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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

**Joint written statement* submitted by Association Bharathi
Centre Culturel Franco-Tamoul, Alliance Creative
Community Project, ANAJA (L'Eternel a répondu),
Association Burkinabé pour la Survie de l'Enfance,
Association des étudiants tamouls de France, Association
Mauritanienne pour la promotion du droit, Association pour
les Victimes Du Monde, Association Thendral, Le Pont,
L'Observatoire Mauritanien des Droits de l'Homme et de la
Démocratie, Society for Development and Community
Empowerment, Tamil Uzhagam, Tourner la page, non-
governmental organizations in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[10 August 2017]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).



Australia - Urgent Measures needed to save lives*

Testimony From Human Rights Activist and Refugees supporter from Manus Island.

I thank you for this opportunity to present this statement of concern. I write as a volunteer with the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project and former Detention Rights Advocate for the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre on a matter of urgency concerning imminent risk to the lives of the men on Manus.

The Manus Island Regional Processing Centre in Papua New Guinea was reopened in 2012. When Kevin Rudd once again took on the Prime Ministership in 2013 he introduced the PNG Solution a regional resettlement arrangement which meant that all asylum seekers arriving to Australia by boat would have 'no chance' of being settled in Australia.

Under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments, asylum seekers are not only processed in Papua New Guinea, but will also be resettled there if found to be refugees. No asylum seekers sent to PNG who are found to be refugees will ever be settled in Australia.

The detention of asylum seekers in the centre on Manus Island subjects them to dangerous and inhumane conditions that led many deaths since 2014. A recent United Nations report has stated that the Australian Government has violated the right of asylum seekers to be free from torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment "by failing to provide adequate detention conditions... and put a stop to the escalating violence and tension at the regional processing centre."

Amnesty International's report on conditions in the centre found that living quarters were severely overcrowded

- with up to 112 men housed in a single dormitory
- and that the centre was seriously lacking in drinking water, adequate toilet and shower facilities, and basic essentials such as shoes and clothing.

The effect of these degrading material conditions is compounded by uncertainty and stress brought about by the indefinite nature of the detention, prolonged processing times, and fears over the prospect of resettlement in Papua New Guinea.

The detention environment on Manus is severely detrimental to the mental health of detained asylum seekers, many of whom are already vulnerable from previous experiences of torture and trauma in their countries of origin. IHMS, the organisation contracted to provide health services in the centre, has reported that at least half of all asylum seekers in offshore detention suffer from significant depression, stress and anxiety, according to clinical assessments.

On the 31st of October 2017, the Australian government will withdraw all services both medical and security, all provision of food and shelter from the Manus Camp. They are already cutting off the water and power and are demolishing the buildings and tents which provided shelter to the men who have been imprisoned there for the past four years. There is no contingency plan in place to avert the human rights catastrophe which awaits these men.

This statement is from Walid asking the Human Rights Committee to consider the human rights of the men on Manus. He is one of 800 men waiting on Manus.

"My name is Walid Zazai. I live in an Australian-owned and -run detention centre on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. I have been here for four years.

I would like to talk to you about the tragedy that happened just Three-days-ago. On Monday, 7 August 2017, our beloved friend Hameed was found dead. It was a sad day and one we will never forget. We lost another kind and caring friend. His parents lost their son. Hamed's death is not only the one to remember. There are now five lives lost in the four years of this camp.

It is with constant grief and anger at injustice that we also remember Reza Barati, Hamid Kehazei, Kamil Hussain and Faysal Ishak Ahmed. We won't forget them. Hameed was a very kind, intelligent, decent and humble guy. He was a good guitar player. His guitar sound is still playing in my ears and in heart.

In my early days on Manus I got much courage and strength from Hameed. I was so sad and down during those days. Most nights I could see and listen to Hamed playing guitar and singing funny songs that made us laugh and brought smiles on our faces.

He would also write his own poems. His sense of humour was very good at that time, but no one has enough patience, strength and energy to fight with the cruel policies inflicted upon us.

At the start of last year Hamed's mental illness was getting worse. He began walking here and there for almost the whole day and night in dirty clothes. And Wilson, IHMS and immigration left him like that.

Then they were too tired of him so they sent him to the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre and left him there when he wasn't well at all.

I saw him many times in town near the police station and I could see that he was very mentally ill. I remember one night when I visited friends at the transit centre. We were walking in the evening and I saw Hamed ran towards us. I was a bit scared because I knew he was mentally sick and not good. But when he reached us he hugged us and told us "I'm a refugee, I'm your brother, we will not fight".

When I remember this, I can't stop my tears. By now I am sure you have all seen what happened to Hamed Shamshiripour. He would be in better place and enjoying his life if the Australian government had treated him as human. This cruel policy may take all our lives. I can see many like Hamed around me.

I myself am always trying to be patient and care for friends who I love a lot. But for how long? Forever? I'm losing myself to these harsh policies. It's eating me from the inside slowly slowly. My strength and hope is the people who are there for our support and standing with us in these hard times.

We need your support please. If it was your son, daughter, brother, sister, mum or dad, what would you do for them? Plz show humanity to the world. Don't turn your back on innocent people who came and asked for human rights.

Our situation gets worse day by day. Every day we gather in peaceful protest to ask for our safety in life in a safe place. Australian immigration want to dump us in PNG where we aren't safe. Our friends have been beaten, robbed and only on Monday we found one dead. Our lives are in the Australian government's hands. Please stand for us. Yell for us. Water and power connection have been cut to one of the compounds where we are held.

And we have been given until October 31 to leave the detention centre and move into the Papua New Guinea community. If we don't, we have been told we may be violating the law. They might arrest us or as they said they will move us by force with help of police and navy army. Where we should go?

We came to Australia to be safe and now Australia is putting us in danger. Why? Are we not humans like Australians? We all long for human rights. We have families like you, who are waiting for us, and need our helping hands to put some food on the table for dinner, to go to school and to have better life. Tell everyone you meet about our situation. Believe me, many aren't aware of these mental illness factories.

We could have a better life in next three months or we may have no life at all. Most of us would prefer to hang instead of going to settle in the Papua New Guinea community.

I hope I have not offended or hurt anyone with the truth of my words.
God bless you all. Sending you much love from Manus. Take care of each other and smile every day."

End of statement from Walid in the Camp at Manus Island, Papua New Guinea.

Recommendations:

- cease the interception and return of asylum seekers to the countries from which they are fleeing or countries of asylum which do not offer effectively protection to refugees.
- cease using practices such as 'enhanced screening' and ensure all asylum seekers have their protection claims fairly and thoroughly assessed under Australia's standard refugee determination process.
- the government's practice of detaining asylum seekers should be abolished;
- detention should only be used under special defined circumstances such as to establish the identity of the claimant or if the claimant is found by a magistrate to be a risk to the community;
- minors should not be detained under any circumstances;
- there should be regular judicial review of a decision to detain an asylum seeker;
- conditions of detention should meet certain standards;
- no detainees should be held in penal institutions.
- We also note that under article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Australia has an obligation to ensure that there is a minimum right of access to employment, especially for disadvantaged and marginalised individuals and groups.

*Brigidine Asylum Seekers Project (BASP), International Tamil Refugee Advocacy Network (I-TRAN), NGOs without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.