

Refugee Action Collective - Manus Island Fact Sheet

This was a brutal attack, not a “riot”

On the Monday night of the attacks there was only one small protest by 30-50 asylum



seekers in a different compound than the attacks took place, and 6 hours before them, yet the media still wrongly refers to events as a ‘riot’. Local G4S personnel brutally attacked asylum seekers, a fence was pushed down from outside, and PNG Police and the PNG ‘mobile squad’ entered the facility – there are no guns in the compound, they came from outside.

The desperate and terrified calls from asylum seekers¹ trapped in compounds and their rooms, facing mobs armed with guns, machetes, pipes and sticks puts it beyond any doubt that asylum seekers were attacked that night.

This was retribution. Asylum seekers had been holding peaceful protests for a month, chanting freedom and demanding processing of their claims begin.

What were the injuries?

Reza Berati a 23 year old Faili Kurd was murdered, his head bashed by blunt force. 77 others were injured mostly with head injuries. One man was shot in the hip. Azita Bokan an interpreter and eyewitness said “There was blood everywhere. The number injured was horrific: people with massive head injuries, at least one with a slashed throat”² (Immigration Minister Scott

Morrison knew of the slashed throat, but failed to mention it).

Who are the PNG ‘Mobile Squad’?

The PNG Mobile Squad have a long history of human rights abuses going back to the Bougainville war, including credible allegations of rape and murder³. Ex OHS manager on Manus Island Rod St George said “They’re known as a killing squad, plain and simply”. Manus Island MP Ronny Knight admitted they had been part of the attacks calling them ‘brutal but effective’⁴. They are being paid a \$100 a day living away from home allowance out of Immigration Dept. funding⁵. You don’t employ the PNG mobile squad by accident.

Who was to blame?

Though the attacks were carried out by PNG personnel, responsibility ultimately lies with Australia. The centre is funded and run by Australian authorities. As one Manus G4S guard told RAC the Manus detention centre “is Australian soil, it’s like an embassy”. This is blood on Scott Morrison and Tony Abbott’s hands. There is also blood on Labor’s hands. The Rudd Labor government opened Manus Island, and Reza Berati was sent there by the Rudd government in August last year.

Can the safety of asylum seekers be guaranteed on Manus Island?

Scott Morrison was asked this question by a journalist, he replied “I can guarantee their safety when they remain in the centre”⁶. However Morrison who originally claimed the violence occurred outside the centre was forced to backtrack as more eye-witnesses

came forward, and admit the violence happened inside. Self-evidently he cannot guarantee safety.

Tragically asylum seekers are still being guarded by those who attacked them. No staff have been charged, none have been stood down, but even if this occurred, the Australian authorities who created the situation would still be in charge. Manus must be shut immediately and all asylum seekers brought to Australia.

Had any refugee claims been processed?

No. Asylum seekers have been on Manus since July last year but no refugee claims have been processed. Migration agent Liz Thompson, who was working on the island during last week's violent attack, told SBS the process she was involved in was a "farce".

"It's not designed as a processing facility, it's designed as an experiment in the active creation of horror, to deter people from trying in the first place,"

"They [asylum seekers] ... know there is no decision from the PNG government on resettlement. So what that means is: you're never getting out of this camp. This is indefinite detention. While we play this charade"⁷

Do we need an independent enquiry?

Yes! It is wrong for Scott Morrison and his department direct an investigation, when their own conduct is in question. Manus Island is a crime scene. Interviews should have taken place, and Mike compound should have been sealed off immediately, to allow to collection of evidence. As a minimum the Human Rights Commissioner Gillian Trigg,

refused permission to visit by Morrison, should be allowed access. Journalists and lawyers should be allowed unfettered access, and the phone and internet connection of asylum seekers cut off for over a week, must be restored.

What's wrong with offshore processing?

Even before the attacks offshore processing was an obscenity. Amnesty International described the situation on Manus Island as "tantamount to torture", with detainees being denied sufficient water, medical help, privacy, and living in cramped conditions and unbearable heat⁸. Conditions on Nauru, where pregnant women and young children have been sent are similarly inhumane. These offshore detention centres will cost \$2.867 billion for 2013/14⁹. These detention camps should be closed. Any detention is unnecessary. Processing asylum seekers in the Australian community, with the right to work, while their claims are assessed, would be more humane and far cheaper.

1. <http://www.asrc.org.au/2014/02/18/draft-transcript-of-phone-messages-received-from-asylum-seekers-at-manus-island-detention-centre>
2. <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/manus-island-violence-interpretor-claims-detainees-attacked-by-locals-there-was-blood-everywhere-20140219-3315g.html#ixzz2todBwVFI>
3. <https://newmatilda.com/2014/02/19/whos-policing-manus-island>
4. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/were-no-cannibals-says-manus-mp-ron-knight/story-fn9hm1gu-1226832125311#>
5. <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2013/s3948291.htm>
6. <http://www.minister.immi.gov.au/media/sm/2014/sm212047.htm>
7. <https://newmatilda.com/2014/02/25/manus-camp-human-experiment-staff>
8. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA12/002/2013/en>
9. Budget 2013/14 http://www.budget.gov.au/2013-14/content/bp1/html/bp1_bst6-01.htm

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Get Involved! RAC meets every Monday at 6.30pm at ANF House, 540 Elizabeth St City. New people always welcome.