

2<sup>nd</sup> May 2014

Committee Secretary  
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

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Dear Committee Secretary

### **Inquiry into the incident at Manus Island**

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc supports an Inquiry into the tragic death of Mr Reza Berati and the circumstances that led to his death.

We trust that central to the Inquiry are the involvement of specialist national and international human rights organisations which are reputable and well-placed to perform this function, thus providing a level of confidence and reassurance to the Australian community. These organisations need to be independent of the Australian Government and would include such bodies, but not limited to, the Australian Human Rights Commission, Amnesty International, Save the Children and Refugee advocates.

We are unequivocal that any Inquiry which seeks to revisit and understand human tragedy that it must be accompanied by a set of principles such as:

- The inclusion of specialists independent Human Rights and Refugee advocates and that they be granted a central role and be adequately resourced to undertake this function.
- Australia provides safe and protective mechanisms for those who have knowledge and or have witnessed the death of Mr Reza Berati so they can speak with safety and support. We note the urgent petition from lawyers who say witnesses to Mr Reza Berati's death need urgent protection and we support this action.
- Media and other methods of communication that underpin a civil society must be granted access and that they are free to conduct and report their business accordingly.
- As a country, we cherish and place human life above economic considerations.
- Australia support person/s that has been impacted by the death of Mr Reza Berati.
- The Inquiry is forthright and collates the lessons learnt with the goal to prevent a further tragedy.

NCSMC is deeply concerned that refugees who have fled war, torture, threats of death, or profound discrimination find themselves in detention held on Manus Island, and that their worst fears; a premature and brutal death was realized through the death of Mr Reza Berati.

As reported by Amnesty International, only one asylum seeker held on Manus Island since the facility reopened in November 2012 has been granted refugee status and that there are no time-frame for the process for other asylum seekers<sup>i</sup>.

It is these circumstances and the gravity of the tragedy that demands the expertise of Australian and International Human Rights bodies, Refugee advocates and that they are granted primacy in the Inquiry; the Inquiry is underpinned by a set of principles and it is responsive to the urgent calls for the protection of the refugees that are held in detention at Manus Island.

Warm regards

Terese Edwards

Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>i</sup> The truth about Manus Island: 2013 report, 11 December 2013, Amnesty International

[http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/33587/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+AIACampaigns+Amnesty+International+Australia+Campaigns](http://www.amnesty.org.au/refugees/comments/33587/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+AIACampaigns+Amnesty+International+Australia+Campaigns)

**National Council for Single Mothers and their Children Inc.**

Eliminate and respond to violence, hardship and inequality for single mothers and their children

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