

UA 184/17, **UPDATE 2**, AI Index: ASA 12/7380/2017 of 3 November 2017.

The original index number is: ASA 12/6899/2017 of 9 August 2017.

AUSTRALIA: NO SAFE OPTIONS FOR REFUGEES AFTER CAMP 'CLOSURE'

There are serious concerns for the health and security of hundreds of refugees after essential services were withdrawn at the Manus Island detention centre on 31 October. In addition to limited access to food, water, electricity and medical care, these refugees and asylum-seekers are at risk of violence from members of the local community and Papua New Guinea (PNG) security forces.



Photo of Manus Island Detention Centre

The Australian government withdrew all personnel and services from the Manus Island detention centre, where refugees and asylum-seekers have suffered for nearly five years as part of Australia's cruel and illegal 'offshore processing' policies, on 31 October. The more than 600 individuals affected were told to move to so-called transit centres that are currently too small and lack adequate security or health facilities.

Hundreds of refugees and asylum-seekers living in the current detention centre have said that they will resist moving as they fear for their personal safety. Locals have previously attacked refugees in the town of Lorengau, sometimes with machetes, and left several individuals badly injured. Neither the PNG nor the Australian authorities have acted to adequately protect the refugees from such violence.

Refugees and asylum-seekers were given bulk medication in the last week of October to last for one month. Since that time there have been two medical incidents - one involving a person with epilepsy and the other an attempt at self-harm - reported to Amnesty International, and medical assistance was not provided.

All water, food and power supplies have been cut off from the centre since Tuesday, 31 October and the men have resorted to digging for ground water and catching rain in bins as their supplies run low. With severely limited access to medical care, and a rapid deterioration of sanitary conditions, there are serious concerns for their health and well-being.

Please send an urgent letter, email or fax without delay! Call on authorities to:

- * Ensure all refugees and asylum-seekers have access to acceptable living conditions, including access to adequate medical care, sanitation, food and water, electricity and other essential facilities.
- * Ensure the safety and security for all refugees and asylum-seekers, including from violence by local communities, security forces or private security contractors.

* Immediately bring all men to Australia and ensure all those granted refugee status have the right to settle in Australia or safe third countries.

Here is the contact information you will require:

Minister of Immigration and Border Protection

Mr Peter Dutton
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Fax: 011 61 (02) 6273 4144
Email: minister@border.gov.au
Salutation: Dear Minister

Minister for Immigration and Border Protection (PNG)

Mr Petrus Thomas
National Parliament
Parliament House,
Waigani
Port Moresby, NCD
Papua New Guinea
Salutation: Dear Minister

Please send copy to:

Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Julie Bishop
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Fax: 011 61 (02) 6273 4112
Email: Julie.Bishop.MP@aph.gov.au

His Excellency Tony William NEGUS (M)
High Commissioner Australian High
Commission
50 O'Connor Street, Suite 1301 Ottawa,
ON K1P 6L2 Canada
Tel: 1 (613) 236-0841
Fax: 1 (613) 786-7621

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, 300km off the coast of 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.

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 at Lombrum would be shut down but that the people detained in the centre would not be brought to Australia.

The East Lorengau Transit Centre was reportedly built to accommodate 300-400 people, but there are around 700 people in total on Manus Island, currently at two centres. Not only would the move lead to dangerous overcrowding, the East Lorengau transit centre also 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 so-called transit centre. There are four centres for refugees and asylum seekers on Manus Island – the original detention centre, which the Australian government refers to as a 'Regional Processing Centre' based at Lombrum Naval Base (around 20 kilometres from Lorengau, the main town on Manus Island); the East Lorengau Transit Centre (around 5 kilometres from Lorengau), and two new facilities on the one site, located at Ward One, referred to as 'Hillside Haus' and 'West Lorengau' (around 10 kilometres from Lorengau). The last two facilities are still under construction and are not ready for refugees to live there.

The refugees have been subjected to periodic physical attacks and verbal abuse by some local people and members of the PNG police and armed forces. This has left them highly vulnerable but unable to leave PNG except to return to the countries from which they originally fled. Refugees cannot work or travel to other parts of PNG without permission from immigration officials. Amnesty International has documented several incidents of violence, including on 14 April 2017 when multiple bullets were fired into the Manus refugee detention centre by PNG soldiers.

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 was run by the Australian government until they abruptly removed all services on 31 October. 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 other so-called transit centres on Manus Island increases 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".