

Australia's "border protection" regime claims another victim

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The Australian government's illegal "border protection" regime, involving the overseas detention of all asylum seekers who arrive by boat, has claimed yet another victim.

On December 20, Faysal Ishak Ahmed, a 27-year-old asylum seeker from Sudan, suffered a seizure and collapsed in the Australian-controlled detention centre on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea (PNG). He remained in the camp until the afternoon of December 23, when he was finally transferred to a properly equipped hospital, the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital in Queensland. Doctors were unable to save his life, however, and Ahmed was pronounced dead on Christmas Eve.

The refugee's death was met with bitter protests on Manus Island, with several refugees reportedly taking part in a "disturbance" in which they took control of two compounds.

Reports have emerged alleging that Ahmed's health problems were ignored by detention centre staff. Detainees on Manus Island have told ABC News and Fairfax Media that Ahmed was repeatedly turned away by medical staff at the detention centre's clinic run by the International Health and Medical Service (IHMS), despite his repeated complaints over a six-month period of chest pains, fevers, stomach pains and high blood pressure.

Fairfax Media released a photograph of a complaint letter written by Ahmed to IHMS nine days before he died. In the letter Ahmed asked why he has had more than 20 visits to the clinic but was still provided with no diagnosis. He wrote that he had "chest, heart, high pressure and also nose block [sic]." He also described a "problem at the back of my head."

He was supported by 60 asylum seekers, who signed a letter addressed to IHMS demanding better treatment.

A week after writing the complaint letter, Ahmed returned to the clinic one last time. He told his friends once he returned to the compound that the doctor had told him there was nothing wrong with him. Three days later he died.

Abdul Aziz Adam, 24, a friend of Ahmed's also imprisoned on the island, told reporters that Ahmed said to him prior to his death, "I don't get to see the doctor, I always see the nurse and then the nurse tells me 'you don't have anything,' but I feel I have a problem."

Adam added that "this system is designed to kill us one by one."

The Department of Immigration and Border Protection released a brief statement on Ahmed's death declaring that "the Department is not aware of any suspicious circumstances surrounding the death" and the death will be reported to the Queensland Coroner.

Ahmed is the fourth asylum seeker to die on Manus Island. The others were Kamil Hussain, who drowned in August 2016; Reza Barati, murdered during a disturbance on Manus Island that was orchestrated by Australian authorities in February 2014; and Hamid Kehazaei, an Iranian refugee who died in September 2014 from a treatable blood-borne virus.

Just weeks before Ahmed's death, a coronial inquest revealed that Kehazaei's death was a consequence of the Australian immigration department's actions in preventing Kehazaei's transfer, coupled with the appalling conditions and sub-standard medical equipment on Manus Island.

For much of Ahmed's life he had been living in refugee camps. His family was displaced from his hometown in the Darfur region in Sudan in 2004, and afterwards moved into the Kasab refugee camp in north Darfur. The conditions in this camp are brutal. The

Sydney Morning Herald reported that in Ahmed's application for asylum in Australia, he described how in the Kasab camp he had "refused to be recruited by the same militias that had tortured him, killed several members of his family and raped his sister."

He fled in July 2013, leaving his nine-month old son and wife behind, in a desperate attempt to reach safety in Australia and secure a better life for his family. He managed to travel to Indonesia, where he lived for two months in extreme poverty. By September 2013 he managed to get on a boat to Australia, which was then intercepted by the Australian navy. He and everyone on board was forcibly imprisoned on the Manus Island detention centre.

For three years he languished in the camp. Among the many cruelties he suffered was having to hide under his bed only metres from where Reza Barati was murdered, when local security guards rampaged through the camp in February 2014.

Australian Greens Senator Di Natale declared that Ahmed's death was "completely preventable" and that it is "the latest symbol of cruelty, inhumanity and heartlessness of these camps." Di Natale called for yet another Senate inquiry into the Australian-run camps, and was backed by Labor's immigration spokeswoman Shayne Neumann.

This is a cynical attempt by the Greens and Labor to cover up their responsibility for the latest atrocity on Manus Island. The 2010-2013 Greens-backed minority Labor government revived and extended the former Howard government's notorious "Pacific Solution," which involved reopening the Manus detention camp.

Responsibility for Ahmed's death, as with the deaths of numerous other refugees both inside and outside Australia's detention centres, rests with the reactionary "border protection" regime and the entire political establishment that supports it.



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