

Project SafeCom News and Updates

Sunday, 17 May 2015

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1. Will Grant: Universities 'censor' bad ideas all the time, Tim Wilson. It's called learning

Bjørn Lomborg's assessment of climate change isn't just a 'contrarian' take. It's at odds with peer-reviewed science and isn't entitled to a platform at taxpayer expense

The Guardian
Will J Grant
Monday 11 May 2015 13.37 AEST

Late last week the University of Western Australia reversed course and rejected the \$4m the Abbott government had awarded it to host Bjørn Lomborg's Australian Consensus Centre. Christopher Pyne expressed the sentiments of the government:

What a sad day for academic freedom when staff at a university silence a dissenting voice rather than test their ideas in debate

Now the human rights commissioner, Tim Wilson, has weighed in, condemning the university for engaging in what he called "a culture of soft censorship". The human right of free speech requires, he argues, "more than just stopping censorious laws. It also requires a culture that tolerates dissent and allows for challenging ideas to be voice, heard and debated".

I'm 100% down with the idea that free speech requires more than stopping censorious laws, and I'm very much with Wilson on the point that it also requires a culture that tolerates dissent and allows challenging ideas to be voiced.

But the idea that all challenging ideas have a right to be heard is just nonsense – and it's a nonsense that he himself has rejected in an earlier mood:

"Walked past Occupy Melbourne protest, all people who think freedom of speech = freedom 2 b heard, time wasters ... send in the water cannons."

Apart from the water cannons bit I agree. A right to free speech doesn't mean a right to a platform to be heard.

We're used to the idea that universities are rampantly radical institutions, full of unwashed students in desperate need of a water cannon and lecturers like me who only egg them on.

But actually, universities are fundamentally conservative institutions. We engage in what Wilson would call "soft censorship" of bad ideas all the time. It's called learning.

In fact, the word censor comes from the Latin "to assess". In universities – whether in the sciences, social sciences or the humanities – people voice their ideas by submitting them for peer review, and if they're deemed good then they get a platform to be heard by a wider audience.

Great idea? Hurrah, you get published in Nature. Crap idea? You'll be rejected by the journals that have a reputation for quality. You don't get to have your ideas heard just because you really like them, because you say them over and over again, or because you've got powerful friends in the government.

So the academics and students at the University of Western Australia had every right to defend their reputation as a place that values actual scholarship – to defend their platform to be heard by students and the wider community – from the muckraking of the Abbott government and climate change action sceptics.

Lomborg's assessment of the potential impact of climate change isn't just a lighthearted contrarian take. It stands at odds with what the peer-reviewed science says, and Lomborg has presented insufficient evidence to sway such thinking.

Wilson argued that "the University of Western Australia essentially endorsed a culture of soft censorship by stopping these public policy questions even being asked". Lomborg remains as welcome as he's always been to submit his ideas to either the world of peer review or to raise his voice in other places. He just doesn't get a free platform to be heard at taxpayer expense.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/11/universities-censor-bad-ideas-all-the-time-tim-wilson-its-called-learning>

2. Counter-terrorism adviser: Abbott's IS 'death cult' label is counter-productive

Brisbane Times
May 11, 2015 - 7:24PM
Rachel Olding

Counter-terrorism advisers and Muslim community leaders have raised serious concerns about Prime Minister Tony Abbott's obsessive use of the phrase "death cult" to describe Islamic State, saying it is counter-productive, ineffective and does some of the terror group's marketing for them.

Of all the existential threats to the Australian way of life, none seem to have captured the Prime Minister's attention like the "death cult", otherwise known as Islamic State, ISIL or ISIS.

An analysis by Fairfax Media of all press releases, transcripts, speeches, interviews and YouTube videos uploaded by the Prime Minister's Office as well as Hansard reveals that Tony Abbott has used the term "death cult" 346 times since September.

In contrast, domestic violence rated a mention just 43 times in the same period.

Ebola was worth 63 mentions, ice was worth 53. Mr Abbott said the dreaded phrase "liberal spill" just seven times.

However, experts say the incessant use of "death cult" is a misfire by the Prime Minister that may have dangerous ramifications.

"Osama Bin Laden used to say, 'you love life, we love death'. Dying a martyr is their badge of honour, it's a huge push factor for young Australians and the Prime Minister is putting that front and centre," said Dr Anne Aly, from Curtin University, who had advised governments on counter-terrorism policy.

"I don't know who he's talking to when he says death cult because the people who are thinking about going over there are laughing and walking away."

Mr Abbott first coined the phrase on September 1 when announcing that Australia would enter Iraq.

It wasn't a nod to a heavy metal band or '80s horror movie but an attempt to delegitimise the Islamic caliphate that the terror group aspires to create.

"I refuse to call this hideous movement an 'Islamic state' because it is not a state; it is a death cult," he told parliament.

Mr Abbott has since mentioned "death cult" in 103 of the 516 press releases, transcripts, speeches and videos released by his office.

He managed to weave it into 36 interviews and speeches that had nothing to do with national security, from press conferences with NSW Premier Mike Baird on WestConnex to doorstops in Boronia about pharmaceuticals.

His record is 17 times in one press conference – a March 3 briefing on military operations in Iraq – and he has answered 20 questions without notice on "death cult" since September, compared to just one on ice, one on domestic violence and three on ebola.

No other world leader has followed suit. US President Barack Obama, like most others, also argues that the group is neither Islamic nor a legitimate state but prefers to stay neutral with ISIL or ISIS, acronyms for the earlier incarnation, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

At least 22 other Coalition MPs have followed their leader and mentioned "death cult" in parliament using adventurous variations like murderous death cult, bloodthirsty death cult and even apocalyptic death cult.

"The term has two effects," said Kuranda Seyit, a Muslim youth worker and secretary of the Islamic Council of Victoria.

"For mainstream Australians it creates a perception that these people are violent psychopaths. For the more impressionable sympathetic ear, say a young man angry with the world, the term has little meaning. Death cult is an out-dated term [without] the same connotations it had in the '80s or '90s."

Professor Michele Grossman, a cultural diversity researcher from Victoria University, said it was dangerous to use a term that only reflected one small part of the reality of Islamic State.

"It's too easy to overlook the elements of the IS narrative that focus on building a new world and a new order, promising action, power and engagement," she said. "This holds enormous potential appeal, especially for the young."

A spokesman for Mr Abbott said on Monday that he makes no apologies – "because that's what it is: a cult that rejoices in death".

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/counterterrorism-adviser-abbotts-is-death-cult-label-is-counterproductive-20150511-ggyl4i.html>

3. Paul Bongiorno: The budget prepares Scott Morrison

The Saturday Paper
May 16, 2015
Paul Bongiorno

[...]

Hockey did his ebullient best to talk up the economy in the face of available evidence to the contrary. In the past seven years, he has used the same evidence – slowing growth, higher unemployment, a collapse in confidence – to talk it down. But there are signs he is feeling very insecure in his job. The most dramatic illustration of this was in the traditional Mother's Day pre-budget interview with the venerable Laurie Oakes. It was a car crash.

The gallery veteran was bemused that the treasurer felt he was not allowed to talk about details of his budget. He said he was leaving the childcare package to the prime minister and the relevant minister, Scott Morrison. Surely it was Hockey's budget, Oakes prompted. The answer was stunning: "It is Tony Abbott's budget as well. It's a career-limiting move to release something on the same day the prime minister is, Laurie."

Could anyone imagine a Keating, Costello or a Swan being put in the position of saying they could not talk about a key budget measure? As the saying goes, many a true word is spoken in jest. Treasurers have been sacked before. Gough Whitlam made a habit of it, much to the detriment of his government. But Hockey's embarrassment is compounded by his invisibility in the past couple of weeks and Scott Morrison's in-your-face presence everywhere.

The humiliation of the treasurer reached a high-water mark the next day, with a report in the media section of The Australian that Morrison had a discussion with Abbott about being given the treasury portfolio if he succeeded in getting his Jobs for Families package through the senate. August was nominated as the handover timetable. For good measure, the report said there had been a power struggle in the Expenditure Review Committee of cabinet between Hockey and Morrison. "Absolute rubbish," was the swift denial from the social services minister.

The trouble is Morrison compounded the damage when he went on Radio 2GB and compared the treasurer to the disgraced rugby league player Greg Bird. Like the controversial star, currently serving eight weeks off the field for a dangerous illegal tackle, Hockey was going to score the try after Morrison had done all the hard work running the ball. He later said he was confusing his Birds, but Labor wouldn't let him off the hook. Shadow finance minister Tony Burke accused Morrison of deliberately demeaning the treasurer. Shadow treasurer Chris Bowen said the prime minister had already lost confidence in Hockey.

Then on budget day The Australian ran another story confirming that the sidelining of Hockey was a deliberate strategy worked out by Abbott and Morrison. It revealed Morrison rang Hockey thanking him for staying in the cupboard, as it were.

[...]

Full story at <http://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/opinion/topic/2015/05/16/the-budget-prepares-scott-morrison/14316984001873>

4. The Conversation website to 'take stock' after funding cut by a quarter

Brisbane Times
May 15, 2015 - 1:30AM
Matthew Knott

Academic website The Conversation will lose a quarter of its annual budget because of the federal government's decision to scrap its funding.

The government announced in Tuesday's budget that there would be no new funding for the website, created in 2011 to give academics a platform to promote their research to a broader audience.

After providing \$1.5 million to launch the site, Labor gave the website an extra \$2 million in the 2013 budget. The website was also given tax deductibility status.

In a note published on The Conversation's website, executive director Andrew Jaspan said that he had lobbied for two years' extra government funding. Last week Mr Jaspan was still holding out hope that funding had been continued despite indications the funding would be axed.

"We failed to persuade Education Minister Christopher Pyne that we need a further two years funding to secure our future," Mr Jaspan wrote in his note. "Our aim is to be fully self-sufficient by 2017 through the contributions from our global network ... We must now take stock."

The other 75 per cent of The Conversation's \$4 million annual budget comes from 33 universities, the CSIRO, commercial partners and public donations.

The website is asking for readers to contribute \$300 a year to help make up the shortfall.

Mr Pyne said last week that the website does a "great job" but these are lean budgetary times.

"The Conversation was initiated by the previous Labor government," Mr Pyne said. "It had a shelf-life of three years at which time The Conversation is meant to be self-sustaining.

"They were given \$3.5 million – in that time they've expanded to Africa, the United States and the UK and I expect that they are in a position where they will be self-sustaining otherwise they wouldn't be able to expand overseas in the way they have."

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/budget-2015-the-conversation-website-to-take-stock-after-funding-cut-by-a-quarter-20150514-gh1gpz.html>

5. New York Times: Australia's Rigid Immigration Barrier

New York Times

By GABRIELLE APPLEBY

May 7, 2015

SYDNEY, Australia — In April, after the deaths of nearly 900 migrants attempting to reach Europe by boat, Australia's conservative prime minister, Tony Abbott, urged European governments to adopt his country's hard-line stance. The sentiment echoed a comment he'd made weeks earlier: that only his administration could resist "the cries of the human rights lawyers."

The Abbott government's strategy is to treat asylum-seekers who arrive by boat so terribly that they simply give up. Unconstrained by a bill of rights, Canberra has implemented a suite of harsh policies to this end. And now Parliament is considering two bills that could further toughen the country's stance.

Central to Australia's policies is the navy's authority to intercept and return boats carrying asylum-seekers to countries like Indonesia, where they live in legal limbo, and Sri Lanka, where they may face government prosecution or worse. Those who do reach Australian territory are sent to privately run detention centers on the impoverished Pacific island states of Papua New Guinea and Nauru, where conditions are notoriously poor. As of March 31, 124 children were in immigration detention in Australia; 103 on Nauru.

Canberra spends millions publicizing these policies abroad: Newspaper ads, posters and even a TV movie warn those desperate enough to attempt the hazardous boat journey that they "will not make Australia home."

Last September, in return for \$31 million in development assistance, Cambodia agreed to accept refugees held on Nauru, provided they consented to the transfer. Refugees have been told of Cambodia's "wealth of opportunity," and offered resettlement packages in exchange for volunteering. But the pitch is a fantasy. In November, Human Rights Watch reported on Cambodia's failure to support refugees already living there; the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has also expressed concern about Cambodia's treatment of asylum-seekers.

Canberra, undeterred by the human cost, is pushing legislation that would further entrench these programs. One bill, likely to be voted on this month, would make operational a permanent Australian Border Force in the Department of Immigration. To be fully established by July, this force would oversee the interception and return of boats carrying asylum-seekers; its commissioner would have the same standing as the chief of the Australian Defense Force.

This heightened national security presence would make it easier for Canberra to avoid releasing information on attempted boat arrivals. The government already has a history of invoking the need to protect "on-water" operations to maintain secrecy in its immigration enforcement. In 2013, Scott Morrison, then the immigration minister, refused to answer questions in Parliament about a reported boat arrival, claiming this would jeopardize a "military-led border security operation." In April, the U.N.H.C.R. expressed concern over reports that the Australian Navy had turned back a boat carrying 46 Vietnamese asylum-seekers, allegedly rejecting their applications at sea following expedited assessments. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton initially declined to comment, citing "operational matters." The government has since confirmed the incident, but disclosed no details on the assessments.

The second piece of legislation before Parliament would give officers in Australia's privately run immigration centers exceptional powers to use "reasonable force" against detainees, effectively with impunity. This would be authorized not just to protect the life, health or safety of others, but to "maintain the good order, peace or security" of a facility. These powers, possibly involving lethal force, could be invoked to suppress legitimate, nonviolent protests.

Officers deemed to have utilized force "in good faith" would receive legal immunity. These powers would exceed those of prison guards, who are not protected if they use excessive force. In a statement to the Senate, Stephen Charles, a former

judge on the Supreme Court of Victoria, warned that this legislation would effectively enable detention center personnel to “beat asylum-seekers to death.”

Conditions in Australia’s immigration detention centers are already dire. Last February, an Iranian asylum-seeker, Reza Barati, died of head injuries sustained during protests at a facility in Papua New Guinea. Reports by the Australian Human Rights Commission and the government reveal allegations of sexual abuse and physical assault, and high rates of self-harm among detainees, including children. In recent weeks, detainees at a facility in the Northern Territory protested and committed self-harm to prevent their transfer to Nauru.

What’s needed is a radical overhaul of Australia’s detention practices — not a legislative Band-Aid that increases the potential for violence.

Canberra’s posturing suggests that the influx of migrants by boat poses a serious national threat. But the number of asylum-seekers arriving this way has been relatively low. According to the U.N.H.C.R., there were 1.2 million asylum-seekers worldwide in 2013. That year, Australia saw its greatest number of asylum-seekers arriving by boat: about 20,000. These are almost always found to be refugees with legitimate fears of persecution.

Australia’s harsh stance is best explained by domestic political expediency. In 2001, Prime Minister John Howard refused to allow more than 400 asylum-seekers rescued by a Norwegian cargo ship to land on Australian territory. Though unpopular internationally and in the Australian press, that decision boosted Mr. Howard’s coalition government and contributed to his re-election that year. Likewise, Mr. Abbott’s promise to “stop the boats” was central to his successful 2013 election campaign.

In January, a poll by an Australian media research firm found that 58 percent of Australians considered the country’s position on asylum-seekers either appropriate or too soft; only 26 percent thought it too tough.

Paradoxically, Australia seems to have no problem extending protection to refugees who apply through regular channels. And leaders on both ends of the political spectrum have recently advocated for economic and population growth in northern Australia. With a national population of 23 million in a country roughly the size of Europe, it’s not that Australia can’t support more people: It just doesn’t want those people to be asylum-seekers arriving by boat.

This attitude may perhaps be understood as a dismal legacy of the “White Australia” immigration policy, in place from the country’s federation in 1901 until its final vestiges were dismantled in the 1970s. Under this doctrine, a range of legislation aimed at keeping out non-Europeans promoted white homogeneity in the name of social and economic security. Canberra’s call to “stop the boats” may resonate because it taps into the same well of xenophobia that enabled “White Australia” to persist.

As Europe revisits its immigration policies, it should eschew the Abbott administration’s hard line on people arriving by boat. And Canberra has an obligation to reverse course, beginning with the legislation currently before Parliament. Australia must start responding responsibly and with compassion to the challenges of protecting asylum-seekers, including those who come by sea.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/08/opinion/australias-rigid-immigration-barrier.html>

6. Claire Higgins: Assessing asylum seekers' status requires procedure not glib dismissal

Sydney Morning Herald
May 14, 2015 - 12:00PM
Claire Higgins

Fraser government-era process ensured Australia could respect its obligations under international refugee law.

When Immigration Minister Peter Dutton confirmed last week that Australia had returned 46 Vietnamese asylum seekers who were held at sea, his press release stated that “we were assured that they did not have a claim for protection”. The release did not clarify exactly how this assurance was obtained. What we do know is that without a principled, fair and efficient refugee status determination procedure, it is impossible to say whether these people were refugees or not.

A principled status determination procedure is essential to ensuring that a person is not returned to persecution. Yet history shows us that it can also be an important part of a government’s message to the Australian public, used to circumvent politicised or negative discourse about asylum seekers.

Australia established a refugee status determination (RSD) procedure in 1978, in response to the arrival of Vietnamese asylum seekers. The immigration minister responsible for this procedure was Michael MacKellar, who died at the weekend. MacKellar was immigration minister under the Fraser government from 1975 to 1979.

MacKellar implemented a system of RSD to ensure that Australia could respect its obligations under international refugee law.

This RSD procedure also served a strategic purpose. RSD enabled the government to maintain the appearance of control over the arrival of the boats.

When MacKellar announced that Australia would accept only "genuine" refugees, he was simply stating the basic objective of an RSD procedure. This is often overlooked in historical analysis of this period. As UNHCR noted in 2001:

"Fair and efficient procedures are an essential element in the full and inclusive application of the convention. They enable a state to identify those who should benefit from international protection under the convention, and those who should not."

Under this procedure, Vietnamese boat arrivals were assessed against the criteria set out in the Refugee Convention (a matter of law), and against broader humanitarian considerations (a sign of goodwill). A UNHCR representative was closely involved, acting as an observer to the integrity of decision-making.

A survey of Immigration media releases during this period show that once the Fraser government had announced the establishment of an RSD procedure, references to individual status determination became a central part of the minister's public message. In Parliament, MacKellar circumvented references to the boat arrivals as "illegal immigrants" by noting the existence of mechanisms for formal processing.

When MacKellar spoke of "genuine" refugees, he knew full well that the Vietnamese were likely to be "genuine". Indeed, most people fleeing Vietnam were refugees, just as most Syrians are today. Yet opinion polls conducted between 1977 and 1979 showed that one quarter of respondents thought the government should stop the asylum seekers from arriving, and more than half thought Australia should limit the number received. MacKellar told cabinet that the RSD procedure would allow the government to defend itself against claims that the boat arrivals did not merit Australia's protection.

By emphasising the importance of RSD, the government gave due effect to Australia's international legal obligations while also reassuring an anxious public. Australians were encouraged to understand that those who had arrived spontaneously, without visas, deserved to have their claims for protection assessed.

The Vietnamese who sailed to Australia and were assessed through this RSD procedure were overwhelmingly found to be refugees. Some had worked for the former South Vietnamese government, and feared persecution for their political opinions. Others were ethnic Chinese targeted by the new regime.

Receiving and processing the boat arrivals in this manner was not easy. Within the bureaucracy, there were fears that more than 100,000 Vietnamese could sail to Australia. Therefore in order to discourage the boats while still creating pathways to protection, the Fraser government resettled refugees out of the camps in South-east Asia. This demonstrated the importance of a flexible, two-pronged approach to displacement: on the one hand, an organised resettlement program to resolve refugee situations, and on the other hand, the ability to respond to spontaneous claims for asylum.

The Immigration Minister's comments last week concerning the return of 46 Vietnamese asylum seekers were designed to show that the government is committed to tough border protection policies. But instead, these individuals deserved to have access to a procedure that is the best means of signalling to the public that Australia can assert a level of control over the spontaneous arrival of asylum seekers – fair, principled and efficient RSD. Only then can the Immigration Minister truly say – to use Dutton's words – that the asylum seekers "were able to be safely returned" and that "we had met our international obligations".

---->>>> Historian Dr Claire Higgins is a research associate at the Andrew & Renata Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law at UNSW. She is writing a book on Australian refugee policy during the Fraser era.

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/assessing-asylum-seekers-status-requires-procedure-not-glib-dismissal-20150514-gqzqcc>

7. Jane McAdam: Australia's unsustainable approach to asylum-seekers

At a time when international cooperation on refugees is most sorely needed, countries are instead resorting to increasing unilateralism. Australia is at the forefront. Retreating inwards by trying to seal off borders to people in search of protection is both unrealistic and unsustainable.

The Lowy Interpreter
Jane McAdam
1 May 2015 10:00AM

The international protection regime itself – by which I mean the Refugee Convention, bolstered by human rights law and supporting soft law instruments – is normatively strong and legally sound. The reason there is such a large protection gap can be boiled down to one thing: political will – or rather, the lack thereof.

Khalid Koser argues in his new paper for the Lowy Institute (Australia and the 1951 Refugee Convention) that the international refugee regime is 'failing Australian national interests; the interests of the international community; and the interests of refugees themselves'. He suggests that 'Australia should lead a reform of the international system for assisting

and protecting refugees'. Koser's suggestions need to be understood within the full context of his report, since his arguments are more nuanced than this snapshot from the executive summary suggests.

Full story at <http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2015/05/01/australia-unsustainable-approach-to-asylum-seekers.aspx>

8. Lawyers appalled at asylum seeker's treatment after suicide attempt on Nauru

ABC-TV - 7.30

By Madeleine Morris

First posted Thu 14 May 2015, 6:11pm

Updated Thu 14 May 2015, 7:19pm

Lawyers for a 23-year-old Tamil asylum seeker say they are appalled at the way she was treated when she was brought to Australia for medical help after attempting suicide on Nauru.

"Ruth" told ABC's 7.30 that after she learned she would never be resettled in Australia, where her husband is currently on a bridging visa, she lost all hope and wanted to end her life.

"If such a thing as hell exists it would be very similar to Nauru ... I can't live here," she said.

After her suicide attempt, she was medically evacuated to Brisbane, while her son was kept on Nauru with her brother.

It took her husband "Michael" three days to find out where she had been taken to. Ruth and Michael have requested pseudonyms be used, as their asylum cases are still being determined.

When Michael eventually found where she was being treated, he went immediately to visit her, the first time they had seen each other for nearly three years when he left Sri Lanka on a separate people-smuggling boat.

"I didn't see the same person I left three years ago," he said.

"She had over 18 cuts in many parts of her body. I don't know why she is doing this, but I can see she is suffering a lot."

They had three days together, with Ruth crying much of the time.

Last Thursday, Ruth was due to have a private phone call with her Melbourne-based lawyer, but two security guards refused to leave the room or take the phone off speaker-phone, saying she was on suicide watch and needed to be monitored.

"They said they couldn't even stand on the other side of a glass window and monitor her from there," said her lawyer, Daniel Webb of the Human Rights Law Centre.

"I couldn't give her confidential legal advice so the visit had to end."

The Immigration Department subsequently apologised that a private conversation had not been permitted, and said arrangements would be made for a private phone call the next day.

Scenario is 'unacceptable' says lawyer

The phone call never happened. That night Ruth said goodbye to her husband at 9:30pm, then said she was given sleeping tablets by a mental health nurse to help her sleep.

The next morning she was woken at 5:00am and told she was being immediately deported back to Nauru.

"My body was very weak and I couldn't resist," she said.

"I was crying and then I asked them whether I could speak to my husband and tell him I will be taken to Nauru. They refused."

When her husband arrived for his scheduled visit at 9:00am, he was told she was already on the plane.

Mr Webb said he did not know why his client was removed so quickly.

"What I know is that at 5:00pm on Thursday evening the department said this woman was too suicidal to be left alone with her husband and with her lawyer on the phone," he said.

"Only a few hours later she'd been whisked away to the very place where she had attempted to take her own life just a few days before.

"The department has either shown contempt for her right to confidential legal advice or it's shown contempt for her health and wellbeing. Either scenario is unacceptable."

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton declined to be interviewed on her case but his spokesman said in a statement: "The transferee was given notice of her return to Nauru and at no time during the transfer did she request to contact her lawyer or husband."

"We have been advised by the Department that all standard practices were adhered to in this case."

Michael said despite the government's policy that no-one arriving by boat would be given asylum in Australia, he still held out hope that one day he would be reunited with Ruth and their son, who he has not seen since the boy was three days old.

"I'm very worried about my wife. I want my wife to be with me," he said.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-14/lawyers-appalled-at-asylum-seekers-treatment/6471132>

9. Asylum seekers appeal to high court against order to send them to Nauru

Group of 10 asylum seekers, which includes newborn child, had been allowed into Australia temporarily but will fight order to return them

The Guardian
Australian Associated Press
Friday 15 May 2015 08.50 AEST

A group of 10 asylum seekers has launched a high court bid to challenge the federal government's decision to send them back to Nauru.

The director of legal advocacy at the Human Rights Law Centre, Daniel Webb, said the case, launched on Thursday, involved asylum seekers with serious medical issues and families with young children, including a newborn.

They have been temporarily allowed into Australia but face imminent removal back to Nauru, where they would be returned to the island's detention centre.

"We're helping a very vulnerable group of people," Webb said. "They've all described conditions inside the centre as abhorrent.

"Their time on Nauru has clearly taken a toll on them and on their children."

Webb said the case raised untested legal questions over the government's power to detain asylum seekers offshore and use taxpayer funds for that purpose.

"The question is whether the government has the authority to then lock them up indefinitely in territories of other sovereign nations or to effectively procure that detention," he said.

The legal team also wants the high court to stop the government paying Transfield Services to manage the centres on Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/15/asylum-seekers-appeal-to-high-court-against-order-to-send-them-to-nauru>

10. Asylum seekers launch High Court challenge to legality of offshore detention system

ABC News Online
By Madeleine Morris
Posted Thu 14 May 2015, 9:30pm

Ten asylum seekers have launched a High Court challenge to the legality of the Federal Government's offshore detention system.

The asylum seekers come from a variety of countries and are being held offshore but are currently receiving medical treatment in Australia.

The challenge, being run by Melbourne's Human Rights Law Centre on the asylum seekers' behalf, will test whether Australian law allows the Government to hold asylum seekers on Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

"The Government needs clear legislative authority to detain people," said the Human Rights Law Centre's Daniel Webb.

"One of the key questions at the heart of this case is whether any such authority exists under Australian law."

The case will argue that because the Government has issued the contracts for the establishment and maintenance of the processing facilities, they are Australia's responsibility, not that of Nauru and PNG.

It will also argue that necessary laws have not been passed to authorise the facilities.

Also of key importance is the \$1.2 billion the Government pays to contracted companies to run the facilities.

"It is a truly extraordinary thing for the Government to be spending billions of dollars indefinitely detaining people in other countries," Mr Webb said.

He said the recent High Court decision in the school chaplaincy case ruled that with limited exception, the Government needs legislative authority to spend public money on big policy issues, but no law had been passed authorising the expenditure on Nauru and Manus Island.

Mary Crock, professor of public law at the University of Sydney, said the case would be of international significance.

"We've assumed until now that when we send our refugees overseas that we cut all legal ties with them," she said.

"It's not at all clear, however, that this is the case because we are paying for them, and Australia determines who gets released and when.

"So this raises very interesting constitutional, fundamental legal questions about the authority we have in those countries to do what we were doing."

The named respondents in the case are Immigration Minister Peter Dutton, the Department of Immigration and Transfield Services, which manages the processing centres on Nauru and Manus Island for the Government.

Mr Dutton declined to comment on the launch of the case.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-14/asylum-seekers-launch-high-court-challenge/6471376>

11. Budget 2015: Asylum seekers, border control and migration

Campaigns to urge asylum seekers to avoid Australia have received an almost \$40 million boost in the Abbott Government's second budget.

SBS News

By Stephanie Anderson

3 May 2015 - 1:19pm

A total of \$39.9 million has been allocated over four years for "anti-people smuggling strategic communications campaigns", both in Australia and overseas.

The funding comes amid cuts to the Refugee Council of Australia, which has had its annual funding of \$140,000 axed.

The cuts will help fund \$21 million over the coming financial year for the Asylum Seeker Assistance Scheme, supporting "non-illegal maritime arrivals".

The government has also allocated:

- \$389.6 million over two years to fund resettlement arrangements for refugees in Nauru, PNG and Cambodia
- \$164.8 million over four years to upgrade border protection at airports, including the rollout of eGates, additional training for Australian Border Force officials
- \$4.7 million in the coming financial year to station Australian Border Force agents in Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka

Increased use of the Australian Customs Vessel will be facilitated by \$74.3 million in funding over five years. The funds will boost the use of the Ocean Shield from 180 days a year to 300 until 2018-19.

The government is due to make savings through changes to the migration agents registration system and the consolidation of the immigration detention network.

Treasurer Joe Hockey said “unnecessary detention centres” such as Phosphate Hill and Construction Camp on Christmas Island, as well as Blaydin Point in Darwin, would be closed – saving \$554.5 million over five years.

According to budget documents, “this measure has been made possible by the Government’s effective policy of stopping the boats.”

The government will also save an estimated \$1.8 million in departmental expenses by removing the need for lawyer migration agents to be registered under the migration agents’ regulatory scheme.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said the Australian Border Force is due to commence operations from July 1.

“The Australian Border Force will be an agency focussed on protecting our borders with the ability to gather intelligence and swiftly deal with existing and emerging threats,” he said.

Mr Dutton said the government would also maintain the Special Humanitarian Program at 13,750 in 2016-17, before increasing to 16,250 and 18,750 over the next two financial years.

He said this year’s budget – which will also save \$66 million by reducing charter flights between detention centres – would build on savings from the Abbott Government’s first budget.

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2015/05/12/budget-2015-asylum-seekers-border-control-and-migration>

12. Federal budget 2015: Indonesia braces for aid cuts

The Age
May 11, 2015 - 6:29PM
Jewel Topsfield, Sarah Whyte

Funding for some of the long-term Australian aid projects established in Indonesia in the wake of the Boxing Day tsunami is due to expire this year, paving the way for budget savings.

The Coalition announced in December it would slash its overall aid budget by \$1 billion next financial year.

If Australia's aid program in Indonesia reflects this 20 per cent cut, more than \$120 million will need to be shaved off its 2014-2015 budget of \$605.3 million.

The savings are likely to be found through projects that have come to an end and a reassessment of where Australia can provide the most value.

In June last year, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said Australia's aid budget would emphasise "aid-for-trade" - driving economic growth in developing countries.

The emphasis in Indonesia is expected to move away from post-tsunami bricks and mortar projects such as building roads, hospitals and schools, to areas where Australia can provide expert policy advice.

For example, between 2006 and 2011 Australia helped Indonesia build or extend more than 2000 schools.

Its education program is now focused on training principals and teachers and accrediting schools.

Funding expires this year for a \$463 million project for improving water, sanitation and roads and transport, known as the Indonesia Infrastructure Initiative, although it could be extended.

A \$22 million electoral support program, which helped develop the system of registering 190 million voters used in the 2014 election, also comes to an end this year.

And a disaster risk management program announced by Kevin Rudd and former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono has already been scaled back.

Aaron Connelly, East Asia research fellow from the Lowy Institute, said if the Abbott government mishandled the aid cuts by linking them to the Bali nine executions, diplomatic relations could be inflamed.

"The risk is that Indonesia will see this as retaliation," he said.

A recent Lowy poll showed only 28 per cent of Australians thought the Abbott government should suspend aid to Indonesia, while 27 per cent said it should suspend military and law enforcement co-operation.

ChildFund's chief executive officer, Nigel Spence said Australian aid should be focused on reducing poverty.

"It would be deeply unfortunate if the cuts were perceived as retribution," he said.

"We feel strongly that decisions about aid should not be focused on issues such as where asylum seekers are being housed or pay back for executions," he said.

Over the next three financial years, \$3.7 billion will be cut from the overall foreign aid budget.

Shadow Assistant Treasurer Andrew Leigh said the cuts mirrored those advocated for by the extreme right party UKIP in the UK.

"Here you have Tony Abbott taking the same position on aid as the extreme right takes in British politics from 0.37 to 0.22 per cent of the national income and to cut it still further really is going to hurt so many more vulnerable people in the region as well as our relationships with those countries," he said.

Oxfam's chief executive, Helen Szoke, said the aid organisation remained in the dark on how the cuts would fall, saying it was not in Australians' nature to be stingy for those who need help.

"Australia's standing in the world is significantly diminished just by the scale of these aid cuts," she said.

"We're a rich country, not withstanding we have challenges domestically... and for a country like Australia to make cuts to this depth is just very disappointing."

<http://www.theage.com.au/business/federal-budget/federal-budget-2015-indonesia-braces-for-aid-cuts-20150511-ggz7nl.html>

13. Indonesians see aid cuts as retribution for Bali nine executions

Brisbane Times

May 11, 2015 - 6:30PM

Jewel Topsfield

The Australian government may have first announced its cuts to foreign aid six months ago, but in Indonesia they are widely perceived as a reprisal for the Bali nine executions.

Indonesia is Australia's largest aid recipient, so it is self-evident the republic will be hit by the 20 per cent cut to Australia's overall foreign aid budget in 2015-16.

But in Indonesia - where the population is still smarting from Tony Abbott's clumsy link between the \$1 billion in tsunami aid and the lives of the two Australians - the cuts are seen as punitive.

"Canberra's latest move suspiciously looks like a retaliatory backhand aimed at Jakarta," trumpeted an editorial in the Jakarta Globe, suggesting the aid cut was likely to push the already strained relationship to a "new low".

The generally sober newspaper even suggested Indonesians would be reminded of former president Sukarno who memorably told the US to "go to hell with your aid" in the mid 1960s.

Indonesia has not quite told Australia to go to hell with its aid, but some of the rhetoric is coming close.

At a press conference last week Foreign Ministry spokesman Arrmanatha Nasir baldly stated that Indonesia no longer needed help from other countries or international organisations.

"The assistance provided by Australia is their effort to strengthen our partnership, so it is their right to give it, but Indonesia did not ask for development funding assistance," he said.

Aid expert Peter McCawley from the Australian National University said Australia needs to consider how Indonesia will respond to the cuts.

"We should not assume they will do nothing," he said.

Dr McCawley, a former AusAID official, said the Australian public tended to view aid as philanthropic. However the Indonesians viewed it as something Australia does to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

"I think it's clear that there is a questioning to what extent Indonesia should receive foreign aid and under what conditions they should receive it," Dr McCawley said.

Indonesia famously refused aid from the Netherlands in 1992, after the Dutch government became increasingly critical of former president Suharto.

"This shows Indonesians are capable of responding," Dr McCawley said. "It would be useful for Australia to recall what happened to the Dutch program."

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/business/federal-budget/federal-budget-2015-indonesians-see-aid-cuts-as-retribution-for-bali-nine-executions-20150511-ggz1wv.html>

14. Aid to Indonesia slashed by 40 per cent

Sydney Morning Herald / AAP
May 12, 2015 - 8:16PM
Lisa Martin

Australia has slashed aid spending to Indonesia by 40 per cent and trimmed assistance to Nepal as it recovers from a devastating earthquake.

Tuesday's federal budget confirmed a mid-year review decision to reduce the overall aid program by an unprecedented \$1 billion to \$4 billion in 2015-16.

Aid to Indonesia - the biggest beneficiary of Australia's largesse - will be cut from \$605.3 million to \$366.4 million.

But Treasurer Joe Hockey insists Indonesia has not been singled out for special attention in the wake of Jakarta's decision to execute Bali Nine drug smugglers Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran in April.

"Not at all," he told reporters ahead of his speech to parliament on Tuesday.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop had gone through a proper process in deciding which nations would be supported, taking into account their economic growth, the needs of the region and whether countries were aid donors themselves.

The executions fuelled speculation that aid to Indonesia could be targeted as a possible retaliatory measure.

However, most experts were predicting Indonesia would get less assistance anyway, even before the Australian pair faced the firing squad.

Ms Bishop has always insisted the Asia-Pacific region should be Australia's aid priority.

While aid to Pacific islands faced only tiny tweaks in the budget, east Asian countries fared badly with Vietnam, Burma, Laos and the Philippines facing 40 per cent cuts.

But Cambodia, which is about to resettle refugees on behalf of Australia, and East Timor's aid budget were left largely unscathed.

Overall aid to earthquake-ravaged Nepal will be cut from \$33.9 million to \$26.8 million.

But Vanuatu, hit by a cyclone earlier in 2015, gains an extra \$500,000 this financial year with \$60.9 million in overall aid.

Papua New Guinea, which hosts the Manus Island immigration detention centre, will receive five per cent less in aid but now becomes Australia's top aid recipient pocketing \$553.6 million next financial year.

Aid to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh and Sub-Saharan Africa will be cut by 40 per cent.

Funding to non-government organisations will be slashed from \$203.9 million to \$176 million slightly less than the 20 per cent cut many were anticipating.

Australia's aid budget is set to plummet to 0.22 per cent of national income by 2016-17 well below the United Nation's push for countries to donate 0.7 per cent.

<http://www.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/aid-to-indonesia-slashed-by-40-per-cent-20150512-3vval.html>

15. Foreign aid to Indonesia cut by nearly half, Africa aid down 70 per cent

Brisbane Times
May 12, 2015 - 9:53PM
Sarah Whyte

Aid to Indonesia has been cut by nearly half and assistance offered to Africa has plummeted by 70 per cent in historic cuts to foreign aid.

Indonesia, once Australia's largest aid beneficiary, dropped from \$605.3 million to \$366.4 million, in a move that could be seen as retribution for the executions of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran. But it is understood that funding for some of the long-term Australian aid projects established in Indonesia following the Boxing Day tsunami were due to expire this year, paving the way for budget savings.

South-East Asian countries including the Philippines and Vietnam also had their aid cut by 40 per cent.

Yet countries involved in Australia's regional processing centres and the resettlement of asylum seekers were barely touched by the severe cuts. Aid to Cambodia was unaffected, as was aid to Nauru, which now hosts one of Australia's regional processing centres. Papua New Guinea, Australia's largest aid beneficiary, was only cut by 5 per cent. This year the country will receive \$553.6 million. Last financial year it received \$577.1 million.

In March, ambassadors from several African countries pleaded to the joint standing committee on foreign affairs and aid not to cut aid to their impoverished nations. Now, aid to Africa has been cut by 70 per cent as the Abbott government says it has committed to broadening and deepening Australia's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

Financial commitment to a number of global organisations including the United Nations Development Fund and United Nations Children's Fund were also significantly cut, while major non-government organisations such as World Vision and Care Australia will lose 5 per cent of their federal funding.

Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop said Australia would provide \$4 billion in total Official Development Assistance in this year's budget.

Over the next three financial years, \$3.7 billion will be cut from the overall foreign aid budget, as forecast in December's mid-year economic fiscal outlook.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/business/federal-budget/federal-budget-2015-foreign-aid-to-indonesia-cut-by-nearly-half-africa-aid-down-70-per-cent-20150512-1mzhal.html>

16. Australia cuts aid to Indonesia by 40%, federal budget reveals

Joe Hockey says reduction from \$542.5m to \$323m isn't retribution for Bali Nine executions as assistance to several other countries also slashed

The Guardian
Bridie Jabour
Tuesday 12 May 2015 20.32 AEST

Australia's aid to Indonesia will be reduced by 40%, the budget has revealed, but the government says it is not because of the executions last month of two Australian drug smugglers.

A \$1bn reduction in the aid budget for the next financial year was announced in the previous mid-year economic and fiscal outlook and the specific details of the cut in the budget show big reductions in foreign aid for Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Burma.

Aid to Africa and the Middle East will be reduced by almost 75% from \$143m to \$52.9m.

Indonesia's official development assistance from Australia has been reduced from \$542.5m to \$323m and the total aid for east Asia has been reduced from \$1.08bn to \$688.6m. More than 90% of Australia's aid will go to the Indo-Pacific region.

Papua New Guinea will experience a slight drop in aid, from \$502.1m to \$477.3m, while other countries in the Pacific such as the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa and Fiji will receive the same amount in the 2015-16 financial year as they did in the last, meaning no drop in their aid in nominal terms.

In east Asia, Vietnam's aid will drop from \$97.4m to \$58.4m while the Philippines will be hit by a drop from \$111.7m to \$67m. Cambodia, with whom Australia has a refugee resettlement program, was the only country in east Asia that won't have aid cut, instead keeping its \$52.4m.

Australia has withdrawn its ambassador to Indonesia for "consultations" after the executions of Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran for drug smuggling, but Joe Hockey said the reduction in aid was not retribution.

"There wasn't any specific targeting of any country at all, it was all done with a formula," the treasurer said.

Aid to sub-Saharan Africa will be reduced from \$106m to \$31.8m while aid to the Palestinian territories will be reduced from \$34.2m to \$20.5m. Aid to Afghanistan will be reduced from \$130.9m to \$78.5m.

A \$50m gender equality fund to "strengthen the importance and priority of empowering women" was announced in the budget and an emergency fund of \$120m will be retained by Australia to deal with global emergencies.

There will be a 5% reduction, equivalent to \$6m, in money for non-government organisations working overseas.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/12/australia-cuts-aid-to-indonesia-by-40-federal-budget-reveals>

17. Abbott government to splash out \$400 million on Australian Border Force

Brisbane Times

May 11, 2015 - 5:40PM

Peter Hartcher, James Massola

The federal government will spend up to \$400 million in extra funds to create a dedicated new border enforcement agency, to start operating from July 1.

It's understood the new Australian Border Force agency will comprise between 4000 and 5000 officers, mainly armed, and potentially hundreds of new staff to be hired.

The extra funding means that the immigration portfolio will be the only one other than Defence to receive a boost, government sources said.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton will lead the major reorganisation, but it is the fulfilment of a plan launched last year by the former minister, Scott Morrison.

The overarching idea is to gear up for bigger flows of people and goods in and out of Australia but with more rigorous enforcement in a so-called "once in a generation" overhaul.

While the number of bureaucratic staff in the departments has fallen, the federal government has been advertising for new officers to join the Australian Border Force.

The boost comes after the last budget allocated \$711 million over six years to the creation and sustainment of the Border Force.

Another \$150 million out of the \$630 million announced last August for the national counter-terrorism package was allocated to eight counter-terrorism teams now operating at eight major airports around the country, and to the roll-out of Smartgate passport technology for international travellers.

Many of the officers will be armed and the officers will, among others things, take over Australia's immigration detention network while also taking up positions on the frontline at airports, shipping terminals and at sea, while playing a role in the gathering of intelligence and detaining offenders.

A new website, Border.gov.au, will also be launched to replace the websites for the formerly separate Immigration and Customs departments.

Last year's budget predicted there would be about 13,800 staff in the merged Immigration and Customs departments, down from about 14,300. The merger was forecast to cost about \$480 million and 480 jobs across the two agencies.

But the government also claimed a saving of up to \$2.5 billion over five years as a dividend from "stopping the boats" in the budget, too.

This year, the government has already flagged a saving of \$168 million over four years in the Immigration portfolio.

Lessons have been learned from a failed experiment in Britain that saw an attempt to put the administrative and enforcement wings of that country's border agency into one agency.

In contrast, the newly merged agency will see the see administrative functions of the two departments merged into one. Border Force's first commissioner is expected to be the current chief executive officer of the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service, Roman Quaedvlieg.

In a major speech on the future of the merged agencies in April, Immigration Department secretary Michael Pezzullo said the focus of the new department would be to "manage a system of border processes by which we will oversee the flow of people, and goods, to and from our nation".

"Our staff will, where necessary, be expected to say 'no' more often than they do now, where circumstances warrant and within the law, as a result of the better use that they will make of new intelligence systems and other capabilities, as well as improved relationships with law enforcement and intelligence agencies, and better training and support to make defensible adverse decisions," he said.

"This is not to say that the shutters are coming down – far from it. The overall flow of visitors and migrants will only continue to increase.

"What we will focus on in the months and years ahead is the quality of our decisions in favour of the rights of the community, while still delivering the economic and social benefits of immigration.

"The Australian community rightly expects us to deliver those benefits, and to keep the public safe. This is not a choice. It has to be done simultaneously and seamlessly."

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/business/federal-budget/federal-budget-2015-abbott-government-to-splash-out-400-million-on-australian-border-force-20150511-ggz1oz.html>

18. More than 1,500 detention centre staff trained in using force on asylum seekers

All officers in mainland immigration detention centres trained to use force to control and restrain detainees, official figures show

The Guardian

Paul Farrell

Thursday 14 May 2015 18.49 AEST

More than 1,500 staff members across Australia's mainland immigration detention centres have been trained to use force to control and restrain asylum seekers, official figures show.

A spokeswoman for the immigration department said 1,580 staff were listed on a central register. "All officers are trained in de-escalation, and this is how the vast majority of incidents are resolved.

"On the rare occasions where it is necessary, only approved control and restraint techniques may be used, as a last resort, where the safety of staff and detainees is at risk.

"All officers are instructed in these techniques as part of their induction training course, and receive regular refresher training. They must also hold or earn a certificate II in security operations."

On Wednesday the House of Representatives passed the maintaining good order in immigration detention bill. The bill has been criticised because it gives private contractors a broader mandate in the use of force, and will also significantly restrict asylum seekers from bringing personal injury claims against the commonwealth.

A former Victorian court of appeal judge has warned it would allow guards to "beat asylum seekers to death".

The immigration minister, Peter Dutton, said in parliament the bill included "appropriate instructions and administrative arrangements to guide authorised officers in the use of force."

"The bill provides for appropriate assistance for a detainee who wishes to make a complaint," he said. "It provides the force used must be reasonable force. Excessive force would always be beyond what is reasonable."

Labor's immigration spokesman, Richard Marles, said that while the opposition did not oppose more clearly outlining the powers immigration officers may use in detention centres, it could not support the bill in its current form.

Labor proposed to move amendments to the bill that accorded with a series of recommendations made by the Australian Human Rights Commission to tighten up the nature of the powers, and also to wind back the sweeping immunity the bill would give the federal government from court claims.

"In the event these amendments do not pass, Labor will not be supporting the bill in its current form," Marles said.

If the federal government is unwilling to support Labor's amendments in the Senate, they will need to negotiate with crossbench senators to gain the numbers to pass the bill.

The Greens also do not support the bill. Adam Bandt told the House of Representatives on Wednesday: "Prison guards and the Australian federal police are held to a stricter test than this ... The breadth of circumstances in which force can be used is too wide, and wider than in any other comparable area in this country."

A Senate report into the bill is due to be tabled in May.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/14/more-than-1500-detention-centre-staff-trained-in-using-force-on-asylum-seekers>

19. Australia secretly transfers four Nauru refugees destined for Cambodia

May 13, 2015 - 5:03PM

Lindsay Murdoch
with Sarah Whyte

Bangkok: Australia has secretly flown four refugees slated to be resettled in Cambodia from the tiny Pacific island of Nauru to Darwin from where they will be flown to Phnom Penh.

But Cambodian officials who are insisting on vetting the refugees before approving their arrival have not been told about the move.

"We don't have any official information about this," Kerm Sarin of the Ministry of Interior's Refugee Department told the Phnom Penh Post, adding that a government delegation that visited Nauru in April to assess the refugees' applications had not yet submitted their report to the government.

Asked about the secret flight, a spokeswoman for Australia's Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said: "Arrangements are ongoing and we haven't been and won't be commenting further".

The refugees, an Iranian couple, an Iranian man and a Rohingya man arrived in Darwin on Sunday and they are staying at immigration accommodation near Darwin airport.

A source told Fairfax Media they are expected to be flown to Cambodia within two weeks.

Mr Dutton has complained in the past that refugees on Nauru had been pressuring others on the island not to accept the Cambodian deal.

Cambodian officials were "shocked" to learn last month that Australian immigration officials on Nauru had told refugees and asylum seekers they could fly to Cambodia as early as April 20 if they accepted up to \$15,000 and offers of accommodation, food, training and other benefits to give up their hopes of living in Australia to go to Cambodia, one of Asia's poorest nations with a poor human rights record.

Refugee advocates say among the promises made to asylum seekers was to have their applications for refugee status fast-tracked if they agreed to go to Cambodia..

The Abbott government announced in Tuesday's budget that Australia's aid to Cambodia would be left intact, despite slashing aid to other south-east Asian nations.

Australia has pledged an additional \$40 million to Cambodia for accepting refugees from Nauru in a deal that has been widely condemned by Cambodia's opposition parties and human rights and refugee advocate groups.

In Phnom Penh, officials of the Interior Ministry are unhappy with having to receive refugees from Australia with a source pointing out the meaning for "hell" in the Cambodian language is Nauru.

But the deal has the backing of strongman prime minister Hun Sen who oversaw the negotiations for his country to receive the additional \$40 million in aid.

Refugee advocates point out that if only four refugees agree to make the journey to Cambodia the cost to Australian taxpayers will be well in excess of \$10 million per head.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/world/australia-secretly-transfers-four-nauru-refugees-destined-for-cambodia-20150513-gh0p20.html>

20. Four Nauru refugees flown to Darwin after agreeing to Cambodia transfer: reports

ABC News Online

By political reporter Dan Conifer

First posted Wed 13 May 2015, 3:37pm

Updated Wed 13 May 2015, 4:14pm

Four refugees have agreed to resettle in Cambodia from Nauru, the ABC understands, amid reports the group has been secretly flown to Australia.

Cambodia has agreed to take refugees from Nauru who tried to reach Australia by boat.

It is believed an Iranian couple and a single Iranian man along with an ethnic Rohingya man from Myanmar have accepted the Federal Government's offer to resettle in the south-east Asian nation.

An asylum seeker advocate said the group arrived in Darwin on Sunday and was waiting in the Darwin Airport Lodge immigration facility.

The advocate said it was interesting the facility was being used, adding that it had not been used in months.

Fairfax Media reports the group arrived in Darwin on Sunday and is waiting in immigration accommodation before flying to Cambodia.

Fairfax says Cambodian officials - who insist on vetting the refugees before their arrival - have not been informed about the shift to Australia.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton's office has refused to provide details of the group, if they have arrived in Darwin or when they will arrive in Cambodia.

More details emerge of Australian Government offers to refugee

The ABC understands one of the people was offered \$10,000 to take the deal, along with paid employment, free accommodation in Phnom Penh and a permanent visa.

The Federal Government's offers to those on Nauru have also including language training and health insurance.

Flights have departed Nauru's international airport for Brisbane and Darwin over the past fortnight.

The Phnom Penh Post reports an Iranian refugee on Nauru said the group had said they were travelling to Australia.

"They just disappeared for a while and they said that they are going to Cambodia, but they are in Australia now and wait[ing] for the flight to take them to Cambodia," the refugee told the newspaper.

The first charter flight from Nauru was expected to leave as early as April 20.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-13/asylum-seekers-en-route-to-cambodia-flown-to-darwin/6467710>

21. Peter Dutton confirms refugee transfers from Nauru to Cambodia

Brisbane Times
May 14, 2015 - 11:10AM
Sarah Whyte
with Lindsay Murdoch

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton has confirmed that a small number of refugees from Nauru are in the process of being transferred and resettled in Cambodia.

This is the first group of refugees to be transferred to the Asian country after the deal worth \$40 million was signed by the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in September last year.

"We have an arrangement with Cambodia, so people on Nauru we will try and transition them across to Cambodia," Mr Dutton told 2GB radio on Thursday morning.

"...We have been very clear about it. Those people who have arrived illegally into Australia by boat won't be staying in this country. They are either up on Nauru or if they are single males they are up in Papua New Guinea and they won't be coming to our country.

Mr Dutton said the economy in Cambodia was transitioning and resettling refugees in a third country would help them start a new life.

"Hopefully they will be in Cambodia shortly," he said.

The refugees - an Iranian couple, an Iranian man and a Rohingya man - arrived in Darwin on Sunday and they are staying at immigration accommodation near Darwin airport.

A source told Fairfax Media on Wednesday that they are expected to be flown to Cambodia within two weeks.

Cambodian officials were "shocked" to learn last month that Australian immigration officials on Nauru had told refugees and asylum seekers they could fly to Cambodia as early as April 20 if they accepted up to \$15,000 and offers of accommodation, food, training and other benefits.

<http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/peter-dutton-confirms-refugee-transfers-from-nauru-to-cambodia-20150514-gh1bcj.html>

22. Christmas Island detention centres to close as part of immigration savings

Budget confirms that funding for International Organisation for Migration and Refugee Council of Australia will also be cut

The Guardian
Daniel Hurst
Tuesday 12 May 2015 21.34 AEST

Several immigration detention facilities on Christmas Island are set to close, the budget has confirmed, while the Abbott government has cut payments to the International Organisation for Migration.

Expected savings in the immigration portfolio include \$555m over five years by consolidating the detention network. "The immigration detention facilities at Phosphate Hill and Construction Camp on Christmas Island and Blaydin in Darwin will be closed," the budget papers said.

"By July 2016 the North West Point facility on Christmas Island will transition to a contingency setting for use as a reception processing site, should it be required."

In April, a court ordered a temporary delay in demolition plans on Christmas Island in light of an outstanding class action.

The government said it would also achieve savings of \$29m in 2014-15 and 2015-16 through "revised funding" provided to the IOM.

The organisation is funded to manage asylum seekers intercepted on their way to Australia and help the Indonesian government to monitor migration flows, but costs are "lower than originally estimated", according to the budget papers.

The government has earmarked an extra \$21m to continue providing the asylum seeker assistance scheme "to support eligible non-illegal maritime arrivals while they await resolution of their migration status".

This funding "will be partially offset by not renewing federal grant funding of \$140,000 per annum to the Refugee Council of Australia", the budget says.

The government is also budgeting to spend an extra \$390m over two years on refugee resettlement arrangements involving Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Cambodia.

The government will provide \$165m over four years to increase the capability of Australian border protection services. This includes equipment and training for the new Australian Border Force; design and scoping work for new IT platforms to manage travellers' biometric data; and rolling out next-generation eGates at major international airports and three seaports.

At the same time, the government has banked savings of \$439m from "smaller government" in the immigration portfolio. These include \$270m from merging the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and \$168m from efficiencies in visa, refugee and humanitarian processing.

The government will raise \$437m in revenue over four years by adjusting visa application charges from July 2015 and moving to "full cost recovery for citizenship costs" from January 2016. Changes to import processing and licence charges are predicted to raise an extra \$108m.

The treasurer, Joe Hockey, said some of the immigration savings would be offset by extra spending for countering terrorism in Australia and military operations against the Islamic State militant group in Iraq.

"To help pay for this, our tough stand on border protection is delivering a dividend," he said.

"Our border protection policies have stopped the boats and they have saved lives. As a result, we are saving more than \$500m from closing unnecessary detention centres and we are saving on the costs of processing new boat arrivals."

Other spending measures in the immigration portfolio include:

-- \$40m over four years to continue anti-people-smuggling communications campaigns, which will run domestically and in source and transit countries;

-- \$26m over four years to establish permanent border clearance services at Townsville and Sunshine Coast airports in Queensland to support regular international air services;

-- \$74m over five years to increase the availability of the Australian customs vessel Ocean Shield for people smuggling-related operations.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/12/christmas-island-detention-centres-to-close-as-part-of-immigration-savings>

23. Federal budget 2015: Christmas Island centre to be wound back

WA Today
May 12, 2015 - 9:02PM
Sarah Whyte

The controversial detention centre on Christmas Island will considerably wind back its operations, as the Abbott government continues to tighten the net around Australia to stop asylum seeker boat arrivals.

Two facilities at the detention centre, Phosphate Hill and Construction Camp, will close in 2016, along with the Blaydin Point detention centre in Darwin. The centres on Christmas Island have been criticised for their harsh environments and being unfit for children. Fewer than 100 asylum seekers currently remain in the Christmas Island facilities after all children were taken off the island last year.

But as the number of asylum seekers reaching Australia has dramatically dropped, the surveillance of Australia's borders has intensified ahead of the creation of the Australian Border Force, which merges the immigration and customs departments.

An interception vessel, the Ocean Shield, will now patrol Australia's waters 300 days a year, up from 180 days a year, to prevent "maritime people smuggling operations". This will cost the government nearly \$75 million over five years, while Australian Border Force officials will continue to be stationed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka to prevent people smuggling.

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton said the success of Operation Sovereign Borders had delivered savings of more than \$500 million in this year's budget. He also said the detention centre closures will save the government \$326 million, on top of the 10 centres that were closed last year.

But services to asylum seekers in Australia have also been scaled back. The Refugee Council of Australia has lost all of its \$140,000 government funding, while the International Organisation for Migration has had its funding reduced due to the lower number of asylum seekers being held in processing centres and being resettled in countries such as Papua New Guinea and Cambodia. Charter flights to transfer asylum seekers have also been reduced.

<http://www.watoday.com.au/business/federal-budget/federal-budget-2015-christmas-island-centre-to-be-wound-back-20150512-1mzh2n.html>

24. Christmas Island detention facilities to close, centre 'disaster' for community: shire president

ABC News Online
By Laura Gartry
First posted Tue 12 May 2015, 11:30pm
Updated Wed 13 May 2015, 6:23am

The immigration detention centre on Christmas Island has been a "disaster" for the community, the shire's president has said, in the wake of this year's federal budget outlining the winding down of detention facilities.

The budget included plans to close the Phosphate Hill and Construction Camp facilities, and for the main North West Point centre to only be used as a contingency from 2016.

Closing immigration detention facilities on Christmas Island and in Darwin will save the budget \$554 million over five years, through reduced charter flights and giving work rights to some asylum seekers on bridging visas.

Shire president Gordon Thomson said the economic and social impact on the community would be devastating.

"The long-term issue is that the detention centre is a disaster for Christmas Island, because the focus has been on staffing and running our economy around that," he said.

Mr Thomson said the concept of the centre being used as contingency would not be received well by locals.

"A stop-go effect on our economy is not what our island needs," he said.

"We need economic development on the island, and having attention and resources directed to a detention centre which is sometimes working, sometimes not, is devastating.

"It's not good in the long-term interests. We need to see development of agriculture and other industries.

"The social consequences of a stop-go economy is just miserable, just miserable."

Mr Thomson said the winding back of the island's detention centre would also cause a ripple effect throughout the island's employment.

"There will be 50-100 jobs or 10 per cent of the island's employed population lost," he said.

"They will have less money to spend on the island and it's very expensive to live here.

"So it won't only be a loss of jobs, but potentially a significant number of people leaving the island.

"The moral view that I hold is that you shouldn't have asylum seekers locked up in prisons in any case — in prisons like the one on Christmas Island. People who haven't committed crimes shouldn't be detained."

Ben Pynt, spokesman for the Darwin Asylum Seekers Support and Advocacy Network, welcomed the news.

"I think the advocacy community will largely welcome the move," he said.

"The Christmas Island detention centre is largely out of sight and out of mind and it means it can be incredibly difficult for the people there to access justice, to find a migration lawyer who can represent them from that far away.

"Access to medical specialists can also be difficult."

Mr Pynt said he believed the approximately 200 asylum seekers in the island's detention centre would be transferred to Darwin.

The Blaydin Point detention centre in Darwin will also be shut, the Government announced earlier this year.

The Government has closed more than a dozen detention centres since coming to power.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-13/christmas-island-detention-centre-to-close/6465266>

25. Christmas Island detention centres may be used as tourist accommodation

Phosphate Hill and Construction Camp detention facilities would be "ideal" tourism properties says island administrator

The Guardian

Calla Wahlquist

Wednesday 13 May 2015 19.04 AEST

Two former detention centres on Christmas Island are being considered for use as budget accommodation for Asian tourists in an attempt to sustain the island's economy after the loss of multi-million dollar immigration contracts.

Christmas Island administrator Barry Haase told Guardian Australia on Wednesday the Phosphate Hill and Construction Camp detention facilities would be "ideal" tourism properties once released by the Department of Immigration.

The closure of the two facilities was announced in the federal budget on Tuesday. The North-West Point facility, which was put on high alert after an apparent spike in self-harm incidents last month, will be mothballed in July 2016.

Blaydin detention centre in Darwin will also close. The savings to the immigration portfolio are expected to add up to \$555m over five years.

Both Phosphate Hill and Construction Camp are classed as alternative places of detention and have housed children and families. Neither is a purpose-built detention centre. All children in detention on Christmas Island were moved in December.

Haase said the announcement was "as much a blessing as it is a curse" because it would allow the island to focus on its tourism industry, beginning with the restoration of charter flights.

His economic vision involves capitalising on what he described as "employer-sponsored tourism" in the form of a cheap three-day getaway to the conveniently located tropical island. Christmas Island is 1,600km north-west of Australia, but just 300km from Java.

“In many of the very, very large factories in Asia, employees are rewarded with a paid short holiday,” he said.

“The closure of those facilities opens up new opportunities for budget accommodation.”

Haase said the attitude of Christmas Islanders to detention centres had “moved from disgust to appreciation” in the years since they opened, and most now only considered them as a potential source of employment.

Christmas Island shire president Gordon Thomson disagreed, saying most were opposed to the centres.

Thomson, who has been a vocal critic of Australia’s immigration detention policies, told Guardian Australia he was “absolutely fucking appalled by what’s being done to people who have committed no crime,” and said short-term economic pain was worth it to be free of the detention centres.

But he said two restaurants had already closed as a result of the scaling back of local detention centres, and the Christmas Island Resort, a major employer on the island of 1,400 people, was struggling.

Thomson, who is also the general secretary of the Union of Christmas Island Workers, said job losses and “economic distress” could not be avoided, but added, “I think in the long run it’s a good thing”.

“The economic and social long-term preferences are that the detention centre closes and stays closed into the future, and all funding goes toward the restoration of the tourism industry,” he said.

Thomson said the bulk of detainees held on the island in recent months had been people awaiting deportation after being convicted of a crime. Under section 501 of the Migration Act, the immigration minister can cancel the permanent visa of a person deemed to be of “bad character”, which can be interpreted as those who have committed a crime punishable by at least 12 months imprisonment.

Both Thomson and Haase argued reopening the casino, which the island has been lobbying for since the Howard government blocked an application to reinstate the licence in 2004, would boost tourism numbers and create 400 jobs.

The casino attracted wealthy crowds from Indonesia before closing in 1998. Successive reports have recommended reinstating the licence but so far the 2004 ruling, which said it would have a negative social impact, has been upheld.

<http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/13/christmas-island-detention-centres-may-be-used-as-tourist-accommodation>

26. Asylum seekers may return to Pontville under Labor

The Mercury / News.com.au
BLAIR RICHARDS, State Political Reporter
May 08, 2015 12:00AM

THE former Pontville detention centre could reopen as an asylum seeker reception centre under federal Labor.

Immigration and border protection spokesman Richard Marles visited Pontville yesterday and said he was “open minded” about the site playing a role in an asylum seeker system under Labor.

The former army training facility is back in the hands of the Defence Department after the detention centre was closed last January.

Mr Marles was invited to Tasmania by state Denison MP Madeleine Ogilvie, who has long pushed for Pontville to be reopened as a more humane alternative to offshore processing.

Ms Ogilvie said the site should be turned into a reception centre without high fences, a place to stay rather than a place of detention.

She said Mr Marles was “very warm” about the idea by the end of his visit.

“I wanted to convey that Tasmania has a different perspective when it comes to the issue of asylum seekers and refugees,” she said.

Asylum seeker policy is set to be the subject of intense debate at the national ALP conference in July.

Mr Marles is leading the party’s efforts to formulate a compassionate asylum seeker policy while grappling with the issue of deaths at sea without a Liberal-style “stop the boats” policy.

“I’m open to hearing the message around Pontville,” Mr Marles said.

"We believe it's critical the journey from Java to Christmas Island is stopped because we don't want to see people drowning at sea ... What I hear people saying is they want to feel a sense of pride again in the role Australia is playing as an international citizen in what is an international crisis.

"It's important that we deal with [asylum seekers] in a way that reflects the values of compassion and fairness."

<http://www.news.com.au/national/tasmania/asylum-seekers-may-return-to-pontville-under-labor/story-fnn32rbc-1227344094875>

27. Nauru government criticised over new law limiting free speech

ABC News Online

Posted Thu 14 May 2015, 3:03pm

An expelled magistrate of Nauru and a Pacific media watchdog have accused Nauru of breaching its international obligations by introducing a law restricting free speech.

The government has amended the criminal code to make comments deemed in breach of the new amendments of the criminal code an offence punishable by up to seven years in jail.

On Tuesday, Nauru justice minister David Adeang presented to parliament the Criminal Code (Amendment) Bill 2015, which prohibits language "that is threatening, abusive or insulting in nature and has the intention to stir up racial or religious hatred".

In documents sighted by the ABC, the final Act enacted by parliament adds "political hatred" as a trigger for criminal proceedings.

In his second reading of the bill to parliament, Mr Adeang referred to the right to freedom of expression in the Nauru constitution, and said the amendment was in the interests of defence, safety, morality and health.

"We have to appreciate the constructive critique that comes from our people but as of late, this freedom has been tainted with somewhat vile and tasteless words that have no place in our country and amongst our traditional and Christian values," he said.

Under the changes, public statements that are likely to threaten national defence and public order would also be an offence.

Australian Peter Law, who was deported from the island and fired as resident magistrate last year, said the law was aimed at stifling free speech.

"This is one more nail, if you like, in the coffin of democracy in Nauru," he said.

With a national election slated for August 2016, Mr Law said he was concerned human rights could be further eroded.

"What happens between now and then is anyone's guess to where this is going to go," he said.

The Pacific Freedom Forum (PFF) told Radio Australia's Pacific Beat the laws go against Nauru's international commitments.

"The law itself will be causing the most emotional stress right now, I would imagine, for those who want to exercise their freedom of speech," PFF editor Jason Brown said.

"Seven years is enough to put fear into anyone, that's a really chilling effect on freedom of speech.

"Nauru is signatory to all kinds of treaties and international laws that assure the international community that they'll respect human rights including freedoms of speech.

"This obviously goes against all those commitments."

New laws 'not a good look' for Australia

Mr Brown said the new law was also "not a good look" for Australia, which runs an immigration detention on the island and is Nauru's largest aid donor.

"The government of Australia was urged a few years back by the international community to focus more on the Pacific region," he said.

"I don't think suppressing freedoms of speech is what taxpayers and developed countries had in mind when they're paying for aid."

Mr Law said Australia and New Zealand both had a moral obligation to intervene.

"Both Australia and NZ, as donors to Nauru, have very big responsibility to try ensure Nauru can be put back on road to democracy," he said.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said "Nauru is a sovereign nation able to establish its own legal framework".

"Any concerns held by the Australian Government would be raised directly with the government of Nauru," he said.

The ABC has attempted to contact the Nauru government for comment.

The new law comes less than two weeks after Nauru imposed a temporary ban on Facebook, sparking condemnation from refugee advocates and opposition MPs.

They accuse the government of attempting to restrict asylum seekers in detention from communicating with the outside world.

President Baron Waqa rejected claims the Facebook ban was linked to the issue of refugees, saying asylum seekers had "plenty of email and social media options".

About 400 people have been released from the Australian-run detention centre to live in the community after being given refugee visas by the Nauruan government.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-14/nauru-introduces-law-curbing-dissent/6469202>

28. Former Nauru president slams crackdown on free speech, questions Australia's influence on governance

ABC News Online / Pacific Beat

First posted Fri 15 May 2015, 3:31pm

Updated Fri 15 May 2015, 3:43pm

The former president of Nauru has said he fears new restrictions on freedom of speech will make it impossible to properly campaign for next year's national election.

The government has amended the criminal code to make comments deemed in breach of the new amendments an offence punishable by up to seven years in jail.

The Criminal Code (Amendment) Bill 2015 prohibits language "that is threatening, abusive or insulting in nature and has the intention to stir up racial or religious hatred," adding "political hatred" to the triggers for criminal proceedings.

Former Nauru president, Sprent Dabwido, was one of five opposition MPs who last year were suspended from parliament for talking to foreign media.

Mr Dabwido told Radio Australia's Pacific Beat he was "not surprised" by the new legislation.

"This government, and the way they are handling the running of the nation, is more of a dictatorial manner," he said.

He said he was "ashamed" a law had been passed that could "gag people" and "break the constitution in terms of freedom of speech".

The tiny Pacific Island nation, which had a population of less than 10,000 in 2011, generates a large majority of its income from Australia's offshore detention centre.

Mr Dabwido said Australia's influence on Nauru was affecting the way the country is governed.

"80 per cent of the economy in Nauru, 90 per cent of the revenue Nauru is coming from Australia," Mr Dabwido said.

He said Australia's money was being used "not to develop a nation, but to be used by those few in power to get rich... and for themselves to retain power".

A federal election is slated for next year, and Mr Dabwido said the new laws will make campaigning "very difficult".

In documents sighted by the ABC, Nauru justice minister David Adeang said the amendments were in defence of public safety.

"In defence of what? Who's attacking Nauru?" Mr Dabwido said.

"I haven't seen the republic of Kiribati sending an army."

US State Department 'concerned' by Nauru's Facebook block

The new law was passed a week after the government enacted a 'temporary block' on social networking site Facebook.

The move, which the government said was to stop the spread of child pornography, was slammed by refugee advocates, who said the ban would severely impact the ability for asylum seekers to communicate.

The US state department confirmed it was aware of the restrictions, and Press Office director Jeff Rathke said the department was "concerned" by the reports.

"Freedom of expression online and offline is essential to a healthy democracy, and so ensuring that a country's citizens have access to an unrestricted and open internet is in accordance with Nauru's own expressed desire... to the highest standards of democracy," he said.

"We've certainly conveyed our views to the government there and reiterate our call for these restrictions to be lifted."

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection last week told the ABC that "any internet restrictions in Nauru are a matter for the government of Nauru".

The ABC has attempted to contact Nauru's government for comment.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-15/former-nauru-president-slams-new-free-speech-laws/6473314>

29. US calls on Nauru to lift restrictions on Facebook and other social media sites

Ban imposed weeks ago limits Nauruans' access to information and makes communication difficult for asylum seekers held in Australian detention centre

The Guardian
Paul Farrell
Friday 15 May 2015 15.25 AEST

The United States government has called on Nauru to lift restrictions on Facebook and other social media sites.

On Thursday the US Department of State said it had been made aware of web restrictions on Nauru. The Nauruan government restricted access to Facebook several weeks ago, which has limited Nauruans' access to information and made it difficult for asylum seekers held in the Australian detention centre to communicate with people outside the centre.

US Department of State press officer Jeff Rathke told reporters the US had directly contacted Nauru about the ban.

"We're concerned by reports of recent internet restrictions imposed by the government of Nauru, including that they blocked Facebook and other social media sites," Rathke said.

"Freedom of expression online and offline is essential to a healthy democracy, and so ensuring that a country's citizens have access to an unrestricted and open internet is in accordance with Nauru's own expressed desire to the higher – to the highest standards of democracy – and we've certainly conveyed our views to the government there and reiterate our call for these restrictions to be lifted."

The comments are at odds with the Australian government's silence over the Facebook blocks on Nauru. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has refrained from commenting on the ban.

Following the ban of Facebook and other sites, the Nauruan government also introduced a new law that could see political opponents and asylum seekers who protest on the island jailed for up to seven years. The law has sparked renewed concerns about the state of democracy on the island, which has seen growing attacks of members of the judiciary over the past 18 months.

The Nauruan government also removed the former manager of Digicell, the telecommunications providers on the island, shortly before the Facebook ban was instated.

The government continues to maintain that the ban is necessary to prevent the community from "sexual perverts" and restrict access to pornography.

The president of Nauru, Baron Waqa, has also criticised international media coverage of events on the island, and said in a tweet on Wednesday “we hope the decisions of Nauru as a sovereign state will be respected”.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/15/us-calls-on-nauru-to-lift-restrictions-on-facebook-and-other-social-media-sites>

30. Pregnant asylum seekers on Nauru 'forced to create makeshift toilets'

Women decreased water intake to avoid walking long distances, Save the Children tells Senate inquiry into sexual assault and conditions on Nauru

The Guardian

Paul Farrell

Saturday 16 May 2015 11.30 AEST

Pregnant asylum seekers on Nauru have been forced to create makeshift toilets and have decreased their water intake to avoid walking long distances, Save the Children has told a Senate inquiry.

A Senate inquiry is currently underway into allegations of sexual assault and conditions on Nauru. It was launched following the release of a review by former integrity commissioner Philip Moss, which substantiated some allegations of sexual abuse at Australia's detention centre on the island.

A number of submissions made publicly available detail serious concerns about the care of vulnerable people on the island.

While the immigration department and Wilson Security have defended their role in the administration of the centre, Save the Children reported serious concerns in its submissions, and made a number of recommendations for the improvement of care.

It said in its submissions:

-- Pregnant women on Nauru have deliberately decreased their water intake, posing risks due to high temperatures on the island. In some cases Save the Children had been aware they had not received medical treatment due to difficulties in walking to the medical clinic. The submission also said no maternity clothing is made available to the women, instead forcing them to wear their husband's clothes or trade with other asylum seekers.

-- Australia's policy towards asylum seekers was a “piecemeal and incomplete policy response, aspects of which are driven more by political considerations than any desire to find a sustainable and humane approach”.

-- Young children and infants are forced to live in “cramped accommodation which can give rise to an increased risk of infection”. It recommended no further infants should be transferred to Nauru.

It also said it had been documenting allegations of sexual assaults and other incidents throughout 2013.

“Incidents of abuse and harm of asylum seekers at the Nauru RPC [regional processing centre] have been clearly documented since Save the Children first began providing services there in 2013. These events have been recorded by Save the Children in incident reports, through case notes and via other monitoring processes in accordance with guidelines and protocols at Nauru RPC,” the submission said.

Save the Children was also concerned by developmental regression and mental illness among children, instances of family violence and the breakdown of family relationships as a result of immigration detention.

“These observations together with the documented incidents, very clearly and comprehensively demonstrate how prolonged immigration detention threatens the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of asylum seekers, particularly children.”

Its submission outlined several personal case studies from asylum seeker children who had been affected by trauma – but each was redacted by the Senate committee. It also made a number of recommendations to improve conditions at the centre.

Full story at <http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/may/16/pregnant-asylum-seekers-on-nauru-forced-to-create-makeshift-toilets>

31. AUDIO: UN torture prevention team tours Nauru to review all deprivations of liberty

ABC-RN
Pacific Beat
Updated 8 May 2015, 18:34 AEST

Presenter: Sam Bolitho

Speaker: Malcolm Evans, chair of the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture

Three senior United Nations rights experts completed a visit to Nauru this week as part of the country's obligations on the prevention of torture.

Nauru became a party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture agreement in 2013, and the United Nations team was there to monitor the nation's obligations to treat people correctly, both local Nauruans and the asylum seekers detained there.

They visited Nauru's police station and prison, as well as the Australian-run Regional Processing Center for asylum seekers.

The specialists are members of the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture, and chairman Malcolm Evans says they are reviewing all aspects of citizens' and refugees' deprivations of liberty.

<http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/radio/program/pacific-beat/un-torture-prevention-team-tours-nauru-to-review-all-deprivations-of-liberty/1445378>