

Australian High Court rubberstamps Howard government's treatment of Tampa refugees

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13 December 2001

In a decision with far-reaching implications for democratic rights, the Australian High Court late last month sanctioned the Howard government's continued use of military force to remove asylum seekers from territorial waters and transport them to detention camps on remote Pacific islands. A panel of three justices refused to consider an appeal from a split decision of the Federal Court allowing the expulsion of the 433 Afghan refugees aboard the Norwegian freighter, the *Tampa*, in September.

The verdict means that hundreds of asylum seekers will remain incarcerated, at the behest of the Australian government, in hellish conditions on the tiny island of Nauru. Within two days of the ruling, the government formally asked Nauru to take up to 500 more asylum seekers, on top of the 700 Afghan and Iraqi refugees already being held there against their will. In return for a further cash payment of \$10 million from Canberra, the Nauru government has now agreed to detain up to 1,200 people at a time.



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