

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES - 25 FEBRUARY 2014

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(AE14/251) PROGRAMME – 4.3: Offshore Asylum Seeker Management

Senator Carr (Written) asked:

Incident on 18 October: Is it still the position of the Department and the Minister that they are unaware of the events that triggered the incident?

The facts as outlined in the chronology do not give any details as to why or what this incident may have to do with the ODC.

What is the “catalyst incident” referred to departmental media release on 10 January 2014?

Was there a post-incident operational report into this incident?

Can you please outline the role of the “incident response team” in general?

Who makes up the “incident response team”?

Are they locally engaged or Australian staff? G4S? or DIBP?

In addition to the incident response team, what other precautionary measures were put in place?

Who is classed as “non-essential” staff?

What led to the confusion that resulted in the belief an authorised evacuation had been ordered?

Was there a formal communication?

Who gave the order? G4S...DIBP?

Where were the detainees and transferees during this ordeal?

Answer:

On 18 October 2013 at approximately 9:00 am local time an altercation started outside, but near, the Manus Offshore Processing Centre (OPC) between the Royal PNG Constabulary (RPNGC) and the PNG Defence Force (PNGDF).

The catalyst incident referred to is a matter for the PNG Government as it is an event that occurred outside the OPC, did not involve anyone from the OPC and was not witnessed by anyone at the OPC. The Australian Government is not in the position to comment on local matters.

G4S, the contracted security service provider, issued an Incident Report on 18 October 2013 once the situation was under control and recommencement of normal duties was recommended (within 30 minutes of the commencement).

The Incident Response Team (IRT) role was to protect staff, visitors and transferees from projectiles; and to provide a safe egress from a hostile environment. The IRT is defensive in nature and officers were unarmed.

The IRT was made up of Australian and PNG nationals engaged by G4S.

The incident of 18 October 2013 involved approximately 20 G4S officers.

A number of precautionary measures were put in place including:

- the facility alert status was increased to code red
- re-deployment of staff within the OPC
- off-duty G4S officers were called in to assist
- notifying HMAS Choules to prepare for a possible evacuation
- moving non-essential staff to a designated safe zone within the OPC.

G4S ordered the relocation of all non-essential staff from the compound nearest the incident to an alternative place in the centre, and requested that the PNGICSA Centre Manager and the DIBP Centre Coordinator attend the incident outside the centre.

“Non-essential” staff included cleaning, catering and maintenance staff, IOM staff, interpreters and The Salvation Army staff not directly involved in the incident or managing transferees, visitors to the centre and all other DIBP staff.

The DIBP Centre Coordinator attended the scene for approximately five to ten minutes after it had commenced, by which stage the PNGDF officers had departed, and entered into peaceful discussions with the RPNGC officers.

No decision to evacuate was authorised through the normal chain of command. The only agency that has the authority to call for an evacuation of service providers and transferees at the OPC at Manus is PNG ICSA. The PNG ICSA Operations Manager did not call for an evacuation at any time and, similarly, the DIBP Centre Coordinator did not order any DIBP personnel to evacuate the centre at any time.

The confusion that led to staff members moving to a pre-staging point was around the incorrect belief of some people, and the consequential communication from those people to others in the centre, that a formal evacuation had been called. The exact source of this belief has not been determined, however, it was a matter of minutes before all individuals were returned to active duty.

Transferees remained within the centre during this time.

As a precautionary measure, the HMAS Choules was placed on standby in the event that staff needed to be evacuated.

At all times G4S maintained a full active presence in the centre, including all transferees remaining under the physical control of G4S Security staff within the centre and throughout the incident.