

**Oral Statement of the 31st Session of the UN Human Rights Council
Item 6 of the agenda: Consideration of the UPR report for Australia
17 March 2016
Delivered by Mohammad Ali Baqiri**

Mr. President,

My name is Mohammad Ali Baqiri and I am speaking on behalf of a coalition of organizations.

We welcome the adoption of the outcome of the UPR of Australia and we commend Australia for having accepted recommendations concerning the situation of people seeking protection in Australia.

However, we are deeply concerned that the Australian government has announced that it had "no plans to cease its policies of mandatory immigration detention [...]."

Australia's practice of mandatorily and indefinitely detaining asylum seekers, including women and children, amounts to a serious violation of international human rights obligations. Australia is the only country in the world to detain children arriving on its shores as a first option. In addition, Australia denies these asylum seekers the right to challenge the legality of their detention and subjects them to inhumane conditions of deprivation of liberty.

I have experienced this myself as a child. I fled Afghanistan to avoid persecution and seek protection in Australia. I travelled by boat and I was detained for almost three years in Nauru from the age of 10 to 13, where I was called by a number not by my name.

There, one day seemed like one year. Refugees around me were losing hope and a few of them started protesting and displaying physical demonstrations of pain, like sewing their lips together and going on hunger strikes. Our health, mind and hope were all deteriorating.

Today, the situation has not improved, but it has actually gone worse.

Mainland Immigration Detention Centers and Australian-run offshore detention facilities in Nauru and PNG raise serious concerns about the welfare and safety of asylum seekers, particularly women and children, especially in light of the recent evidence of physical and sexual abuse occurring in certain facilities.

We therefore urge the Government of Australia to:

1. Stop *refoulement* of asylum-seekers and refugees;
2. Cease financing the offshore processing centers in Nauru and PNG;
3. Establish more humane alternatives to detention for children and their families who arrive by boat and for women who are pregnant or nursing;
4. Ensure that asylum claims are processed faster and in accordance with international human rights standards.

I thank you.