

AUSTRALIA

EXTREME RISK OF VIOLENCE FOR REFUGEES ON MANUS

Australia's offshore detention and processing policy on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea (PNG), amounts to the systematic abuse of hundreds of individuals. Ongoing reports of violence, and the recent death of an Iranian man who had sought asylum, underline the grave harm being done by Australia's policy.

Hundreds of refugees and individuals who are seeking asylum from persecution are currently trapped on Manus Island, PNG, where they are at risk of violent attacks and abuse at the hands of some local actors. The refugees were forcibly transferred to PNG by the Australian government after attempting to seek protection in Australia. Many have been trapped on the island for several years.



Map credit: refugeeaction.org.au

Australia's deliberately abusive system has contributed to serious mental health problems and acute distress amongst the refugees and asylum seekers.

The refugees have been subjected to periodic physical attacks and verbal abuse by some local people and members of the police and armed forces. This has left them feeling highly vulnerable and unable to leave PNG except to return to the countries from which they originally fled. Amnesty International has documented several incidents of violence, including recently on 14 April 2017 when multiple bullets were fired into the Manus refugee detention centre by PNG soldiers. Over the past few weeks the situation has deteriorated, and there have been several reports of attacks on refugees and asylum seekers by some members of the community. These attacks have reportedly resulted in extremely serious physical injuries requiring hospitalization.

In this increasingly tense context on Manus Island, the body of 31-year old Iranian asylum seeker, Hamed Shamshiripour was found on 7 August 2017 in a forest near a facility known as the "Lorengau transit centre." The cause and circumstances of his death are unknown. The latest attacks come at a time when the Australian and PNG authorities are trying to close the refugee detention centre on Manus and move refugees to another location on PNG - the Lorengau transit centre.

Please send a fax, email or letter without delay. (Postage is \$2.50.) **Urge the authorities**

- * to ensure the protection of all refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island from further attacks;
- * to bring all asylum seekers and refugees to Australia immediately and ensure that all those granted refugee status have the right to settle in Australia or third countries;
- * to cease all action or implementation of policy on Manus Island that puts refugees at risk of further harm, for example by forcing them to move to the refugee transit centre in East Lorengau or into the local community;
- * to ensure adequate medical care for all the refugees and asylum seekers suffering injuries and trauma;
- * to urge the Papua New Guinean authorities to open an independent, impartial, prompt and effective investigation into the death of Hamed Shamshiripour and into the reported attacks.

Here is the contact information you need:

Minister of Immigration and Border Protection

Mr Peter Dutton
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House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600, Australia
Fax: 011 61 2 6273 4144
Email: minister@border.gov.au
Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Julie Bishop
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600, Australia
Fax: 011 61 2 6273 4112
Email: Julie.Bishop.MP@aph.gov.au
Salutation: Dear Minister

Please send a copy to

His Excellency Tony William Negus
High Commissioner for Australia
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Additional information

In August 2012, Australia introduced its offshore detention regime, under which everyone arriving by boat to an external Australian territory would be detained in a Refugee Processing Centre on Nauru or Papua New Guinea. In mid-2013, Australia enacted further legislation that meant anyone who arrived by boat anywhere in Australia – including the mainland – would be barred from seeking asylum in the country. The Australian Government has claimed that its policy deters people-smugglers and protects people who might otherwise undertake the hazardous boat crossing to Australia. The Government however has not publicly recognized that this offshore detention and procession policy is in fact punitive and has subjected thousands of men, women and children to systematic abuse on Manus, PNG and on Nauru. Asylum seekers and refugees have been sent to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, as part of a bilateral agreement between Australia and PNG. Nearly 800 refugees and asylum seekers are currently in Papua New Guinea. There are two separate facilities on Manus Island – one is located in the town of Lorengau, the other is on Lombrum Naval Base.

On 26 April 2016, the Supreme Court of Papua New Guinea ruled that the transfer and detention of asylum seekers in Manus Island are both illegal and in breach of the right to personal liberty recognized by the constitution of Papua New Guinea. This led to the announcement by the Australian Immigration Minister that the Manus refugee centre would be shut down but that the people detained in the centre would not be brought to Australia.

The Lorengau transit centre was reportedly built to accommodate 300-400 people, but there are close to 800 people in the detention centre. Not only would the move lead to dangerous overcrowding, the Lorengau transit centre moves the refugees closer to local communities, some of whom have perpetrated attacks on them. The recent violence has exacerbated refugees' concerns about the forcible relocation to the transit centre. They have organized protests against the move, and made appeals on social media for help. Amnesty International understands that, in an effort to coerce the refugees to move, the authorities have made the conditions in the detention centre more uncomfortable, and the refugees have been threatened with arrest if they do not move to the Lorengau transit centre. However, the authorities have not confirmed these actions.

Both the government of Australia and the government of PNG are responsible for the safety and rights of the refugees and asylum seekers. The detention centre is run by the government of Australia.

Amnesty International has called for the refugee detention centre on Manus Island to be closed and all refugees and asylum seekers to be brought to safety in Australia. The closure of the detention centre only to move refugees to a transit camp on PNG would increase the already grave risks to their human rights.

The UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR, has publicly expressed its concerns over the deteriorating situation and has said that “the planned closure of the Manus [...] Centre must only take place in the context of continued critical services and in line with Australia’s ongoing responsibility for the refugees and asylum seekers it has transferred to Papua New Guinea and Nauru”.