

Manus Island Detention Centre



The Manus Island Regional Processing Centre in Papua New Guinea was opened in 2001 as part of the Howard Government's 'Pacific Solution'. It was officially closed in 2008 after Kevin Rudd took office, however Julia Gillard reopened the centre in 2012.¹ When Kevin Rudd once again took on the Prime Ministership in 2013 he introduced the 'PNG Solution', a regional resettlement arrangement which meant that all asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat would have 'no chance' of being settled in Australia.² Under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments, asylum seekers are not only processed in Papua New Guinea, but will also be resettled there if found to be refugees.³ No asylum seekers sent to PNG who are found to be refugees will ever be settled in Australia.

As of 31 March 2015, there are 989 men detained in the centre.⁴

Conditions within the centre

The detention of asylum seekers in the centre on Manus Island subjects them to dangerous and inhumane conditions that led to two deaths in 2014 alone. A recent United Nations report has stated that the Australian Government has violated the right of asylum seekers to be free from torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment "by failing to provide adequate detention conditions... and put a stop to the escalating violence and tension at the regional processing centre."⁵ Amnesty International's report on conditions in the centre found that living quarters were severely overcrowded - with up to 112 men housed in a single dormitory - and that the centre was seriously lacking in drinking water, adequate toilet and shower facilities, and basic essentials such as shoes and clothing.⁶

The effect of these degrading material conditions is compounded by uncertainty and stress brought about by the indefinite nature of the detention, prolonged processing times, and fears over the prospect of resettlement in Papua New Guinea. The detention environment on Manus is severely detrimental to the mental health of detained asylum seekers, many of whom are already vulnerable from previous experiences of torture and trauma in their countries of origin. IHMS, the organisation contracted to provide health services in the centre, has reported that at least half of all asylum seekers in offshore detention suffer from significant depression, stress and anxiety, according to clinical assessments.⁷

Health services in the centre have been shown to be severely inadequate. Hamid Kehazaei, an Iranian asylum seeker detained in the Manus Island centre, died in September last year after contracting septicaemia through a cut on his foot. A lack of medical resources and bureaucratic delays meant that Kehazaei was unable to be treated in time. Leaked documents have since revealed 'a pattern of medical negligence on the island.'⁸

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-11-21/first-asylum-seekers-arrive-on-manus-island/4383876>

² <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/immigration/kevin-rudd-to-unveil-manus-island-expansion-plan-in-bid-to-stop-boats/story-fn9hm1qu-1226681830019>

³ <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/papua-new-guinea/Pages/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-government-of-the-independent-state-of-papua-new-guinea-and-the-government-of-austr.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.immi.gov.au/About/Documents/detention/immigration-detention-statistics-mar2015.pdf>

⁵ <http://static.quim.co.uk/ni/1425873116713/Mendez-report.pdf>

⁶ http://www.amnesty.org.au/images/uploads/about/Amnesty_International_Manus_Island_report.pdf

⁷ <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/manus-island-asylum-seekers-in-mental-health-crisis-20140525-38wwd.html>

⁸ <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/iranian-asylum-seeker-hamid-kehazaei-died-from-rare-bacterial-infection-from-manus-island-report-20141004-10qa9h.html>

Violence and insecurity

Tensions between asylum seekers and Manus Island locals (including staff working for the centre) have led to widespread insecurity and fear amongst asylum seekers, particularly for those men that are set to be resettled in the local community.⁹ In February 2014 a violent confrontation between asylum seekers and locals within the centre resulted in the murder of 24-year-old Iranian asylum seeker Reza Barati, and around 70 other asylum seekers sustained various injuries.¹⁰ A Senate inquiry into the violence found that the Australian Government “failed in its duty to protect asylum seekers including Mr Barati from harm.”¹¹ It has now been 14 months since Reza Barati’s death and no one has faced trial for his murder, despite detailed witness accounts of the events, and assurances that the trial would finally begin in March 2015.¹²

Asylum seekers detained on Manus Island have repeatedly attempted to draw attention to their plight and in January 2015 over 700 detainees went on hunger strike to call for better conditions within the centre, quicker processing times, and safer resettlement solutions.¹³

Financial Cost

The cost of maintaining the Manus Island detention centre is vastly more expensive than it would be to process asylum seekers in Australia. Operational costs have now reached over \$600 million per annum, according to senate estimates.¹⁴ In comparison, Martin Bowles, former Secretary of DIAC (now DIBP) has stated that processing in Australia costs just 20% of the amount required to process someone on Manus Island.¹⁵

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⁹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-06-11/former-manus-island-guard-makes-emotional-address-to-inquiry/5515166>

¹⁰ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/18/manus-island-unrest-one-dead-dozens-injured-and-man-shot-in-buttock>

¹¹ http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Manus_Island/Report/c08

¹² <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-26/two-men-to-stand-trial-over-reza-barati-death-on-manus-island/6265212>

¹³ <http://theconversation.com/manus-island-hunger-strikes-are-a-call-to-australias-conscience-36419>

¹⁴ *Hansard*, Senate Estimates, 20 October, 2014

¹⁵ *Hansard*, Senate Estimates, 27-28 May 2013.