



AUSTRALIAN
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Media Release

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ALHR Condemns Australian Government Refusal to Cooperate with UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of Migrants

Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (ALHR) condemns the Australian Government's refusal to assure complete freedom of inquiry to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, Francois Crépeau, during his planned visit to Australia, forcing him to postpone the visit. An ALHR representative had been due to meet with Mr Crépeau during his visit.

Determined to shroud offshore detention centres in secrecy, the Australian Government has refused to cooperate regarding Mr Crépeau's access to the Australian-run offshore immigration detention centres in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Claire Hammerton, spokesperson for Australian Lawyers for Human Rights, said "such lack of transparency is extremely concerning from a human rights perspective. If the Australian Government was respecting the human rights of asylum seekers, it would not have anything to hide and would do everything in its power to facilitate the Special Rapporteur's access to its offshore detention centres."

The 2015 Border Force Act, which sanctions detention centre service-providers who disclose 'protected information' with a two-year court sentence, discourages people from speaking up. Mr Crépeau said that he was forced to postpone his visit to Australia because the Australian Government refused provide a written guarantee that those meeting with him would not be subject to intimidation or sanctions under the Border Force Act. Ms Hammerton asked "where does this leave the many children and adults in detention, when not even the UN Special Rapporteur can gain access to detention facilities and service providers cannot speak to him without fear of reprisal?"

Despite a recent announcement to increase the number of Syrian refugees Australia will accept, the Australian Government continues to detain thousands of asylum seekers - including Syrian asylum seekers who fled their country earlier - in onshore and offshore detention centres, which includes close to 200 children. Australian Lawyers for Human Rights calls on the Australian Government to provide the assurances Mr Crépeau has been repeatedly requesting to facilitate his visit to Australia. "In a democratic nation where the rule of law is respected and upheld, the Australian public are entitled to know what is happening in our onshore and offshore detention centres" Ms Hammerton said. "By refusing to guarantee the assurances requested by the UN Special Rapporteur, the Australian Government has shown once again its lack of respect for human rights and for its international obligations to make sure those seeking asylum are protected from harm".

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ALHR was established in 1993 and is a national network of over 2600 Australian solicitors, barristers, academics, judicial officers and law students who practise and promote international human rights law in Australia. ALHR has active and engaged National, State and Territory committees and a secretariat at La Trobe University Law School in Melbourne.