

13 March 2016 Refugee Action Coalition Media Release
Out of Control: Nauru Police Strip and Handcuff Refugee Worker

An Iranian Arab refugee was held naked and handcuffed for a night and a day at the Nauru police station after he was arrested last Thursday night (10 March).

The refugee, who also works for Connect, an Australian service provider for refugees on the island, was arrested after police were called to an argument between the refugee and a local shopkeeper.

Even though the shopkeeper declined to make any formal complaint, the police arrested the refugee.

At the police station, the Nauru police would not allow the man to make a phone call to call the Connect emergency number for assistance. Instead, he was handcuffed and placed in a cell.

After numerous pleas to police to remove the handcuffs, 'to free my hands', the police stripped the man of all his clothes, leaving him completely naked and handcuffed in the cell. "This is like Guantanamo, the police said, "You might be a terrorist."

He was kept naked and cuffed until he was released on Friday after a Connect manager attended the police station. No charge has been laid against the man, although he has been told he may have to appear at a court at an unspecified future date.

The arrest and brutalisation of the refugee on Thursday night is the latest example of the discriminatory policing of refugees on Nauru.

The incident also raises more questions about the complicity of Connect, the Australian-contracted service provider, with the discriminatory policing of refugees on the island. There have been previous incidents in which Connect has called the Nauruan police in regard to disputes over housing; one involving an Iranian female refugee who was held for several days. In another, a 44 year-old Iranian refugee was separated from his 8 year-old daughter and held by the police for almost two weeks after Connect called the police.

The arrest of the Connect worker on Thursday 10 March, comes only days after Nauru police said there was nothing they could do about a machete attack on another Iranian refugee at Nibok, last Saturday night, 5 March.

Despite requests for greater security, neither Connect nor the police have provided a guard for the man and his wife even though the locals responsible for the machete attack, came the next night to attack their accommodation at Nibok, and threatened to kill them.

Connect have also declined requests by the threatened couple to be moved, even temporarily, to safe accommodation.

Despite initial denials of the machete attack, the Nauru police came to Nibok at 2.40pm on Friday 11 March to 'investigate the incident'. The police repeated their earlier statements that, 'We cannot do anything.'

"We lock ourselves in every night. We do not sleep at night for fear we will be attacked again," the Iranian refugee told the Refugee Action Coalition, "But there is no one who will help us."

Police and Connect are also turning a blind eye to a racket involving gangs of locals, often armed with machetes, stealing motorcycles from refugees in Fly Camp.

“Nauru is not safe for asylum seekers and refugees. The Nauru government is both unable and unwilling to provide the protection and secure future for the refugees they are holding for the Australian government”, said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition.

“That lack of safety is one more reason why the Turnbull government should not return the 267 asylum seekers who are presently in Australia, to Manus Island and Nauru. Allowing the 267 to stay, should be the first step to closing the camps.”

For more information contact Ian Rintoul mob 0417 275 713