



## TRANSCRIPT

### **THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&EO TRANSCRIPT  
TV INTERVIEW  
ABC CAPITAL HILL  
THURSDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2015**

***SUBJECT/S: Liberal Government accused of paying people smugglers to turn boats around; proper health care for asylum seekers; regional processing.***

**GREG JENNETT:** Mr Marles, thanks for rushing out from a pretty busy schedule there in the west. We do want to start with the matter of the asylum seekers and Amnesty International's report. Because of the veil of secrecy that surrounds ASIS activities there will probably never been any clarity over what was paid, but if you look to the future and the Labor Government, are you prepared to take that tactic of cash payments off the table?

**RICHARD MARLES SHADOW MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION:** Well, I think paying people smugglers to turn around boats represents a step that we would not go down. It seems to us to give rise to a really concerning precedent in that it creates a business model for the people smugglers themselves. If they turn up next to an Australian Navy vessel, there is half a chance that they would get given a wad of cash, which is actually why we need to hear from our Government as to what actually happened here. The report we've now seen from Amnesty once again raises all the concerns we had at the time and Malcolm Turnbull has to answer this question, is this what occurred? What we saw from Tony Abbott at the time was really an invitation for us to believe that that is what occurred, that in fact Australian officials did pay people smugglers to turn around boats. We need to know from Malcolm Turnbull what has happened. It is a test for him and his transparency as to whether he is going to let us know that question, and obviously this is an appalling thing for an Australian Government to do.

**JENNETT:** And in saying that you wouldn't do it in office, have you been able to satisfy yourself that Labor governments in the past weren't using that or similar tactics?

**MARLES:** There were no paying people smugglers to turn around boats; I can absolutely assure you of that.

**JENNETT:** Paying people smugglers in Indonesian ports, perhaps?

**MARLES:** This is a difficult area in terms of intelligence that is gathered in relation to these questions, but let me put it this way, there is a vast difference between paying people to infiltrate criminal networks around the world, which law enforcement agencies do all over the world, and paying criminals to engage in the crime. Now, when you're paying a people smuggler to turn around boats, that's in effect what is happening. I can assure you that did not happen under us and it wouldn't under a future Labor Government.

**JENNETT:** Alright let's move onto some other areas. There are a few things happening in your portfolio. Aryan, the Somali refugee, you've said that the Government should make it clear that this woman will continue to be provided with unrestricted access to health and counselling professionals. In making that statement, is there any reason to think that she wouldn't be provided with that care?

**MARLES:** Well, it is obviously difficult to go into an individual's case, but the circumstances surrounding the treatment that this person requires is obviously a matter ultimately between her and her physician, but the principle here is this: if there are people, refugees on Nauru who are requiring treatment, and that includes the termination of a pregnancy, that can only be provided for in Australia, well that's treatment that has to be provided, and in giving that treatment and allowing that to occur in Australia, it needs to be done on the basis that people have all the time they need to receive that treatment. We would hope and expect that that is what applies in relation to this woman, as it would expect it to apply in relation to all of those in Nauru who are requiring treatment. But I think one of the difficulties here Greg is we don't have transparency in relation to what our Government is doing in managing this facility on Nauru. There isn't independent oversight off of the kind that we would like to negotiate with Nauru and for that matter with PNG, so we can give the Australian people a sense of confidence that what is being provided on both Nauru and Manus Island is both dignified and humane refuge. At this moment obviously I think Australians don't have that confidence and that's why it's so important that the transparency or the lack of it that we see from this government is removed and that we do have independent oversight of these facilities.

**JENNETT:** Well you're not going to Nauru next week I don't believe, but you are going to Papua New Guinea. Will you start to make those diplomatic overtures to the PNG Government for this transparency mechanism that Labor favours and also to start to pin them down on when they might actually start to resettle refugees?

**MARLES:** Well, we will have all of those conversations with PNG when we meet with them. Obviously we meet with them in the capacity of being an Australian Opposition, not an Australian Government, and so there are limitations as to the kinds of conversations that you can have, but on the final point that you just raised then, it's more than two years now since Labor negotiated the regional re-settlement arrangement with PNG, and we still haven't seen a single person resettled in Papua New Guinea. Now Papua New Guinea has been coming to meet a request by

Australia, they are the ones helping us out here. It is another failure on the part of the Australian Government in managing its relationship with PNG that we sit here more than two years down the track and we don't have a person who has been resettled in PNG, and it speaks to the failure in a broader sense of this Government in terms of resolving the fate of the 2000 people on Nauru and Manus. They do need, as a Government, the Turnbull Government, to re-engage with PNG and get re-settlement happening as soon as humanly possible because it is essential that we actually start to see some movement on Manus Island in terms of people being resettled and processed

**JENNETT:** But it hasn't been for want of effort, has it? There have been many signs on regular occasions that Papua New Guinea has actually been mired in its own political problems around this and has been dragging its feet. You can't blame Australia entirely for that, can you?

**MARLES:** No, I blame Australia and I think there has been a want of effort, to be frank. It was months after this Government was elected before the very question of resettlement was actually raised between the then Immigration Minister Scott Morrison and his counterpart in PNG. That's utterly unacceptable, it was not until the tragic events surrounding Reza Berati that you actually see some kind of dialogue occurring between the Australian Government and the PNG Government on this question, and it is because they were much more focused on other questions than on the operation of the facility on Manus. And since then I think there has been an ineptness in the way in which the Australian Government has gone about its management of the relationship with PNG and particularly in respect of the facility on Manus Island so this is an Australian initiative. It is Australian policy that gave rise to both the Manus Island facility and the Nauru facility. Accordingly, it should be the Australian Government which is driving the results here and the fact of the matter is they are not.

**JENNETT:** Alright Richard Marles, time is against us and I know you have a bit on there in Perth, but thanks for making at least a few minutes available to talk to us today.

**MARLES:** Thanks, Greg.

**ENDS**

**MEDIA CONTACT: LIDIJA IVANOVSKI – 0427 051 563**