

## Situation on Australian 'offshore processing' facility deteriorates by the day – UN refugee official

21 November 2017 – Three weeks following the closure of the Manus Island regional processing centre, the situation on the ground is very serious and deteriorates by the day, a senior United Nations official on protection of refugees has said.

“Without distribution of food and clean water over the last three weeks [and] significant accumulation of waste and rubbish in the hot and humid weather, the health and sanitation is becoming a very significant issue,” Nai Jit Lam, Deputy Regional Representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)), currently on Manus Island, [told journalists in Geneva over the phone](#).

“The people that we have spoken to are extremely angry and they see this as an opportunity to tell the world and to show the world, years of anger about how they have been treated over the four years, after being forcibly transferred to Papua New Guinea,” he added.

According to the UN refugee agency, the conditions and the lack of medicines, increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers at the former facility are falling physically and mentally unwell. Alternative accommodation and services outside the facility are still under construction and it could be another two weeks before they are ready.

“We have observed [concerns] regarding security and the lack of interpreters on the Island, that brings about the issue of how they would communicate with local people or even the police as well,” added the UNHCR official, noting that local contractual disputes hinder staffing of caseworkers to look after the wellbeing of those there, and tensions with local community also remains.

Calling on Australian authorities for an active role resolve the situation, which Mr. Lam said that is a result of the forcible transfer of people, refugees and asylum seekers by Australia to Papua New Guinea and Nauru under its offshore policy.

“Australia must take responsibility for the protection, assistance and solutions for the refugees here on Manus Island,” he stressed.

According to the UN refugee agency, 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.