

Amnesty International UK

MEDIA BRIEFING

COMMONWEALTH GAMES GLASGOW 2014

AUSTRALIA: WHERE ASYLUM SEEKERS FLEEING INHUMANE TREATMENT ARE PLACED IN APPALLING DETENTION CENTRES

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“The Australian Government’s policies around asylum seekers and refugees are bereft of any kind of respect for human rights. Australia’s transfer of asylum seekers to process their claims in detention facilities in Nauru and on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, means sending people to countries where they are subjected to human rights violations. The practice violates Australia’s obligations under both international refugee and human rights law and standards.

“Refugees and asylum seekers in the Australian-run detention centre in Nauru are living in cramped conditions, suffering from both physical and mental ailments, and routinely have their human rights violated. Recently leaked medical reports have shown that children detained on Nauru have no access to child protection services, appropriate inoculations or critical life-support systems, putting their health and lives at risk. The deliberately harsh, humiliating conditions are designed to pressure asylum seekers to return to their country of origin, regardless of whether or not they were refugees.

“Across the world, people are fleeing horrific human rights abuses. They are leaving their homes – not because they want to – but because to stay would mean persecution, torture and death. These are people who need to be supported and treated with respect whilst their claims for asylum are processed efficiently, protecting their human rights.”

Siobhan Reardon – Programme Director, Amnesty International Scotland

Amnesty spokesperson available throughout the Games
Daily media briefings available throughout the Games

AUSTRALIA

Population: 23, 130, 900

Prime Minister: Tony Abbot

Games debut: debut games Canada, 1930

National sport: Cricket, Rugby League

Delhi 2010 medal tally: 178 medals, 74 gold

Human rights concerns:

Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

The Australian Government is holding approximately 1,200 asylum-seekers at a detention centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. Around 1,100 asylum-seekers, including pregnant women and children, are also held in allegedly harsh conditions at Australia's detention facility on the remote pacific island of Nauru.

Following a visit to the Australian-run detention centre on Manus Island in November 2013,

Amnesty International reported that the deliberately harsh, humiliating conditions there were designed to pressure asylum seekers to return to their country of origin, regardless of whether or not they were refugees.

Similarly, an Amnesty International report in November 2012 found that refugees and asylum seekers in the Australian-run detention centre in Nauru were living in cramped conditions, suffered from both physical and mental ailments, and routinely had their human rights violated. Recently leaked medical reports have shown that children detained on Nauru have no access to child protection services, appropriate inoculations or critical life-support systems, putting their health and lives at risk. Pregnant women must be flown to the Australian mainland to give birth; a transfer that takes 24-36 hours and costs more than AUD 80,000.

Nauru recently (April 2014) denied Amnesty International access to the detention facility, raising further fears about the potential for human rights violations. The Nauru Government's denial for access was based on "the current circumstances and incredibly busy time," despite the organisation's suggestion of alternative dates. This latest obstruction followed Nauru reneging earlier in April on allowing a team of UN human rights observers to access the centre, citing "practical difficulties." In February 2014, the cost of visas for journalists visiting Nauru was increased from AUD \$200 to \$8,000.

Asylum seekers on Manus Island have protested peacefully against their indefinite detention and the conditions at the centre since December 2013. The protests descended into violence on 16 and 17 February, resulting in the killing of one asylum seeker, Reza Berati, and injuries to at least 62 others. The Australian Government's own inquiry into the violence found that injuries occurred when private security staff and local police attacked asylum seekers with weapons including bats and machetes. Some asylum seekers not involved in the protests were dragged from hiding places and beaten. One asylum seeker was shot in the buttocks and another lost an eye as a result of his injuries. The Australian Government inquiry failed to assign responsibility for the violence to any of the authorities responsible for running the facility.

Asylum seekers who witnessed the attacks are at grave risk of retaliatory attacks or threats and intimidation, particularly as the investigation into the incident continues. Papua New Guinea has no witness protection program to ensure the safety of witnesses. Alleged perpetrators of the violence (guards and police from Papua New Guinea) continue to have access to the asylum seekers. Five months on from the violence, no one has been arrested or tried in connection with the violence or the death of Reza Berati.

There are also concerns for the health and welfare of the asylum seekers. It is unclear whether those injured in the attacks have received the medical treatment they require, as healthcare facilities in the detention centre and in Papua New Guinea are limited.

Australia's transfer of asylum seekers to process their claims in detention facilities in Nauru and on Manus Island has amounted to refoulement – sending them to countries where they are subjected to human rights violations. The practice violates Australia's obligations under both international refugee and human rights law and standards.

In May of this year, the Australian media reported that Cambodia has agreed a deal "in principle" to receive refugees and asylum seekers from Australia. These may include some of those held at Australian-run detention facilities in Nauru and on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island.

In 2013, Amnesty International Australia launched a report ['This is Breaking People'](#) outlining human rights violations at Australia's asylum seeker processing centre on Manus Island,

Papua New Guinea. It outlined recommendations for both the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments.

This was followed by an update briefing, 'This is Still Breaking People', based on a return visit to the facility in April 2014, as part of the PNG Senior Justice Cannings inquiry into the legality of the facility. Amnesty International found that recommendations have not been acted upon and that conditions in the facility have, in some cases, worsened. Justice Cannings' inquiry has since been stalled following accusations of bias by the PNG Government.

In July 2014, seven months after receiving Amnesty International's first report on the facility, the [Australian Government provided a response](#). Amnesty International considers this response evasive and deeply inadequate.

Amnesty International will continue to expose the secrecy surrounding Australia's asylum seeker policies, and the human rights abuses that it conceals, through our [Secrets and Lives campaign](#).

Amnesty International Australia's report: *This is Breaking People: Human Rights Violations at Australia's Asylum Seeker Processing Centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea* can be found at - http://www.amnesty.org.au/images/uploads/about/Amnesty_International_Manus_Island_report.pdf

The Australian Government's response to the report can be found at - <http://secretsandlives.com.au/>

More information about Amnesty International's 'Secrets and Lies' campaign can be found here: <http://secretsandlives.com.au/>

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