



NetIPR

Network for International Protection of Refugees

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10 December 2002

Mr Kofi Annan
UN Secretary General
United Nations Headquarters
New York N.Y. 10017
United States of America
Facsimile: (+1-212) 963-4879

Dear Secretary General:

Re: the state of the asylum seekers in Pacific Islands

We draw your attention to the continuing plight of asylum seekers, mostly Afghan and Iraqi nationals, held by the Australian government's off shore detention facilities in Nauru, Papua New Guinea and Australia's Christmas Island. We are especially concerned about the well being of Afghan asylum seekers held in detention in Nauru. We are aware that most Afghan asylum seekers arrived prior to the down fall of the Taliban government and that they were held in detention in Nauru and Christmas Island. The Australian government has delayed processing their visa application for more than one year. Despite the fall of Taliban government, the humanitarian and safety situation on the ground has not improved in Afghanistan. We have received reports that 113 Afghans from Nauru went back to their country by coercive means. We are extremely concerned about the situation of the remaining asylum seekers in the Pacific Island nations, especially because the media is not allowed to visit those asylum seekers.

We also wish to report on matters relating to an inquest held by the West Australian Coroner regarding the drowning deaths of two women near Ashmore Reef in November 2001. There are unconfirmed reports that Australian authorities threatened the refugee witnesses who appeared before the Coroner's Court. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission here has also been seeking to compile and submit a corroborated witness report to the Coroner. In this instance, we are particularly concerned that the threat of deportation is being used to instill fear amongst Afghan asylum seekers.

We are therefore seeking that the UN Secretary-General intervenes in the cases of Afghan asylum seekers. Especially, we would like you to ensure that there be no interference with the refugee witnesses while the Coroner and HREOC are examining the pending case. We trust that you will use all available resources to ensure justice being done in this inquest.

Yours respectfully,

V. (UNEO) for

(EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE)
Network for International Protection of Refugees

Copy:

1. Sergio Vieira de Mello, High Commissioner, UNHCHR, Switzerland.
2. Ruud Lubber, High Commissioner, UNHCR, Switzerland.