

## Situation on Australian offshore processing facility at risk of further deterioration, UN warns

24 November 2017 – Stating that the beating of refugees and asylum-seekers at the former regional processing centre on Manus Island by uniformed officers is both “shocking and inexcusable,” the United Nations refugee agency has urged the Australian Government to take immediate action to ensure their safety and protection.

“The situation still unfolding on Manus Island presents [a grave risk of further deterioration](#), and of further damage to extremely vulnerable human beings,” said Thomas Albrecht, the Regional Representative for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) in the Australian capital, Canberra, in a news release.

“[We] renew [our] call for all Australian parliamentarians and leaders to take immediate action to provide protection and safety for all refugees and asylum-seekers transferred to Papua New Guinea,” he added.

According to the news release, the beatings – including with metal poles – has been seen on footage released today. UNHCR staff have also received reports that several men remaining inside the regional processing centre have been seriously injured.

Limited access, however, has hampered the UN agency’s officials from gaining a better picture on the ground and the agency is seeking additional information from the Governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea.

“Medical treatment for all refugees and asylum-seekers who require it is of paramount importance,” said UNHCR in the release.

The UN agency further added that it had “unequivocally” advised Australia and Papua New Guinea prior to closure of the regional processing centre that comprehensive, intensive support for refugees and asylum-seekers is critical.

“Despite this, medical care remains inadequate, and caseworkers, interpreters, and torture and trauma counselling are completely unavailable,” it said, adding that similar concerns have also been raised by the authorities in Papua New Guinea, who lack the means and infrastructure to provide such services without further resources.

### ***Recognized refugees still being offered ‘enticements’ to ‘voluntarily’ return – UNHCR***

Also in the release, UNHCR voiced particular concern that recognized refugees are still being offered enticements to “voluntarily return” to their home countries.

According to the news release, these places include countries where human

rights conditions have significantly deteriorated in the past 12 months.

“Severely inadequate services and conditions may now further coerce refugees with a well-founded fear of persecution to nevertheless return to their countries of origin,” said the UN agency.

It added that it is aware, for example, of a refugee who recently returned to his home country, despite the precarious situation there, given fears for his safety and health in Papua New Guinea.

“Having been attacked by machete, and unable to get required medical treatment for a serious existing medical condition that had then been exacerbated, he felt he had no choice but to go back,” it noted.

According to the UNHCR, Manus Island (located some 320 kilometres or 200 miles off the northern coast of Papua New Guinea) has been the focus of Australia’s off-shore processing policy. Of the approximately 3,000 refugees and asylum-seekers forcibly transferred by Australia to facilities in Nauru and Manus, some 1,200 remain in Nauru and 900 in Papua New Guinea.