

Australian government denies palliative care to dying refugee

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Malcolm Turnbull's Liberal-National government is continuing its punitive and inhuman treatment of refugees by refusing to provide a 63-year-old dying man with the palliative care he requires. Ali, an Afghan refugee, is dying from lung cancer in one of Australia's offshore prison camps, located on the tiny Pacific island nation of Nauru.

The Australian Border Force (ABF) told Ali he would not be moved to Australia. It claimed that Ali had "refused treatment" because he declined an offer to be transferred to Taiwan to receive care. Ali told ABF he did not want to go because it is most likely there will be no translator for his language, Hazaraghi, and no one who could perform the Shia Muslim rituals before he died.

The ABF also offered Ali \$25,000 to return to Afghanistan, where his wife and children live. However, he is a member of the historically persecuted Hazara ethnic minority. Hazaras have been the target of killings and assaults by the government and Sunni extremist groups, such as the Taliban.

Ali is currently imprisoned in the RPC 1 camp on Nauru, which cannot provide him with the necessary palliative care. Doctors on the island described the camp as "dangerously inadequate," saying his prognosis is "dire" and his life expectancy is "a matter of months."

Members of the Hazara community on Nauru condemned the denial of Ali's request for transfer to Australia. They told the Australian media he "is very angry, he is very upset as well. He said these people do not have a human heart."

Australia's government is condemning Ali to an excruciating death. Dr Barri Phatarfod, speaking for Doctors for Refugees, said: "In Australia, we have well-defined palliative care standards [and the ability to]

deliver powerful analgesia to offset the agonising pain of cancer ... none of these are available in Nauru."

Sources inside the detention centre reported that executive-level Department of Home Affairs officials decide on requests for medical transfers. When asked to comment, department officials said medical transfers are determined on a "case-by-case basis."

Already, two deaths in the detention camps on Nauru and Papua New Guinea's Manus Island have been directly linked to the denial of medical transfers. Faysal Ishak Ahmed, a 27-year-old asylum seeker from Sudan, died in December 2016 after suffering a seizure and Hamid Kehazaei, an Iranian refugee, died in September 2014 from a treatable virus.

Australia's bipartisan "border protection" regime, maintained by Liberal-National and Labor governments alike, involves militarily turning back or forcibly imprisoning all asylum seekers who try to reach Australia by boat.

Like the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy of ripping refugee children away from their parents and imprisoning them in separate tent camps, the denial of medical treatment is a deliberate measure to punish and deter people from fleeing persecution and oppression.

This is coupled with a lack of health care facilities to treat a number of medical issues, including childbirth and endemic mental health problems. The conditions in Australia's prison camps are so severe that detainees, including young children, are driven to harming themselves, and numbers have committed suicide. In 2016, a leading doctor who worked at the camps likened the conditions to torture.

There have been at least 12 preventable deaths since the Greens-backed Labor Party government reopened the offshore detention centres in 2012. The latest victim

is Fariborz K, a 26-year-old Iranian man whose body was found by his wife last Friday on Nauru. He was only recently married, and his wife and mother have been hospitalised after the incident. His 12-year-old brother has been taken into care by the camp authorities.

In April, Fariborz's young brother made a video issuing a public plea for assistance. "I feel helpless because there is no one to help us," he said. "There is no one to see how we are suffering. My mother is very sick and my brother is totally depressed."

The International Health and Medical Service, which operates the medical facilities in the camp, assessed Fariborz on April 24 as "being severely traumatised" due to being held captive as a 10-year-old child in Iran.

Fariborz and his family have been imprisoned for more than five years on Nauru, with no options for transfer to another country. There is mounting evidence that a US-Australia refugee swap deal is deliberately excluding anyone from Iran, Somalia or other countries on the Trump administration's travel ban list.

The swap deal involves heavily-vetted refugees being transferred to the US, in exchange for an undisclosed number of Central American asylum seekers. This agreement is itself reactionary, consigning refugees to opposite sides of the world, denied the right to reunite with their families.

However, the agreement did offer detainees some glimmer of hope to escape their horrible conditions. For Fariborz and his family, even this limited option was not available.

Fariborz's death came just weeks after a Rohingya man died in an apparent suicide on Manus Island. He jumped from the window of a moving bus travelling at 60 kilometres an hour.

Starting with the Labor government's mandatory detention of refugees in 1992, successive Australian governments have pioneered many of the brutal measures now being taken in Europe and the US. In 2017, US President Donald Trump praised the "Australian model" as the standard for the treatment of refugees and immigrants worldwide.

The "Australian model" combines cruelty toward refugees with a "points-based" immigration program that discriminates in favour of wealthy applicants and those whose labour power can be most readily exploited by Australian-based employers.



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