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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC Goulburn Murray, *Breakfast with Joseph Thomsen*, Tuesday, 16 October 2018

**Subject:** Asylum seeker children on Nauru

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**JOSEPH THOMSEN:** So three Liberal MPs [audio skip] get children and their families off of Nauru. The Australian Medical Association has been lobbying MPs, providing them with information about what's happening on Nauru. The ABC's Jonathan Kendall spoke with AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone.

**[Excerpt]**

**TONY BARTONE:** We've been aware of increasing reports now, for a good while, of the deteriorating state of health of a number of children, increasingly day by day - various health conditions against a background of significant mental health and wellbeing issues, and ongoing resignation syndrome and depression situations as well.

A number of children have been taken off the island in twos and threes with their families because of increasing urgent medical conditions that have had to be managed offshore. And what we're also finding now is that we're getting a number of reports from various doctors, from groups such as Medecins Sans Frontieres that had to leave the island last week, of the increasing dire straits that these children in particular, but all of the refugees on the island, are having to face in accessing a credible option in terms of their health care, notwithstanding the really good work that is being done by the volunteers on the island from IHMS and other organisations assisting the Nauruan Government in the provision of those medical services.

But we need to be very clear that it has reached the stage of significant harm and ongoing harm to a group of vulnerable people that have been essentially on the island with no option, no immediate resolution, for the best part of a number of years, almost four or five in some cases.

**JONATHAN KENDALL:** And you mention resignation and depression in these children, how does that present?

**TONY BARTONE:** Well, we we're aware of at least 20 or more children in various advanced stages of food and fluid refusal. Now that's a really distressing option when you look at the doctors who are having to manage those children who are vehemently denying themselves food and fluids, and then getting into quite advanced stages of electrolyte disturbances which can affect their heart rhythm and other vital organ functions.

Even the way that they're actually communicating now is with such a blank face, a blank stare, a blank persona, that it's bordering on a situation that has not been really terribly well understood, but it's been seen on multiple occasions in other situations like this in other parts of the world, and one which causes significant health and welfare distress and issues regarding their overall state of wellness.

**JONATHAN KENDALL:** Dr Tony Bartone's with us, from the Australian Medical Association. He's the President, talking about this call from three Liberal backbench MPs to get

kids off Nauru from the detention centre there. You've been making these calls for quite a while, for months now at least, do you think you've made any progress?

**TONY BARTONE:** We've been very vocal for a good while now about an independent medical delegation visiting the island and assessing the state of facilities, and reassuring the Australian public about the services that are being provided and the conditions confronting these refugees.

Furthermore, we've called on the Australian Government - as far back now as August - for the immediate removal off the island urgently of all children and their families because of the growing dire health emergency that's developing. I wrote to the Prime Minister on behalf of our members in September, and also wrote a similar letter to each and every single Parliamentarian, and that letter was made public and published in the media.

Since then, a number of other medical groups, associations, and Colleges have also echoed the call, and there are other petitions and open letters being delivered simultaneously. The growing tide of the medical community is significantly pushing now for an immediate resolution to this issue, one which can't be left to continue on the strength of just a hearsay or a mild concern. For such numbers of doctors to be motivated to take this course of action is testament to the severity and the urgency of this issue.

**JONATHAN KENDALL:** But this- I mean, the person who can get these kids off Nauru is the Prime Minister, who was the architect of stopping the boats. He's got a trophy in his office that says; I stopped the boats. So how likely is it do you think that, from a political perspective, anything will change when he built his reputation on being tough on migration?

**TONY BARTONE:** I have written to the Prime Minister, appealing to his Christian values and to his sense of fairness and to his sense of compassion. I hope the Australian public, increasingly now as they become aware of the situation, echoes that call that is being made by countless tens of thousands of doctors in this country about the situation. And it will be the echoing of the community sentiment that I hope will ultimately then be successful in changing the Prime Minister's mind on this matter.

**[End of excerpt]**

**JOSEPH THOMSEN:** Dr Tony Bartone, there speaking with the ABC's Jonathan Kendall, the AMA providing its advice and opinion to Federal politicians, to the Government and also to Liberal backbenchers. So three Liberal backbenchers - Julia Banks, Russell Broadbent, and Craig Laundry - have broken ranks now and are calling on the Prime Minister to change the current policy. And they say that there is a tipping point that has now been reached and that sentiment in the community has changed.

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