

Violence against Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Manus Island and the Clearing of Lombrom Naval Base

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Featured image: PNG Defence Force Base Lombrom is located in Papua New Guinea (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

It was another etching in a chronicle of extended violence. For days, resistance by refugees and asylum seekers against forced removal from the Lombrom Naval Base on Manus Island had taken very public form. Images of defiance and distress were receiving international attention. With no electricity, with water supplies destroyed, things were getting dire.

As the weekend dawned, PNG officials were claiming that the remaining 328 men from the base had been moved to new camps in Lorengau. To these can be added the 50 men or so forcibly removed a day prior. Journalists from the ABC noted the use of 12 buses taking men and goods to East Lorengau centre on Friday, though they were unsure how many people were on them.

According to refugee **Behrouz Boochani**, the journalistic spark in the abysmal dark,

“The refugees are saying they are leaving the prison camp because the police are using violence and very angry.”

The clearing operation was nearing its conclusion.

According to **Thomas Albrecht**, the UNCHR’s regional representative in Canberra,

“The situation still unfolding on Manus Island presents a grave risk of further deterioration, and of further damage to extremely vulnerable human beings.”[1]

In a world of parallel universes, where the views of the heavy handed come up against those of the persecuted, narratives differ vastly. PNG **Police Commissioner Gari Baki** tends to assume all matters of force as relative. Removing the men (the term “relocation” is preferred) took place “peacefully and without the use of force”.

The Australian Immigration Minister, **Peter Dutton**, has also done his bit on several fronts of unreality. Efforts are being made to sabotage New Zealand’s offer to encourage the resettlement of 150 men in that country. Dutton’s point is petulant and savage: Australia

won't have them, but nor shall you. Besides, would you really want them, these opportunists, interlopers and deviants?

Dutton has also waged war on those activists whom he sees as giving unnecessary hope to those on Manus. Last week, he publicly castigated pro-refugee protesters who had defaced the office of **Kelly O'Dwyer**, Minister for Revenue and Financial Services.

"Another example," seethed the former police officer, "of the moral vacuum of the left. Not only giving false hope to those on Manus – who will never come to Australia – but also diverting important police resources and wasting tax payer money to investigate and clean up vandalism." [2]

An update from the Ministry of Immigration and Border Protection expressed a mood of contentment at the efforts of the PNG police.

"The Australian Government is aware that all men previously refusing to leave the former Manus Island Regional Processing Centre (RPC) have now departed the complex for alternative accommodation."

The statement paints a picture of cold blooded efficiency. Accounts from refugees who have found their way to the alternative centres differ markedly.

"We have been forcibly removed from where we were," claimed Sudanese refugee Abdul Aziz Muhamat, "to places that are not even ready." [3]

The statement also reads as a distancing document. Australians should be pleased to know that refugees had been informed since May that the RPC would close, and refugees moved to sites such as the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre.

"The alternative accommodation has been available to house all inhabitants of the former RPC since October 31."

A bullet is duly reserved for the irritating bleeding hearts.

"Advocates in Australia are again today making inaccurate and exaggerated claims of violence and injuries on Manus, but fail to produce any evidence to prove these allegations." [4]

Before and after **Donald J. Trump**, news, it would seem, is a relative matter, notably from Australia's truth-averse Ministry of Immigration, an entity given to fiction and fantasy.

The ministerial statement is also intent to focus on the bad eggs and rotten apples, those nuisances who are never mentioned by name, but hover over the faux compassion of Australian immigration officials like moral pointers and accusers. "What is clear is that there has been an organised attempt to provoke trouble and disrupt the new facilities."

The Australian government had been informed "that some equipment has been sabotaged

at the alternative accommodation centres, including damage to backup generators.” There is “vandalism” to “water infrastructure”. These matters were “under investigation”. Who are these mysterious disrupters? What do they want?

The statement naturally makes little of motivation, the Refugee Convention or virtually anything that would give a human dimension to such protest and dismay. The limbo faced by those who failed to be classed as genuine refugees – about 200 men – is not discussed. Nor is anything mentioned about when the US will come good on the offer to resettle refugees in that country..

There is only, the statement chastises, “false hope” peddled by advocates “that [these men] will ever be brought to Australia.” Humanity is to be eviscerated, and brutality permitted. This is authoritarian speak, bureaucratic babble, the sort that Dutton adores.

Despite such brutal and brutalising tripe, the Turnbull government remains resolute. Australia’s reputation as a state happy to observe human rights has not been impaired – or so its politicians, such as foreign minister Julie Bishop, think. Cosily distant from shared borders, its governments can continue to construct a fortress of selectivity and selectiveness when it comes to refugees and those seeking Australian shores. It will outsource its obligations, and fund the necessary satraps. And to hell with international law on the way.

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Notes

[1] <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-11-24/png-authorities-urge-men-to-leave-manus-island-centre/9187406>

[2] https://twitter.com/PeterDutton_MP/status/931337441092317184

[3] <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/24/world/australia/manus-island-detention-refugees-asylum-seekers.html>

[4] <http://www.minister.border.gov.au/peterdutton/Pages/manus-update-24112017.aspx>

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