



Complaint of Serious Human Rights Abuses in Australian Processing Centre Lodged Against UK Company G4S

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The UK security contractor G4S has been accused of failing to meet international standards and committing serious human rights violations in relation to the treatment of asylum seekers detained at an off-shore processing centre in Papua New Guinea, operated on behalf of the Australian Government.

A formal complaint against G4S has been made under the guidelines proposed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The guidelines, which the UK Government has backed alongside 45 other countries, aim to encourage responsible business conduct wherever companies operate in the world.

The complaint has been submitted today (Tuesday 23 September) in the UK as well as in Australia by UK NGO Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID) and the Melbourne-based Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC). RAID and the HRLC are assisted by UK-based law firm Leigh Day.

G4S was contracted by the Australian government to oversee management and security at the Manus Island Centre between February 2013 and March 2014. The Australian Government established the centre in 2001 as an offshore processing centre.

Over this period, the Centre was repeatedly criticised by human rights organisations including the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for breaching basic minimum standards of care.

In February 2014, one detainee was killed and more than 60 others were injured in an outbreak of violence that is the subject of an ongoing Inquiry by the Australian Senate.

Executive Director of RAID, Patricia Feeney, said companies do not operate in a human rights vacuum.

“G4S Australia and its parent company in the UK have a responsibility under the OECD Guidelines not to cause or contribute to human rights violations. G4S cannot evade responsibility simply because those violations are sanctioned by the Australian Government,” said Ms Feeney.

The HRLC’s Director of Advocacy, Rachel Ball, said G4S’ direct involvement in the outbreak of violence at the Centre in February 2014 was of particular concern. “G4S’ locally-employed security guards participated in some of the worst violence against asylum seekers,” she said.

“In addition to the violence, the regime of indefinite, arbitrary detention on Manus is itself a violation of international human rights law, and conditions under G4S’ watch were consistently reported to be cruel and inhumane.” said Ms Ball.

Martin Appleby, a former G4S safety and security officer and training officer, has lashed out his former employer’s practices.

“G4S’ training and risk management processes were woefully inadequate. The company must shoulder some of the responsibility for the human rights abuses suffered by asylum seekers as a result.”

Keren Adams, a lawyer with Leigh Day, said the complaint should serve as warning to other private companies involved in Australia’s refugee detention regime, “G4S’ contract to run Manus has ended but Transfield has stepped into its place and there is little indication that conditions at the Centre have materially improved. Companies that profit from the Australian government’s inhumane detention policies should be aware that they will also be held accountable for their actions.”

Immediately after the incident G4S issued a statement, “We take these allegations seriously and we as a company do not tolerate violent or abusive behaviour from our employees”.

In June 2014 it was announced that G4S were to be investigated after Lawyers for Palestinian Human Rights made a similar complaint to the OECD. The UK National Contact Point for the OECD found that activities of the firm and their subsidiaries in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories required further examination.

In August 2014 another complaint against G4S was brought by the British NGO Reprieve, concerning the operations of its wholly owned subsidiary, G4S Government Solutions Inc., at Guantanamo Bay.

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Notes for editors

1. See for example, G4S Manus Island Allegations – Statement 19 February 2014. Available at <http://www.au.g4s.com/media-centre/Manus/manusislandStatement1.aspx>
2. The International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers (ICOC) sets out human rights-based principles for the responsible provision of private security services. These include rules for the use of force, prohibitions on torture, human trafficking

and other human rights abuses, and specific commitments regarding the management and governance of companies, including how they vet personnel and subcontractors, manage weapons and handle grievances internally. The ICoC was signed by 58 private security companies from fifteen countries at a signing ceremony in Geneva on 9 November 2010. By signing, the companies publicly affirm their responsibility to respect the human rights of, and fulfil humanitarian responsibilities towards, all those affected by their business activities. They also commit to operate in accordance with the code. For more information see http://www.icoc-psp.org/About_ICoC.html.