengau because of hostility from the local community. One asylum seeker was murdered during riots last year when local police and workers invaded the centre. Reza Barati was allegedly killed when a rock was dropped on his head.
- Rape, sexual assault, violence, and other abuses are commonplace and often ignored by guards.
- “Non-compliant” detainees are held in solitary confinement, where they have alleged brutal and violent maltreatment.
- Medical care is catastrophically poor, detainees have been given expired medicines.
- Hamid Kehzaei died from a treatable infection, but the correct antibiotics were not kept on the island, and his transfer to Australia was delayed by bureaucratic hold-ups.
- The detention centre has been left without running water.

Nauru, similarly, has been wracked by regular reports of child refugees being beaten by locals, asylum seekers being sexually assaulted and raped, and reports of self-harm by children.

Nobody who has worked on Manus or Nauru sees as long-term solutions for Australia’s refugee problem.

Senior public servants in the immigration department, experienced experts in the field, are increasingly exasperated at being forced to implement politically-expedient policies that have proven unworkable, that breach international law, and that cause more problems than they solve.

The Coalition government, in particular, has made a rod for its own back in its dealing with the issue of asylum seekers.

For months in opposition, it gleefully used “stop the boats” as a cudgel with which to beat Labor over its perceived failure on asylum seekers. In government, it gloatingly counted off the days since boats arrived.

Now the government is forced to defend increasingly hostile, brutal acts done in Australia’s name, to go to more and more draconian lengths, just to enforce an overly simplistic political slogan it finds itself ingloriously wedded to.

The government has backed itself into a political corner from which it can find no way out. And it is the asylum seekers in Australia’s care who continue to suffer as a result.

53. Labor ranks agitate to close asylum centres

Joe Kelly
The Australian
January 22, 2015 12:00AM

NEW calls are emerging from within the Labor Party to end offshore processing and close down the centres at Nauru and Manus Island as refugee advocates hit back at suggestions they were encouraging disruptive detainee behaviour.

As a mass hunger strike continued yesterday at the Manus centre, Labor MPs Melissa Parke and Anna Burke said that offshore processing was not working and lives now hung in the balance.

"It's very clear the safety of transferees and staff cannot be guaranteed on Manus Island," Ms Parke said.

"And the secrecy around the arrangement on Manus Island is totally unacceptable. I do think that offshore processing is clearly not working and those centres need to close down."

Ms Burke said she had been vindicated in opposing offshore processing and the policy should never have been implemented. She said it was a mistake both sides of politics had to confront.

"The justification for the policy based on the prevention of lives lost at sea is hard to bear out when we might be seeing lives lost on Manus," she said. Ms Burke said the government had failed to finalise an adequate resettlement arrangement for detainees to be moved into the local community and warned that it had sparked the current crisis.

Labor for Refugees national co-convenor Robin Rothfield said it was necessary to remind the parliamentary wing of the party of its platform. "Labor for Refugees demands of the party leadership an immediate call for asylum-seekers on Manus Island, who attempted to seek asylum in Australia, to be brought to Australia for processing," he said.

Refugee Action Coalition spokesman Ian Rintoul released a statement yesterday casting Tony Abbott and Immigration Minister Peter Dutton as torturers and "Hitlers", as Deputy Opposition Leader Tanya Plibersek slammed the government's "culture of secrecy".

A statement, signed by dozens of Manus Island asylum-seekers, claims their 10-day hunger strike will continue. "In here alarms are ringing but heartless politicians are still indifferent," it said. "We will continue our push until we reach our ultimate goal which is FREEDOM. Please rescue us from the HITLERS of our time."

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/immigration/labor-ranks-agitate-to-close-asylum-centres/story-fn9hm1gu-1227192606271>

54. MEDIA RELEASE: Manus witch hunt fails, hunger strike in 10th day

MANUS WITCH HUNT FAILS - HUNGER STRIKE CONTINUES INTO THE TENTH DAY

Thursday January 22, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

Despite witch-hunts, blacklists, and the arrest of scores of asylum seekers, over 700 asylum seekers remain on hunger strike.

Transfield and the Immigration Department have stepped up their witch-hunt against so-called ring-leaders. Two more asylum seekers were arrested in Mike Compound on Wednesday afternoon, as Transfield guards took the opportunity of the attempted hangings there, to put more security guards into the compound. They were accused of sending messages.

Ten community leaders in Foxtrot compound are on the blacklist.

There has been no running water in Foxtrot compound since Wednesday afternoon -- bottled water is being used to wash and to try to flush toilets -- see attached photos.

Punitive measures imposed by IHMS at the medical centre have also done nothing to break the protest. Two Somali asylum seekers who swallowed nail clippers were sent back to the compound without treatment. They have been left in such serious pain, that they are unable to walk.

The Manus Island hunger strike protest has prevented the proposed forced transfer of refugees to the unsafe temporary accommodation at Lorengau -- the move that triggered the mass protest 10 days ago.

"The government's crack down hasn't worked. In fact it has increased the numbers on hunger strike. But it now has the opportunity to go back to the drawing board and discuss a safe third country option. It is worse than reckless to continue to pretend that there is a resettlement arrangement with PNG. Every day delayed puts more lives at risk," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

"Locking up asylum seekers for having mobile phones; and threatening to shut down communications on Manus Island shows just how much the government has to hide. Immigration Minister was caught out over his claims that asylum seekers in Delta compound had home-made weapons.

"If Peter Dutton had any respect for the truth, he would resign."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713

55. MEDIA RELEASE: Hunger strike in 11th day - no exaggeration

Friday January 23, 2015
Refugee Action Coalition
www.refugeeaction.org.au
Ian Rintoul
mobile 0417 275 713

After eleven days, the Manus Island hunger strike remains hundreds strong.

Despite the Immigration Minister's attempts to maintain a media blackout, the truth about Manus Island is still getting out.

The Minister's intemperate statements that asylum seekers are making "exaggerated and unfounded claims" are driving more people to join the protest. Ninety-five percent of Mike Compound -- over 300 people - is now on hunger strike.

Attached are photos of hunger strikers in Foxtrot compound -- taken Thursday 22 January. More than 30 people collapsed and were taken to medical on the morning of Thursday 22 January in Foxtrot compound alone. The asylum seeker in the wheelchair has lost 8 kgs since beginning the hunger strike.

A message from another compound reads: "They are bringing food and fruit every day to [en]courage people to break the protest, but we wont do that and this the 5th day that nobody go to the mess to eat food, [not] even 1 person."

Meanwhile the medical abuses mount. It has become routine for people taken to IHMS to be returned to their compounds without treatment.

Two Sudanese asylum seekers who swallowed nail clippers on Wednesday 21 January were sent back to their compound that same day, without treatment. After twenty-fours in pain, security guards eventually took them back to the IHMS clinic on Thursday, 22nd. It is believed they have now been medivacced to Port Moresby.

"The withdrawal of medical assistance to asylum seekers is nothing short of barbaric. The Minister is refusing to comment on what is happening on Manus Island because the actions of the government cannot be defended," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

FEARS FOR JAILED MANUS ASYLUM SEEKERS

Meanwhile fears are held for the welfare of the asylum seekers being held in the Lorengau jail.

"The people being held in Lorengau and in Chauka are particularly vulnerable," said Rintoul, "We know that people are being interrogated by Australian officials in Chauka. Given the history of the PNG police involvement in the violent attack on the asylum seekers last year, we need a guarantee of the safety of the asylum seekers in their custody."

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

56. Asylum seekers to reportedly be sent to Port Moresby jail

ABC News Online
First posted Sun 25 Jan 2015, 12:49pm
Updated Sun 25 Jan 2015, 1:24pm

Staff at the Manus Island detention centre are reportedly preparing to transfer a group of asylum seekers to a prison complex in Port Moresby after days of protest at the centre.

The men are considered leaders of recent protests at the Australian-run immigration centre, but it is not clear if the men have been charged or how many will be sent to the capital.

Local media has reported 14 men will be sent to Bomana prison in Port Moresby.

Earlier this week more than 40 men were detained by guards at the detention centre's Delta compound, ending a three-day blockade.

The ABC has obtained a video reportedly sent from inside the prison.

Asylum seekers said the cuts and bruises seen in the images were from police and guards beating them.

The claims come despite statements from the Australian and Papua New Guinean governments saying the force used to restrain so-called agitators was "minimal".

More asylum seekers are being held in police cells nearby.

It is not clear if any of these men have been charged with a crime under PNG law.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said enforcement of PNG laws was a matter for the PNG government.

Meanwhile, at least six refugees have been transferred to a transit facility near the main town in Manus Island awaiting resettlement.

Three Iranians, two Pakistanis and an Afghan man have moved to the East Lorengau transit facility.

They leave behind protests at the detention centre.

More refugees are expected to arrive at the transit facility where they will learn the local language Tok Pisin, and wait for an employment opportunity that will allow them to resettle elsewhere in PNG.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-25/reports-manus-island-protesters-to-be-sent-to-port-moresby-jail/6044600>

57. Julian Burnside: Manus Island: What will it take to shock us?

The reports coming out of Manus Island right now should be enough to shock us, but they aren't. What will it take? Barrister Julian Burnside has some ideas.

ABC The Drum
By Julian Burnside
Posted Fri 23 Jan 2015, 4:53am

Reports about what is happening on Manus Island are mixed. According to inside sources, hundreds of asylum seekers are on a hunger strike, many have sewn their lips together, and tensions are high. According to Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, security levels have been high, as a precaution, and the hunger strike and lip sewing are the result of urging by refugee advocates. There has been little apparent public concern.

Some of the hunger strikers have said they are willing to die, and want to donate their organs to Australians. The public, in its post-Christmas torpor, was unmoved. Letters sent from Manus have been published, but this has provoked outrage only in that minority of Australians who are concerned about refugees. The public remain unmoved.

In February 2014, Reza Berati was murdered inside the Manus detention facility, allegedly by members of the staff who were supposedly keeping the detainees safe. I have been informed that eyewitnesses to the murder are still being held in solitary confinement. No one has yet been brought to trial for the murder. In September 2014, Hamid Kehazaei died of septicaemia after an infected foot was inadequately treated. Nobody has been held to account for his death in what looks like significant medical negligence.

Public reaction to these things has been minimal.

There are a few facts we all know, or should know. First (and arguably the most significant fact): the asylum seekers held on Manus and in other detention centres are not "illegal". They have committed no offence by coming to Australia seeking protection.

They are held in captivity without charge and without trial, because their conduct in seeking asylum is not an offence under Australian law. The government of Australia, and parts of the media, refer to them as "illegals" because it makes locking them up look faintly respectable. When they arrive in Australia asking to be protected from persecution, Australia takes them

forcibly, against their will, to Manus. There they are held in uncomfortable, unhygienic conditions in tropical heat. They wait until their claims for refugee status are determined. Some of them have been there for about two years.

It should shock us to know how comprehensively the government has lied to us about Manus. It lies to us by calling asylum seekers "illegal". It lies to us about the conditions in which they are held. Maybe it would shock us to know that the people who are being mistreated by our government (and at vast expense to the taxpayer) are just ordinary people: human beings who have the same hopes and desires, the same frailties and fears as most of us.

Second: It is very clear that, if you lock up an innocent person in circumstances where they do not know how long it will be before they are released, they fall into hopelessness and despair after about 12 or 18 months. One very well-documented response to this despair is self-harm. Typically, they will cut themselves, or sew their lips together, or try to starve themselves to death.

Third: conditions in Manus are very harsh. In October 2013, the UNHCR reported on conditions on Manus. It noted:

"Overall, UNHCR was deeply troubled to observe that the current policies, operational approaches and harsh physical conditions at the [detention centre] do not comply with international standards and in particular ...constitute arbitrary and mandatory detention under international law; ...and do not provide safe and humane conditions of treatment in detention..."

There is not much doubt that our treatment of asylum seekers in Manus constitutes a crime against humanity. This is a matter of legal analysis, not political rhetoric. The hard facts about the horrific conditions on Manus Island that I've outlined above may not be enough to shock us, but the one thing that really might shock us is to see Abbott, Morrison and Dutton prosecuted in the International Criminal Court for those crimes. That's a pro bono case I would gladly prosecute.

---->>>> Julian Burnside AO QC is an Australian barrister and an advocate for human rights and fair treatment of refugees.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-23/burnside-manus-island-what-will-it-take-to-shock-us/6031334>

58. Baby Ferouz and family released from Darwin detention

Baby Ferouz and his asylum seeking family released from Darwin detention

ABC News Online
Posted Tue 20 Jan 2015, 4:49am

An asylum seeker couple and their Brisbane-born son, Ferouz, have been released from detention in Darwin.

The Myuddin family, who have been detention for 14 months, have been involved in a long-running legal battle with the Federal Government arguing the boy deserved a protection visa as he was born in Australia.

Last month the Coalition announced Ferouz and 30 other babies, born to illegal maritime arrivals, would be allowed to apply for a short-term visas while their families' refugee claims were assessed.

Ferouz was born in Brisbane's Mater Hospital in November 2013 after his mother, Latifar, was transferred from the detention centre on Nauru due to concerns about her pregnancy.

The family including his father and two siblings arrived on Christmas Island from Myanmar three months before Ferouz's birth in September 2013. They were fleeing persecution as minority Rohingyas in Myanmar.

Before the Immigration Department's short-term visa announcement, lawyers for the family had tried unsuccessfully in the courts to challenge the department's decision to deny him a protection visa.

The family's lawyer Murray Watt said the family's release from detention in Darwin was the next step in a long fight.

"These families are now released from detention and they will have the right to apply for a three-year refugee visa," Mr Watt said.

"They'll still have to go through the process. They'll still have to show they genuinely fear persecution if they're returned to their home country but at least they now have that opportunity.

"This is a really good step forward, that at last the Government have come to it's senses and recognised, at least for these children, continuing to keep them in detention is not the proper thing to do.

"It does give these families the first step towards potentially staying in Australia on a more long-term basis."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-01-20/baby-ferouz-and-his-family-released-from-darwin-detention/6026628>