



The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship

741-1186

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 11 February 2013 concerning a petition on the removal of families from Manus Island and children from immigration detention centres. I apologise for the delay in responding.

The Australian Government remains committed to implementing the recommendations of the Expert Panel in accordance with its announcement of 13 August 2012 of which reopening Manus Island and Nauru was a priority to break the people smuggling trade and to prevent dangerous sea journeys.

The Government accepts that Australia has responsibilities to ensure that families and children are treated appropriately and receive appropriate medical support. All persons transferred and accommodated in the Manus Island regional processing facility are being treated with dignity and respect and in accordance with human rights standards.

Conditions on Manus Island are improving with the assistance of different contracted service providers including the International Health and Medical Services (health services), The Salvation Army (client welfare services), Save the Children (specialised services for children) and G4S (operational support services). Food and water are available at all times, as is access to medical care and mental health support services provided by counsellors and psychologists whenever they are required.

In terms of general programs for people in the facility, Save the Children arranges and manages recreational activities, sport, library, English language classes as well as life skills classes for children. My Department is currently in discussions with the Papua New Guinea (PNG) stakeholders about access to the local school.

A program of excursions away from the centre has now commenced. All transferees, including children, are invited to participate in the excursions once they have been provided with a PNG health and quarantine clearance.

There were 254 transferees as at 3 April 2013 on Manus Island including 29 children accompanied by their parents. There are no unaccompanied minors on Manus Island.

While the accommodation for single adult males and families at the regional processing facility on Manus Island are in proximity to each other, there is no "mixing" of the populations at any time. Single adult male transferees do not mix with transferees from the family compound. This separation of the populations includes prevention of any single adult male transferees entering the family compound at any time and the two populations do not share meal times or any other facilities at any time.

If a transferee has a significant medical condition which cannot be treated in PNG or Nauru they will be transferred to Australia for treatment. The Department is advised by International Health and Medical Services on the need for such medical transfers. This advice included the advice that the pregnancies could not be effectively managed on Manus Island at this time, given the prevailing medical and operational conditions at the temporary facility.

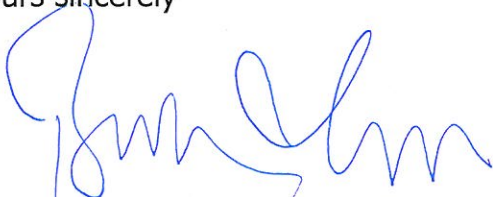
The PNG and the Australian Governments continue to work closely on the timing and composition of transfers to and from Manus Island. Transferees will not be left on Manus Island indefinitely but will not be given any preferential treatment in processing their claims and will receive no advantage including access to resettlement as a result of undertaking irregular migration to Australia.

Discussions continue between the Government of Australia and PNG on the establishment of a permanent Joint Advisory Committee to provide advice to respective governments on regional processing arrangements on Manus Island. It has been agreed that an interim Joint Advisory Committee will be established to provide an immediate advisory role, and to inform both the PNG and Australian Governments on how best to establish the permanent Joint Advisory Committee. The first meeting of the interim Joint Advisory Committee is scheduled for late May 2013.

Membership of the interim Joint Advisory Committee will comprise of government officials from PNG and Australia. Non-government organisations and other subject matter experts will participate in Committee meetings at the invitation of the Committee.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Yours sincerely



BRENDAN O'CONNOR

- 3 JUN 2013