



association pour la prévention de la torture
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- **PUBLIC STATEMENT**

Urgent need for oversight of Australia's offshore detention

Geneva 30 April 2013. Secretly filmed footage from inside Australia's so called *offshore processing centres* on Nauru and Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, has exposed harsh conditions for hundreds of asylum seekers, including children. These images provide yet another argument for the establishment of independent oversight to prevent abuse in all places of detention.

Australian ABC's Four Corners Programme on Monday aired images of the difficult conditions facing the asylum seekers housed there, including muddy passages between temporary tents in equatorial heat, a lack of privacy including a shower with no door or screen, and razor wire and high fences, despite the remoteness of the centers. Footage shows detainees on hunger strikes, some with lips sewn together, and regularly occurring protest marches inside the wire. Testimonials from former medical and other staff of the camps indicated self-harm, depression and mental health issues were common.

That these revelations were only brought to light through smuggled cameras and individuals risking breaching employment contracts highlights the grave lack of transparency and oversight of these places of detention. Media have been given very limited access, and the Australian Human Rights Commission has been advised by the Australian Solicitor General that it lacks jurisdiction to visit.

The Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) believes that detention of asylum seekers should be a last resort, only for justifiable means such as to conduct health and security checks and for the shortest time possible. Where people are detained, it is essential that there is transparency through regular visits by independent oversight bodies to protect the basic rights of detainees. Oversight of detention is also a vital part of an open democracy. It is truly disturbing that there is no regular, independent monitoring of Australia's offshore processing regime.

In January this year Nauru ratified the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), which obliges states to set up a system of regular, independent monitoring visits to all places of detention under its jurisdiction and control. Australia signed this treaty in 2009 but has not yet ratified, despite strong support from a bipartisan committee of the Australian Parliament.

Only by shining a light on the actual conditions and day-to-day practices, practical steps can be taken to improve the treatment of the asylum seekers, deprived of their liberty and vulnerable to all forms of ill-treatment. The APT therefore calls on Nauru, Australia and also Papua New Guinea to urgently provide independent monitors with access to immigration detention.

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