



The Hon Peter O'Neill MP
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The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
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24 November 2017

Dear Prime Ministers,

I write concerning the detention by PNG police of an Iranian-Kurdish journalist Behrouz Boochani at the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre on November 23 2017. MEAA is joined in these concerns by the global journalists' union, the International Federation of Journalists.

In a Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary media statement issued that day, Police Commissioner Gari Baki stated: "Kurdish journalist Boochani was not arrested, nor was he charged. He was stirring up trouble and telling the other refugees not to move out of the centre so police and officers from the Immigration and Citizenship Services Authority simply escorted him out of the decommissioned centre and transported him to the East Lorengau Refugee Centre where he now remains."

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported that a police spokesman had said Boochani was "forcibly removed". The ABC also quoted the police spokesman claimed that Boochani was "taken because he was one of 'the ringleaders'."

However, MEAA's understanding is that during the action by PNG police, while Boochani was in hiding, police officers repeatedly called out: "Where is the journalist? Where is the journalist?". Boochani was found and led away by two police officers. He was detained behind the Centre for at least two hours, and remained hand-cuffed and unable to use his mobile phone. Boochani says that a police commander had yelled at him: "You are reporting against us". Boochani says he was pushed several times and his belongings were broken.

It is apparent that Boochani was singled out and specifically targeted by PNG officials given that he was told: "You are reporting against us".

MEAA condemns this outrageous attack on press freedom.

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The determination of police officers from the outset to find “the journalist” suggests the officers intended to disrupt and muzzle any live reporting of the activities of the PNG police while they conducted their operation inside the Centre, and that by getting a working journalist removed from the scene of the police action, media coverage of the event would be minimal.

Boochani has been acknowledged as a refugee. He is a former newspaper editor and publisher of the Kurdish cultural magazine *Werya*. He had to flee persecution in Iran when Revolutionary Guards ransacked the magazine’s offices, forcing Boochani into hiding because he faced arrest and interrogation.

He fled Iran in May 2013 and has been detained on Manus Island since August 2013.

Earlier this year he was shortlisted in the journalism category for the 2017 Index on Censorship’s Freedom of Expression Awards and just three weeks ago he was awarded the Amnesty International Australia Media Award for his journalism from Manus Island. He is a documentary maker whose film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* on the conditions in the Centre has been screened at the Sydney and London Film Festivals and has been nominated for a prestigious Grierson Award for Best Documentary.

MEAA calls on the PNG and Australian Governments to ensure that those engaged in the outrageous assault on press freedom on Manus Island be reminded of their obligations to protect journalists and working media covering important news stories on Manus Island, and observe their obligations towards freedom of expression and press freedom.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Paul Murphy', with a stylized, cursive script.

Paul Murphy
Chief Executive