



6 May 2011

**** For immediate release ****

A RETURN TO THE HORRORS OF THE PACIFIC SOLUTION

'It is an extravagant waste and it needs to stop'¹ (Stephen Smith, 2004 (ALP Shadow Immigration Minister on Manus Island)).

The announcement today of the restarting of Howard's failed 'Pacific Solution' is a dark day for human rights in Australia. The Labor government which condemned the Pacific Solution is now intending to use former Prime Minister Howard's Excision laws to repeat this human rights violation.

In October 2001, Iraqi men, women and children who fled persecution under the Saddam regime were flown from Christmas Island to Manus Island and incarcerated there until August 2003. All were eventually accepted as refugees. Some were transferred to Nauru until they were finally released. One man Aladdin Sisalem, a Palestinian refugee from Kuwait was flown from Australia was held there by all by himself until June 2004 when he too was finally granted a visa and came to Australia.

The CEO of the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Kon Karapanagiotidis OAM, believes that the re-opening of Manus Island will 'be a disaster' as it will severely damage already vulnerable and persecuted people, burden an impoverished country with our responsibility (PNG ranks last among Pacific developing member countries on both the Human Development Index and the Human Poverty Index of the United Nations), result in warehousing, waste another billion dollars of tax payers money and breach our fundamental democratic and legal obligations to genuine refugees.

The Pacific Solution resulted in irreparable and unnecessary human and financial costs such as the detrimental affects on mental and physical health where people were 'managed' with anti-psychotic medication, sending people back to danger and leaving people in limbo for years – at one stage there were 289 asylum seekers detained for more than three years including 93 children. Some men were detained for up to six years. In addition, we are breaching our commitments under International Law and the Pacific Solution was a waste of money - the average cost for detaining each person on Manus Island was \$500,000.

The re-opening of Manus Island raises many questions. The Australian government has not explained who is going to be responsible for processing the refugee claims of people dumped there or indeed if they will have access to Refugee Status Determination (RSD).

Will Australian officials be sent to a foreign country to process claims? Under whose laws would these claims be processed? Who will run the camps and who will be responsible for the people warehoused there?

Will Australia seek assistance from UNHCR who assist countries which have signed the Refugee Convention but who lack capacity? PNG already receives this assistance for asylum seekers who arrive in PNG but will the UNHCR feel that such assistance should be offered to a rich stable country like Australia who chooses to ship their asylum seekers off-shore?

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2004/s1043095.htm>

The list of legal and moral questions goes on and must be addressed. Who will be sent to Manus - people intercepted by boat on way to Christmas Island or will people already onshore be forcibly trans-shipped to Manus? How will this be done? Who will use the force necessary to send people to this Pacific warehouse as no one will want to go?

The reason the ALP ended the Pacific Solution was because it was affront to human rights, unsustainable, dangerous and inhumane. Nothing has changed.

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