

Australia's asylum-seeker policies claim another victim

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6 September 2014

The Australian government's draconian policy of illegally detaining asylum seekers in appalling conditions on remote Pacific islands with no prospect of resettlement in Australia has claimed another victim.

On Tuesday 24-year-old Iranian refugee Hamid Kehazaei was declared brain dead by the Australian immigration department and placed on life support after suffering a heart attack the previous day at Brisbane's Mater Hospital in Queensland.

Kehazaei had been transferred from the Manus Island detention camp in Papua New Guinea to the hospital on August 27 for emergency treatment for septicaemia spreading from a cut on his foot.

Recognising that Kehazaei's condition was terminal his family in Iran were forced to make the heart-wrenching decision to turn off life support. He is the second Manus Island young detainee from Iran to die this year.

In February 23-year-old Reza Barati was killed and dozens more asylum seekers seriously injured when security guards violently suppressed detainee protests over their prolonged imprisonment in the hot, crowded, squalid, mosquito-infested conditions at the facility.

Kehazaei's tragic fate is not the outcome of an unfortunate accident but the direct consequence of detaining asylum seekers in hell holes like the Manus Island centre. Detainees have suffered a litany of physical and mental health problems, including severe depression and self-harm incidents.

Kehazaei sought medical attention for days at the facility before he was eventually transferred to Brisbane. Angered by his plight, Manus Island detainees issued a statement on September 1, directly blaming the Abbott government for Kehazaei's medical condition.

The statement, which was sent to the International

Health and Medical Services (IHMS), a private agency contracted by the Abbott government to supposedly provide medical care in government detention centres, was signed by dozens of asylum seekers. It declared: "Those who have signed this paper consider you are responsible for any consequence of not treating the illness of our dear friend."

The IHMS has made no comment on the case while Immigration Minister Scott Morrison refused to make any statement on the delay in transferring Kehazaei for medical treatment. Morrison cynically declared that the "government has consistently focused on the care of this young man and his family, as well as respecting their privacy."

A damning statement issued this week by Brisbane GP Richard Kidd, co-founder of Doctors for Refugees, declared that the asylum seeker's death clearly revealed that healthcare on the island was "not up to standard." Kehazaei's infection, he said, "should have been fairly straightforward to diagnose, and he should have been transported off the island sooner.... there probably was time here for this person to have got appropriate care."

Royal Australasian College of Physicians president Professor Nick Talley dismissed government claims that health care services provided at the Manus Island camp were "broadly comparable with health services available within the Australian community."

"I don't believe this standard is being met," Talley said. "Had the Manus Island detention facility been adequately equipped to provide this young man [Kehazaei] with the healthcare he needed when he needed it, the outcome may have been very different."

Greens immigration spokesperson Senator Sarah Hanson-Young responded to the Iranian asylum seeker's death by calling for "an urgent investigation

into medical care” on the island. Attacking Morrison for “shirking his responsibilities,” Hanson-Young declared, “He is the minister, it’s his detention prison and this young guy is now brain dead.”

Hanson-Young’s call for an official inquiry is aimed at containing popular outrage over the latest tragedy within safe parliamentary channels. In May the Abbott government handed down the report of its inquiry into the violent repression of the February protests on Manus which resulted in Reza Barati’s death. The report was a blatant whitewash that covered up the government’s responsibility for the violence and blamed the victims for their own plight.

Laying the blame exclusively on the Abbott government, Hanson-Young ignores the fact that the Greens propped up the minority Labor government that reinstated the so-called Pacific Solution and re-opened the detention camps on Manus Island and Nauru.

While the Abbott government is ruthlessly detaining asylum seekers in remote offshore camps, the Labor government’s so-called “Papua New Guinea solution” policy instituted in 2013 was aimed at preventing all refugees from reaching Australia by boat.

Under Labor’s so-called “no advantage” detention policy, which is in violation of international law, there is effectively no limit on the length of time that refugees can be incarcerated. Significantly, Kehzaei was one of the first asylum seekers to be transferred to Manus Island under the Labor government’s reactionary policy.

While the Greens made limited criticisms of the most inhumane aspects of Labor’s asylum seeker policies, they kept the minority government in office. Like Labor and the Coalition, the Greens agree with the fundamental premise of the “border protection” regime and oppose the basic democratic right of all people to live and work in any country with full citizenship rights.

The entire political establishment, Liberals, Labor and the Greens, are responsible for Kehzaei’s death, the killing of Reza Barati and the ongoing harsh treatment of detained asylum seekers whose only crime is to flee from persecution.

One Australian government after another has scapegoated asylum seekers— attempting to divert attention for worsening domestic unemployment and

living conditions—while ripping up their basic rights and establishing far-reaching precedents for police state measures against the entire working class.

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