

# URGENT ACTION

## MANUS ISLAND ASYLUM SEEKERS STILL AT RISK

**Asylum seekers held at a detention centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, continue to be at risk following two nights of violence on 16 and 17 February which left one man dead and dozens of others seriously injured.**

The Australian government is holding more than 1,300 asylum-seekers at a detention centre on Manus Island under harsh and humiliating conditions designed to pressure them to return to the countries they fled. Asylum seekers 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 – a 23 year old Iranian man Reza Berati - and injuries to at least 62 others. It is not clear what triggered the violence, but several witnesses have claimed that the injuries occurred when private security staff attacked asylum seekers with weapons including bats and machetes.

Asylum seekers who witnessed the attacks are at grave risk of retaliatory attacks or threats and intimidation, particularly as the investigation into the incident begins. 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.

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

### **Please write immediately in English or your own language:**

- Calling for the immediate removal to Australia of all the asylum seekers who witnessed or were injured in the violence for their safety and protection;
- Urging the authorities to ensure that the asylum seekers receive appropriate medical treatment, including full rehabilitation and mental health services and have regular contact with family member and lawyers;
- Calling on them to ensure that all asylum seekers have the ability to seek legal redress for any injuries sustained including access to lawyers;
- Demanding an end of the offshore detention and processing of asylum seekers arriving by boat to Australia.

### **PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 APRIL 2014 TO:**

#### Australian Prime Minister

Tony Abbott  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia  
Fax: +61 (02) 6273 4100  
Email: [tony.abbott.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:tony.abbott.mp@aph.gov.au)  
Salutation: **Dear Prime Minister**

#### Minister for Immigration and Border

Protection  
Scott Morrison  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia  
Fax: +61 (02) 6273 4144  
Email: [scott.morrison.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:scott.morrison.mp@aph.gov.au)  
Salutation: **Dear Minister**

#### Papua New Guinea Prime Minister

Peter O'Neill  
PO Box 639  
Waigani  
Port Moresby  
Papua New Guinea  
Fax: +675 327 7480  
Salutation: **Dear Prime Minister**

**Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:**

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On 16 February 2014, after regular peaceful protests, asylum seekers were called into a meeting with senior immigration staff. There are mixed reports as to what was said in this meeting, with some witnesses claiming asylum seekers were told they would not be resettled in Papua New Guinea or Australia. Asylum seekers continued to protest on 16 February and eight were arrested for disturbing the peace and causing minor property damage. On the night of 17 February, violence erupted in the facility resulting in injuries to more than 62 asylum seekers and the death of a 23 year old Iranian man, Reza Berati. It is not clear what triggered the violence, but witnesses claim excessive use of force by the Australian privately contracted security company G4S and Papua New Guinea Police. Some media reports allege the Papua New Guinea military and other locals were also involved in the violence.

A media blackout enforced by the Australian government has ensured that very little public information is available on the events which occurred at Manus Island on 16 and 17 February 2014.

On 19 July 2013, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Papua New Guinea Prime Minister Peter O'Neill announced a new joint policy designed to deter asylum-seekers from travelling to Australia by boat. Contravening the Refugee Convention, by which both countries are bound, the policy states that for at least the next 12 months, no asylum-seeker arriving by boat to Australian territory will be processed or ever resettled as a recognized refugee in Australia. While Australia was already forcibly removing asylum-seekers to both Manus Island and Nauru, under the new policy those asylum-seekers who would eventually be recognised as refugees after processing their claims on Papua New Guinea would be "settled" there as opposed to Australia.

Since the policy was announced, more than 4,000 asylum-seekers have arrived by boat into the Australian territory. They come predominantly from countries such as Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Sudan and Somalia. Under the policy all these people are sent to the detention centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, instead of being processed in Australia as required by international law.

Amnesty International's report *This Is Breaking People: Human Rights Violations at Australia's Asylum Seeker Processing Centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea* (December 2013, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA12/002/2013/en>) details the appalling conditions in the centre, where at the time of writing only 55 out of more than 1,000 asylum seekers were able to start a claim for refugee status. The report details how asylum seekers are being held in a prison-like regime, in extremely cramped compounds in stifling heat, while being denied sufficient water and medical treatments. Most have fled horrific situations and risked their lives in their efforts to reach Australia.

Many of the asylum seekers being held on Manus Island have fled well-known conflict areas including Afghanistan, Darfur, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria. Others have fled situations of extreme discrimination and statelessness, including Rohingyas from Myanmar and Bidun from the Gulf region, and have nowhere to return to.

Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution regardless of the method of arrival. In 2012, 90 per cent of asylum seekers who had arrived on Australian shores by boat were found to be refugees.

Successive Australian governments have long had a policy of mandatory offshore detention for asylum-seekers arriving by boat, which was first introduced in 2001 and continued until 2008. In late 2012, the current Labour government reintroduced mandatory offshore detention and re-opened immigration detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.

Immigration detention should never be indefinite and it should only be used as a last resort and only according to a lawful purpose other than the person concerned being an asylum-seeker or a refugee. As party to the Refugee Convention, both PNG and Australia have the duty to ensure that asylum-seekers have access to a full and efficient refugee status determination process and are not subjected to arbitrary detention.

Name: Asylum Seekers on Manus Island

Gender m/f: Both

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