

7 April, 2015

An Open Letter to the Australian People

We are a group of current and former employees from the Nauru detention centre who have first-hand knowledge of the conditions in which children and adults are detained. We would like to inform the Australian public that the government and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) has been aware of the sexual and physical assault of women and children on Nauru for at least 17 months, long before the Moss Review was ever commissioned. The Department of Immigration and Border Protection and all service providers were informed, in writing, of several of the assaults detailed in the Moss Review in addition to many other assaults not mentioned in the report. In addition to the receipt of formal incident reports, DIBP management participated in weekly and daily meetings where these assaults were discussed. They were also routinely forwarded copies of internal Save the Children meetings regarding particularly vulnerable children for the entire time that women and children have been detained in the centre.

The statements recently made by Immigration Minister Peter Dutton regarding a “zero tolerance” to sexual abuse do not reflect the attitude or actual response that has been provided to women and children who reported assault and sexual harassment on Nauru.

We would like to be absolutely clear:

The Government of Australia and the Department of Immigration and Border Protection have tolerated the physical and sexual assault of children, and the sexual harassment and assault of vulnerable women in the centre for more than 17 months.

In November 2013, a boy was sexually assaulted by a detention centre employee. The incident was substantiated and the allegations were also found to be credible in the Moss Review. Former Immigration Minister Scott Morrison was notified of this assault. Despite this knowledge, the DIBP chose to keep this child in the detention centre where he was assaulted and remained at risk of further abuse and retaliation. Indeed, this child was subjected to further incidents of abuse while he was in detention.

Following this, there were several additional allegations regarding the sexual assault of children. The DIBP refused to remove these children from further harm. They were forced to remain in the Nauru detention facility where they continued to be at risk of further abuse and retaliation. Furthermore, there were allegations of significant sexualised behaviour amongst children indicative of sexual abuse. Again, despite incident reports from International Health and Medical Services (IHMS) and Save the Children staff, the DIBP failed to act to protect these children from harm.

The following should be asked of the Australian Government:

If the sexual assault or minors is “abhorrent” to the DIBP, why did the Department of Immigration and Border Protection fail to remove children who had been allegedly sexually assaulted in Nauru?

Why did the Australian Government continue to transfer children to the Nauru detention centre when they were aware of substantiated assaults against other children in the detention centre?

Similarly, incidents regarding the sexual exploitation of vulnerable women by detention centre staff and others were provided to the DIBP and the senior management of all service providers 16 months prior. However, DIBP refused to remove these women from the unsafe detention environment despite full knowledge of their ongoing sexual harassment and exploitation. As a result, these women were subjected to continued sexual exploitation even after their allegations were reported. These allegations of sexual harassment and sexual exploitation against women in detention were also found to be credible in the Moss Review.

The Government of Australia should be asked:

If the Australian Government finds violence and sexual assault against women and children as “utterly unacceptable”, why did they leave women who reported violence and sexual harassment in an unsafe detention environment? Why did they continue to transfer vulnerable women to Nauru where they were at risk of sexual exploitation?

As detailed in the Moss Review, sexual and physical assault is underreported in the Nauru detention centre. In response to this finding, the Immigration Minister Peter Dutton requested for asylum seekers to come forward to report their abuse. It is not safe to expect women and children to report abuse to authorities and then require them to live in close proximity to the perpetrators. It is not safe to require vulnerable children who have reported sexual assault to be required to live in close proximity to the people that assaulted them. To do so places them at risk for repeated assault, retaliation for reporting the abuse, and exposure to repeated reminders of the assaults that they suffered which further delays their recovery from trauma. It is important to highlight that many survivors who did come forward previously still remain in Nauru subject to further abuse.

It is also important for the Australian public to know that the people who are now recognised as refugees live in the Nauruan community in a “settlement camp” where they are subjected to harassment, threats and violence. Several of the perpetrators who sexually exploited, assaulted and harassed women and children in the Nauru detention camp, live on the island of Nauru. As such, even though some of them were dismissed from their jobs inside the detention centre, they now have easy access to some of the same women and children whom they assaulted as they are now required to live in Nauru as refugees. Nauru is such a small island that it is impossible for people to avoid local perpetrators.

- In order to protect asylum seekers, and in particular women and children from further abuse, we immediately ask for the transfer of all asylum seekers in the Nauru detention camp to Australia
- We also request the Australian people to support a Royal Commission into abuse allegations in the Nauru detention centre and the government's response to those allegations.

As current and former employees, we are the only ones with first-hand knowledge of the detention centre environment who can speak the truth on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees. We believe that all Australians have a right to know what the Australian government continues to do in their name. We hope that you will join us by expressing your concern for the treatment of women and children in Nauru.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Gordon, FRANZCP, Former Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, IHMS

Tobias Gunn, Former Child and Youth Recreation Worker, Save the Children Australia

Dr. Rodney Juratowitch, FRANZCP, Former Psychiatrist, IHMS

Jarrold Kenney, Former Child and Youth Recreation Worker, Save the Children Australia

E. Maree, Former Early Years Education Program Founding Member, Save the Children Australia

Hamish Tacey, Former Unaccompanied Minors Team Leader and Refugee Assistance Program Case Manager, Save the Children Australia

Viktoria Vibhakar, Former Senior Child Protection and Support Worker, Save the Children Australia



Dr. Peter Young, Former Medical Director, Mental Health Services, IHMS

Anonymous Signatories

Employee, Save the Children Australia

Employee, Save the Children Australia

Former Adult Case Manager Support Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Adult Case Manager Support Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Adult Case Manager Support Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Case Manager, The Salvation Army

Former Child and Youth Recreation Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Child and Youth Recreation Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Child and Youth Recreation Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Child Protection and Support Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Child Protection and Support Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Senior Child Protection and Support Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Senior Child Protection and Support Worker, Save the Children Australia

Former Lower Primary Teacher, Save the Children Australia

Former Teaching Assistant, Save the Children Australia

Former Unaccompanied Minors Worker, Save the Children Australia