

Immigration Panic as Manus Court Challenge Looms

Meetings in the Manus Island detention centre compounds this morning (Tuesday 29 March) have outlined a series of moves by Australian and PNG immigration attempting to resolve detention and resettlement issue before the Supreme Court challenge to the Manus Island detention centre, scheduled for the end of April.

Asylum seekers and refugees were told (i) that all refugee processed will end by 31 March; (ii) those with negative determinations will their appeal resolved by 31 June; (iii) from 6 April, those found to be refugees will be separated from those who have negative determinations. Those found to be refugees will be housed in Delta and Oscar, while found not to be refugee will be housed in Mike and Foxtrot compounds. People will be moved forcibly after the 6 April if necessary, but any person who moved earlier will receive 50 points that can be used at the detention centre canteen. Anyone who refuses to move will have their points cut; meaning they will no longer have access to the canteen for supplies or phone cards.

It is rumoured that extra guards have been flown from Australia, but that cannot be confirmed.

Those who have been found to be refugees have also been threatened that they have to accept resettlement in PNG or they will be forcibly removed from PNG; something the government is not able to legally carry out.

It is unclear what the announcement means for the 60-odd people who have refused to accept processing in PNG in protest at being forcibly transported to Manus Island from Australia, where they did ask for asylum on arrival.

“There is every sign that the PNG Immigration and the Australian immigration are panicked at the possibility that they will lose the Supreme Court challenge to Manus Island detention that is scheduled to start in late April,” said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

“Immigration routinely makes threats and restricts rights in the effort to force people to leave the detention centre or return to their home countries. The cash offer to ‘voluntarily’ return home has recently been increased to \$10,000 but no-one has accepted it.”

Of the hundreds who have been found to be refugees, only around 60 have been willing to move out of the centre to the so-called transit accommodation at East Lorengau on Manus Island.

One Manus refugee told the Refugee Action Coalition, “The message was clear for us – whether you are a refugee or not, they want to clear the detention centre. But there is no safety in PNG.”

“It is always disappointing to see the immigration department inflicting further punishment on asylum seekers and refugees rather than face up to the failure of the offshore detention regime,” said Rintoul, “They are desperate to avoid the consequences of a successful court

challenge which could find that the Manus detention centre has never been constitutional and that human rights of asylum seekers have been breached from day one.”

The announcement has increased tensions at the detention centre. A majority have already decided they will not cooperate with any attempt to force them to move compounds,

For more information contact Ian Rintoul 0417 275 713

Posted by: Ian Rintoul <rintoulian10@gmail.com>