

## **NO TO DUMPING AND DETAINING REFUGEES IN OFFSHORE PROCESSING CENTRES**

*'The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol do not allow states to refuse protection to refugees just because they have not yet entered the core of its territory'*<sup>1</sup> – Professor James Hathaway

### **EAST TIMOR**

#### **What's Australia's plan in East Timor?**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2010 Prime Minister Gillard announced that she would be asking East Timor to establish a 'regional processing facility' and take all undocumented asylum seekers arriving by boat to Australia for processing and resettlement.

#### **What's wrong with this plan?**

It's illegal, inhumane, unworkable and a huge waste of tax payers' money. This policy is merely the continuation of the warehousing of refugees in impoverished countries. We only need to look at Australia's track record in Indonesia for us to be concerned. Over 2,000 asylum seekers assessed as refugees by the UNHCR currently live in indefinite squalor and inhumane detention conditions in Indonesia, often on our dime. Moreover, we must remember the lessons learnt from our history. The processing of asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island was a disaster.

**People were left in limbo for years in poor conditions in offshore detention centres, often released onto mainland Australia with devastating impact on their mental and physical health.**

#### **But won't it be different this time as East Timor is a signatory to the Refugee Convention?**

While East Timor is a signatory to the Refugee Convention (unlike Nauru) it is a country ranked 162 out of 182 countries in the 2009 UN Human Development Index, and fares poorly on key indicators such as life expectancy, access to education and standard of living, East Timor does not have the capacity to humanely care for thousands of asylum seekers.

#### **Is there an alternative to offshore processing?**

Yes. Refugees deserve better than to be dumped in an Australian funded detention centre in East Timor. There is an alternative. As we did before the creation of offshore detention centres, asylum seekers can be processed onshore in Australia. Moreover, as was our policy was for 15 years peacefully and successfully before the introduction of the policy of Mandatory Detention in 1992, people arriving by boat can be processed in the community at a seventh of the cost to the taxpayer and without all the needless suffering that this new 'solution' will inevitably bring.

### **What you can do**

Write to the President of East Timor Xanana Gusmao asking them to say 'No to being a dumping ground for Australia's refugees'. That as Australians we do not support offshore processing. That we are concerned East Timor will just become a dumping ground for Australia's refugees and the Australian government is not to be trusted in resettling the majority of all the people found to be refugees given their poor track record with Indonesia and the history of Nauru and Manus Island. That East Timor a country in a position of rebuilding and with a commitment to human rights will have its international reputation harmed.

E- mail via their Media Liaison officer at: [contact\\_carolineo@hotmail.com](mailto:contact_carolineo@hotmail.com)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR26/FMR2632.pdf>

## NAURU

### **No to a Nauru sequel of hunger strikes, suicide attempts and deportations back to death**

As part of its election campaign, the Liberal Party championed the re-opening of the Nauru detention centre and stood proudly side by side with Nauru's Foreign Minister Dr Keke, who proclaimed 'there were a lot of negative perceptions created that were unfounded...the Asylum Seekers were treated very well [on Nauru]' and goes on further to say Nauru does not even need to sign the Refugee Convention<sup>2</sup>. All the community fears of returning asylum seekers to Nauru are in fact well founded and it is shameful that the Liberal Party would seek a sequel to the human suffering and despair that was created on Nauru.

The reasons to disregard the consideration of reopening the Nauru detention centre are compelling.

### **Lack of capacity**

Around 1,500 Asylum seekers were processed on Nauru. This stretched the small Nauru community of around 10,000 people far beyond its means, as Nauru faced its own economic and financial problems. Nauru lacked adequate medical infrastructure and failed to meet the often complex medical requirements of those seeking asylum<sup>3</sup>. At least 40 people were airlifted to Australia from Nauru from medical treatment during the previous use of Nauru as a detention centre. In August 2002 a 26 year old asylum seeker without any known medical problems died on Nauru<sup>4</sup>.

### **Mental health impact**

Many of those previously detained on Nauru suffered serious mental health issues as a result of detention. A number were assessed at "grave risk" and were taken to Australia because of their deteriorating mental health while numerous incidents of self harm and detainees suffering from depression and psychological conditions were reported<sup>5</sup>.

In 2003, 45 people took part in a serious hunger strike. 284 men, women and children remain imprisoned after 29 months on Nauru (fifteen of the 93 children are babies born on Nauru). Out of sheer desperation, 45 men went on a hunger strike for 22 days. An Australian Government delegation sent in the wake of the hunger strike recommended additional funding to the struggling Nauru Health Services but was specifically directed NOT to assess the health and mental health services of the detained population. The Health Alliance/AMA team of medical experts was refused visas to assist the Nauru Hospital during the hunger strike. Asylum Seekers were prevented from accessing adequate legal advice and information about their rights of appeal<sup>6</sup>.

### **Deported back to danger**

In 2006 the Edmund Rice Centre tracked 41 returned Afghan asylum seekers from Nauru and finds 39 were in perilous conditions. Their report 'Deported Back to Danger II' detailed that the Australian Government secured the return of more than half the asylum seekers on Nauru in 2003 by a "mixture of inducements and threats". The report follows an earlier account by the centre that up to nine asylum seekers and several of their children were killed on return to Afghanistan from Nauru<sup>7</sup>.

In 2007, the average cost for maintaining facilities on Nauru was \$2million<sup>8</sup> per month. Let us learn from our past and have no sequel to this injustice.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/no-obstacles-to-reopening-nauru-says-coalition-after-meeting-nations-foreign-minister/story-fn59niix-1225897375853>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.au/resources/filestore/originals/OAus-PriceTooHighAsylumSeekers-0807.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.au/resources/filestore/originals/OAus-PriceTooHighAsylumSeekers-0807.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-national/refugee-advocates-slam-nauru-plan-20100727-10t00.html>].

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.au/resources/filestore/originals/OAus-PriceTooHighAsylumSeekers-0807.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.erc.org.au/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.oxfam.org.au/resources/filestore/originals/OAus-PriceTooHighAsylumSeekers-0807.pdf>



## What you can do

**Help us by writing** to Prime Minister Gillard and the leader of the Liberal Party Tony Abbott and ask them to promise to act so that Australia will no longer have a policy of processing asylum seekers offshore. Reinforce the message that there is an alternative to offshore processing. As we did before the creation of offshore detention centres, asylum seekers can be processed onshore in Australia.

People arriving by boat can be processed in the community at a seventh of the cost to the taxpayer and without all the needless suffering that offshore processing has resulted in.

Prime Minister Gillard - Email: [http://www.pm.gov.au/PM\\_Connect/Email\\_your\\_PM](http://www.pm.gov.au/PM_Connect/Email_your_PM), The Hon Julia Gillard MP, Prime Minister, Parliament House, CANBERRA ACT 2600

Leader of the Opposition, The Hon Tony Abbott MP - Email: [Tony.Abbott.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Tony.Abbott.MP@aph.gov.au), PO Box 6022 House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

You can also write to Dr Keke, Nauru's Foreign Minister asking him to say 'No to being a dumping ground for Australia's refugees'. That as Australians, we do not support offshore processing.

Email Dr Keke and other relevant Government officials:

Minister Foreign Affairs  
Director for Offshore Processing Centre  
Office of the President  
Office of the Presidential Counsel

[minister.foreignaffairs@naurugov.nr](mailto:minister.foreignaffairs@naurugov.nr)  
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