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Serco accused of negligence and assault in Australia September 26, 2011

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Events in Australia over the last month have shown outsourcing giant Serco's claim to have a worldwide reputation to be more than just corporate speak: the company gets accused of abusing refugees wherever it is.

The inquest into the Christmas Island tragedy in December 2010, in which an estimated 50 refugees entering Australia were killed after their boat crashed into rocks, heard that guards at the Serco-run Christmas Island detention centre were told by detainees that the boat was coming but did nothing to help them. A Serco officer allegedly told them they would have to wait until morning before they could do anything. Things looked even worse for Serco, whose lawyers had tried to stop the detainees' evidence being heard, after staff members admitted they had not been advised what to do if detainees told them refugee boats were about to arrive.

And as that inquest adjourned until November, 50 Iranian detainees were signing a complaint accusing Serco guards at the Curtin detention centre in Western Australia of assault and another inquest was concluding, this time into the suicides of three refugees detained in the Villawood Detention Centre, also operated by Serco. The centre manager admitted to the inquest that some of the officers had not had sufficient training and the coroner heard how Josefa Rauluni killed himself the day he was due to be deported to Fiji after a one-and-a-half hour stand-off with Serco staff, who were reportedly taunting: “One way or another, you are going to the airport. The boys are going to come at get you.”

And just as people in the UK are wondering how a company with such a record can keep winning contracts in an ever increasing variety of public services (it is even trying to run the London Fire Brigade's training programme), aboriginal activists in Western Australia were dismayed to learn that Serco had won the contract for running prisoner transfer services in the state, which were tendered after an Aboriginal elder had died of heat stroke in the back of a G4S van. This shouldn't cause too much concern for G4S; it remains the second biggest profiteer from Australia's immigration system.

No prizes for guessing who's the first.

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