

2016 10 01 Refugee Action Coalition Media Release

Government Maintains Manus Farce as Asylum Seeker Attempts To Set Himself Alight

A 28 year-old Iranian asylum seeker in Mike Compound in the Manus Island detention centre attempted to set himself alight on Friday night (30 September).

The man, who was one of those seriously wounded in the 2014 attack by locals and police on Mike Compound, sprayed himself with flammable liquid before using a lighter to try and set himself alight. Fortunately, other asylum seekers at the scene quickly intervened, preventing the fluid catching fire, and he was uninjured.

After Wilson's Emergency Response Team arrived, the asylum seeker was placed on high watch. The incident is one of the growing numbers of self-harm incidents on Manus Island, as the six month political crisis surrounding the centre drags on. The PNG Supreme Court order in April to close the centre have been ignored.

Bizarrely, a so-called "Communication Guide" issued to Manus prisoners by PNG Immigration on 27 September says that the closure of the centre "...will not be rushed."

The asylum seeker is one of the group of around 30 who have consistently refused to cooperate with the refugee determination process. Despite the fact that this group of asylum seekers have never been interviewed, some of this group have recently been given a negative refugee assessment.

Australian Border Force has also cut the weekly allowance of 25 points that can be used in the detention canteen to buy phone credit, in an attempt to force this group of asylum seekers to attend an interview.

Tensions have been rising in the Manus detention centre since the PNG and Australian immigration moved to tighten rules over the Manus detention centre despite a PNG Supreme Court ruling in April that the detention centre must be closed.

Refugees and asylum seekers from the detention centre are no longer allowed to visit or stay in the East Lorengau Transit Accommodation.

Immigration and Broadspectrum are again causing social upheaval in the detention centre, this time to force all double negative asylum seekers into Mike Compound. They have set a deadline of 4 October for the move. People with a positive assessment are expected to move from Mike to Foxtrot (a photo of a movement slip is below).

PNG immigration has warned that PNG police may be used to force the movement between compounds. PNG police were involved in the 2014 attack on Mike Compound that resulted in the death of Reza Barati.

The restrictions are further steps to try and coerce asylum seekers to return to their home countries. But the restrictions also make a mockery of Australian and PNG Immigration claims that the centre is "open".

Both Australia and PNG governments are panicking to try and pre-empt the PNG Supreme Court hearing on 27 October where an application for “Summary Judgment” will seek orders for the immediate closure of Manus and the return to Australia of all those refugees and asylum seekers who wish to do so.

“Rather than face its legal responsibilities, the Australian government is determined to try to keep the Manus detention open and maintain the fiction that resettlement is possible in PNG,” said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

The PNG immigration letter to asylum seekers warns that non-refugees will face deportation but further legal action is possible in all of those cases and PNG Supreme Court injunctions prevent the removal of any asylum seeker who is attached to the Ben Lomai case.

“The Australian government is trying to save face, and is doing everything it can to maintain offshore detention policies and bully the PNG government to prevent families being united, and prevent refugees finding a secure future,” said Rintoul, “The Turnbull government should stop the delaying tactics, stop obstructing the courts and bring all the refugees and asylum seekers to Australia.”

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