

Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network Inc.

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'THE CAMPS MUST CLOSE': Incidents Disclosed to Australian Officials Not Investigated

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 12TH AUGUST 2016

Several incidents of abuse published on Wednesday in the leaked 'Nauru files' have previously been reported to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection by people in Darwin detention centres but were not investigated, Northern Territory asylum seeker advocates revealed today.

People 'medivaced' from Nauru were regularly brought to Darwin during the period of the leaked reports.

"We are not surprised by these reports," said Justine Davis, President of DASSAN (Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network) and long term detention advocate. "People we have worked with have reported many incidents, including some in the leaked files, and worse."

DASSAN's biggest concern in relation to these incidents has been the inability of Australian authorities to act, and the continuing lack of safety for the asylum seekers who reported them.

"When people in detention tell us about incidents of sexual harassment, abuse or other types of assault that have occurred in offshore processing centres, we always encourage them to report these to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. In some instances, with their consent, we have reported them ourselves," said Ms Davis. "Unfortunately, almost every time these reports were made and the alleged victims spoke with the Australian Federal Police, they were told that there was nothing that could be done while they were in Australia, and that they can report it when they return to Nauru. We had hoped to find ways to protect them from being transferred back into the hands of the alleged perpetrators, but sometimes there was no way to do that."

"These people are terrified of returning to Nauru, and don't feel safe to make reports there. They know there has never been anyone brought to justice there for these types of crimes."

DASSAN has worked with at least 24 people who have disclosed being raped or sexually harassed on Nauru, the majority of whom have stated that their attackers were staff employed by organisations contracted to the Australian Government. Others have told their DASSAN advocates of physical assaults on their children by the security officers detaining them.

"A number of the women who reported sexual assault to us were forced back to Nauru," said Ms Davis. "The women, men and children involved were terrified as a result of the abuse they experienced. Which is why whenever transfers happened back to Nauru, parents struggled to protect their families. In almost all instances they were restrained in 'flexicuffs', physically dragged out of the centres and forced onto planes."

DASSAN calls on the Australian Government to immediately bring all those who have suffered in offshore processing centres to Australia. These people need support to start rebuilding their lives, and access to justice for the abuse that has been perpetrated against them.

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