

NAURU DETENTION CENTRE



The detention centre on Nauru was opened in 2001 as part of the Pacific Solution. It was closed in 2007 but re-opened in 2012 by the then Gillard Labor Government with the signing of an MOU with Nauru.

On 3 August 2013, Australia and Nauru entered into a new MOU to regulate the transfer and assessment of asylum seekers in Nauru¹. The MOU supersedes the 2012 agreement between Australia and Nauru².

Current Australian Government policy includes the resettlement of people found to be refugees on Nauru on temporary protection visas, before they are offered permanent resettlement in Cambodia.

No asylum seekers sent to Nauru who are found to be refugees will ever be settled in Australia.

As of 31 March 2015, there are 718 people in the Nauru detention centre which includes children, women and men.³

Conditions in the Centre

Nauru lacks the infrastructure to ensure adequate processing and resettlement arrangements for asylum seekers. The UNHCR has stated that the centre lacks a “durable solution for refugees” and “does not provide safe and humane conditions of treatment in detention.”⁴ Indeed, the former head of the detention health provider IHMS has stated that treatment of asylum seekers on Nauru is ‘akin to torture.’⁵

The independent Moss Report released in March 2015 revealed reports of rape within the centre, and numerous “reported and unreported allegations of sexual and other physical assault” of both minors and adults.⁶ Former psychiatrists and social workers who worked on Nauru have since released an open letter stating that the Australian Government was aware of cases of sexual assault against women and children for 17 months but failed to act. The signatories have called for a Royal Commission into the abuse, and the immediate transfer of all asylum seekers to Australia from Nauru to ensure their safety.⁷

The centre’s conditions are especially harmful to children, as the Australian Human Rights Commission found in their 2014 inquiry into children in detention. The Commission states that “children detained indefinitely on Nauru are suffering from extreme levels of physical, emotional, psychological and developmental distress.”⁸ It found that Australia’s transfer of children to Nauru is in breach of several articles of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Children in detention are at high risk of mental illness and self-harm, and do not have access to adequate education and recreational facilities.

¹ <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/nauru/Pages/memorandum-of-understanding-between-the-republic-of-nauru-and-the-commonwealth-of-australia-relating-to-the-transfer-to-and.aspx>

² <http://www.asyluminsight.com/nauru-arrangement/#.VTQ2ctyUcW0>

³ <http://www.immi.gov.au/About/Documents/detention/immigration-detention-statistics-feb2015.pdf>

⁴ <http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/images/2013-11-26%20Report%20of%20UNHCR%20Visit%20to%20Nauru%20of%207-9%20October%202013.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-05/psychiatrist-says-treatment-of-asylum-seekers-akin-to-torture/5650992>

⁶ <http://www.immi.gov.au/about/dept-info/ files/review-conditions-circumstances-nauru.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-07/nauru-letter-of-concern-demands-royal-commission/6374680#letter>

⁸ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/forgotten-children-national-inquiry-children-immigration-detention-2014/12-children#a12-18>

Detrimental psychological effects are not limited to children, with frequent instances of hunger strikes, self-harm, aggression and suicide attempts among both children and adults.⁹

Financial Cost

Government data shows that offshore detention is hugely expensive compared to onshore processing alternatives; detaining a single asylum seeker on Nauru for one year costs more than \$400,000.¹⁰ In 2014 the annual operational cost of Nauru hit \$582.4 million.¹¹ It would be vastly cheaper to process asylum seekers in Australia. The 2014 National Commission of Audit figures showed that housing asylum seekers in the community on bridging visas is by far the most affordable option.¹² Offshore detention has been termed a 'scandalous waste' of money.¹³

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⁹ <http://theconversation.com/one-step-forward-two-steps-back-for-asylum-seeker-mental-health-10943>

¹⁰ <http://www.ncoa.gov.au/report/appendix-vol-2/10-14-illegal-maritime-arrival-costs.html>

¹¹ <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/offshore-detention-centres-annual-costs-hit-1-billion-20141020-118s6i.html>

¹² <http://www.ncoa.gov.au/report/appendix-vol-2/10-14-illegal-maritime-arrival-costs.html>

¹³ <http://theconversation.com/penny-wise-pound-foolish-how-to-really-save-money-on-refugees-27270>