



MEDIA RELEASE

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SON OF PACIFIC SOLUTION COST TOO HIGH

Australia should not revive off-shore detention at PNG's Manus Island, according to the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID).

"The human and financial cost would be too high," said Marc Purcell, Executive Director of ACFID.

In the past, money that should have been set aside for overseas aid was used in the discredited Pacific Solution.

"This confused the purpose of overseas aid, directing it to political gains instead of lifting poverty for the poorest people," said Mr Purcell.

The Council called for the Government not to proceed with off-shore detention on Manus Island.

"Between 2001-7, Australian taxpayers spent more than \$1 billion to process less than 1,700 asylum seekers in the Pacific Solution's offshore locations of Manus Island and Nauru. This equates to more than half a million dollars per person," said Mr Purcell.

"The last man on Manus Island was held as the only occupant for six months at a cost to the Australian taxpayer of more than \$200,000 a month, according to the Government's own estimates.

"Riots and a malaria outbreak were experienced by the first Manus Island detainees and in September 2002 more than 40 asylum seekers tried to escape by swimming away from the island.

"The media, lawyers, human rights activists and independent observers were either barred from visiting Manus, or hindered by the high cost of reaching the remote location in PNG, thus placing the actions of Commonwealth officers and private contractors out of the reach of public scrutiny and accountability.

"Asylum seekers held in off shore detention in the former Pacific Solution paid a heavy price in mental health and wellbeing. Many having suffered persecution at the hands of the Taliban, Saddam Hussein's regime or other regimes were left isolated with inadequate access to mental health support.

"With a return to the Pacific Solution, we are likely to see an increase in multiple incidents of self-harm and depression, as well as other psychological conditions requiring treatment with anti-depressants or anti-psychotic medication.

"We would be very concerned if Australian aid money intended to be used to fight poverty in developing countries was skewed towards a revival of the Pacific solution. Official Development Assistance should never be misused for the detention of people fleeing persecution," Mr Purcell concluded.

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