

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the repeal of the Medevac legislation

My concern over this legislation stems from the eyewitness accounts of a relative employed for two stints on Nauru as a trauma psychologist. What was reported privately has been put powerfully into the public domain by Medecins San Frontiers. To refresh the memory of the committee, here is the report from *The Guardian* of 3 December 2018 {emphases mine}:

*'...According to the medical report Indefinite Despair, the mental health suffering on Nauru is among **the most severe MSF has ever seen around the world**, including in projects providing care for victims of torture.*

"The medical data we release today confirms the heart-breaking reality that I witnessed on Nauru. Every day I worried which of my patients might attempt to take their own lives because after five years of waiting people had lost all sense of hope." —Dr Christine Rufener, clinical psychologist and MSF Mental Health Activities Manager.

Among the 208 asylum seekers and refugees MSF treated on Nauru, 124 had suicidal thoughts and 63 had attempted suicide. Twelve adults and children who MSF treated were diagnosed with resignation syndrome, existing in a semi-comatose state and unable to eat or drink.

*'Although three-quarters of refugee and asylum seeker patients reported experiencing traumatic events before reaching Nauru, such as conflict situations or detention, **MSF's report shows that it was the situation on Nauru that was most damaging to their mental health**. A total of 65% of asylum seekers and refugee patients felt they lacked control over their lives, and these patients were significantly more likely to be suicidal or diagnosed with **major psychiatric conditions**.*

"While many of our patients had experienced trauma, it was the Australian policy of indefinite processing that destroyed all their hope for the future and devastated their mental health," says Dr Rufener....'

In short, as the committee is surely aware, the extent and gravity of the health issues on Nauru (and equally on Manus) overwhelm the health care available so that without medevac more lives will be lost, as well as further shocking incidents of self-harm born of despair, not of any desire to "game the system".

It is just unconscionable that the very limited safety valve provided by the legislation could be repealed. May basic humanity prevail in this matter over all political considerations.