

14 November 2017

## Urgent APRRN Statement

### *Stop Persecuting the Persecuted: Australia must Provide Safety and Long-Term Solutions to Refugees on Manus Island*

The Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN) expresses grave concern over the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian emergency unfolding on Papua New Guinea. On 31 October 2017, the Australian authorities cut water, electricity and other essential services to the Regional Processing Centre on Manus Island. Despite these cuts to services, 421 refugees remain at the centre, unable and unwilling to leave the centre due to fears over their personal safety.

Reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in addition to numerous rights groups, highlight the severe lack of viable accommodation options for refugees on Manus Island. Not only are the 'West Lorengau Haus' and 'Hillside Haus' accommodation centres incomplete and unsuitable, but there remains no other viable options available whereby refugees can live peacefully and safely.

A further cause for concern is the lack of medical and healthcare services available to refugees on the island. The majority of medical facilities are ill equipped to handle complex medical cases and the provision of mental health services is almost non-existent. With many refugees having escaped serious torture or harm in their countries of origin, mental health and torture / trauma support is absolutely essential.

In an effort to highlight their plight and express their opposition to the closure of the centre, many of the refugees on the island have maintained a peaceful protest for many months. One detainee currently on Manus Island, Behrouz Boochani, notes that men have "been detained and mentally tortured for four and a half years." He further proclaims that, "All we ask is for a safe third country, a place that respects human rights and has the resources to settle refugees and will provide freedom." Such calls from Mr. Boochani, whilst moving and heart wrenching, are a sad indictment on Australia's political landscape and the government's current stance on refugees that travel by boat.

APRRN recognises and commends members of the local Papua New Guinean community that have attempted to bring emergency supplies to the centre. Inversely, we criticise the Australian Government for not allowing such rations to enter the centre, thus creating heightened tensions and placing many innocent lives at risk.

As such, APRRN makes the following call for action:

#### To the Australian Government:

- We urge the Australian government to immediately provide essential services to the refugees stranded on Manus Islands. This includes food, water, shelter, genuine safety, and immediate medical care for all refugees.
- We urge the Australian Government to immediately take responsibility and provide protection to all refugees on Manus Island.
- We urge the Australian Government to work with their Papua New Guinea counterparts to immediately address the current situation on Manus Island. Australia has sole responsibility for the welfare of refugees on Manus Island until genuine and durable solutions are found.
- We urge the Australian Government to reconsider the offer by the New Zealand Government to resettle refugees from Manus Island.

*While APRRN statements are prepared in consultations with APRRN members, they do not necessarily reflect the views of all members.*

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