

Hassan Ghulam whose media release of 31 December 2003 is below, asked me to forward this to you as a graphic example of what can go wrong when life and death matters take place out of sight. They are totally compromised by off shore processing of asylum seekers. He urges Senators and all MPs to consider the lessons of the hunger strike which symbolized desperation and despair and a Government which chose to totally ignore them and their human rights.

If you could accept it as a submission, please do so.

Frederika Steen for Hassan Ghulam

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Senate Committee

Please consider what happened on Nauru. Asylum seekers were subsequently found to be refugees and were resettled. In total about 600 from Nauru settled in Australia. Below is a disturbing account which was despatched to the media. It says a lot about the sad state of Australia's human rights record which is further undermined by the proposed legislation to process all boat people seeking asylum offshore, out of range of professional and humanitarian help.

Hassan Ghulam

Buranda Qld

MESSAGE FROM HASSAN GHULAM, PRESIDENT, HAZARA ETHNIC SOCIETY IN AUSTRALIA

WEDNESDAY 31 DECEMBER 2003-12-31,

DAY 22 OF THE HUNGER STRIKE ON NAURU

I am truly puzzled by the lack of a Government intervention in the life and death situation in the Topside camp on Nauru, where 45 hunger strikers are peacefully protesting their despair and hope-less-ness after more than two years in limbo and with no safe place to go to. Is this another aspect of the policy of deterrence - sending a deadly, negative message to any future asylum seekers?

Reports to Elaine Smith and to me are telling distressing details of bodies breaking down after 22 days without liquid and food. But the spirit of these men is far from broken. Their solidarity is that of aggrieved and decent men damned by the inaction of others. They are, after all, survivors. Resilient people who have suffered unimaginable things before fleeing the land of their birth , before being rescued from drowning when the unseaworthy Indonesian boats sank. They had a dream of living in freedom and peace, somewhere.

Why did John Hodges make that flying visit to Nauru? He was not going in his capacity as Chair of the Immigration Detention Advisory Group, the Minister said in her media release on 19 December. She claimed that his companion, Gholam Aboss was an eminent Australian and Afghan community leader. She is mistaken in that, and when challenged, has not substantiated her claim. Gholam Aboss is undoubtedly a nice honest bloke who on this trip told the truth about the situation in Afghanistan. But in March 2002, as part of a DIMIA team, he misled people into believing it was safe, when it proved not to be so.

The message delivered by Hodges and Aboss was not new, or in any way a negotiating tool to end the strike. Aboss hardened the resolve of the hunger strikers when he told them that Afghanistan - not even Kabul- was safe. This clearly brought into focus the central issue underlying the protest. The central issue is an urgent need to find an alternative to return to Afghanistan for 203 of the 284 asylum seekers who are Afghan, AND a durable solution for all 284 asylum seekers left on Nauru. The tragic effect of the unsuccessful Hodges' visit was that 15 more men subsequently joined the strike. And it continues into a fourth week.

The Government is being urged from all directions - including the Australian Medical Association - to confront and deal with the human medical crises intensifying with the passing of every day. Their lack of action is incomprehensible. How long can this inaction continue? The Australian Government has dumped the caseload of 45 self harming patients onto the Nauru Hospital, which appears to be seriously under resourced to handle this crisis. Some men are seriously ill and require specialist treatment. We fear some are dying.

IOM's Dr Salah Annani on Monday transferred some hunger strikers with psychiatric conditions into IOM's care in the Medical Clinic in State House camp. We think that IOM may no longer be satisfied with the treatment and care available in Nauru Hospital, and that the prognosis for further specialist medical treatment on a larger scale (ie 45 patients) is beyond the capacity of existing resources at the island's only Hospital.

We wonder exactly what assistance and guidance the Australian Government is giving to IOM in this deteriorating situation which may be very unique for them. Is IOM itself not preparing to declare a medical emergency? Importantly, is the Australian Government listening to them, and to UNHCR and other international human rights organisations ?

The information we have been reporting - posted on www.nauruwire.org - is known to Government and truly in the public domain. Their failure to act is seen by many of us as a dereliction of their duty of care towards men women and 93 asylum seeker children. It reminds us sadly of the situation which resulted in the drowning of 353 asylum seekers from the SIEVX in waters patrolled by our navy. The Government knew, and failed to act.

The current information about the hunger strikers' condition is available to the Prime Minister and his Minister for Immigration. Why won't they meet and talk and solve this humanitarian crisis with the community groups who are working to save these lives and find a lasting, decent solution?

We enter 2004 with a huge stain on our Australian agenda. There is no doubt in my mind that decent, reasonable Australians very much want this Government standoff with 45 powerless asylum seekers to end. I am the authorised person trusted by the hunger strikers to speak for them and I have been waiting for 22 days for an invitation to speak with those in Government who have the power to solve the future for the 284 human souls trapped on Nauru.

Hassan

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WWW.SAFECOM.ORG IS ALSO DOCUMENTING DEVELOPMENTS AND NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS COVERAGE