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An unprecedented 2014 agreement between Australia and Cambodia was meant to enable refugees processed on Nauru to relocate to Cambodia. Seven refugees moved to Cambodia; at the expiry of the agreement in 2018, three remained there.

What was the Cambodia agreement?

On 26 September 2014, Australia and Cambodia signed an agreement providing for the relocation to Cambodia of people who had originally sought asylum in Australia, been forcibly transferred to Nauru, undergone refugee status determination (RSD) in Nauru and been recognised as

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disturbing precedent’ and ‘a worrying departure from international norms’. Touted as an agreement that would facilitate capacity-building in a non-traditional resettlement country and advance the goals of regional cooperation and responsibility sharing, the Cambodia agreement proved very different in practice. By the expiry of the agreement in September 2018, only seven refugees had relocated to Cambodia, of whom just three remained. The minimum standards and conditions that would ordinarily be expected in a resettlement country were not in place and Cambodia’s willingness and capacity to provide protection to refugees more generally did not appear to improve. Indeed, the Cambodia agreement coincided with a deterioration in its treatment of Montagnard asylum seekers from Vietnam.

Why did Australia conclude the Cambodia agreement?

In 2014, the Australian Government faced an immense political difficulty: while insisting that no refugees transferred to Nauru or Papua New Guinea (PNG) would ever be settled in Australia, it had limited other resettlement options. Nauru and PNG had indicated that some refugees might be permitted to settle in their territories

Who was relocated to Cambodia under the agreement?

A first group of four refugees – a man from Myanmar, an Iranian man and a married Iranian couple – were flown to Australia in May and then to Cambodia in June 2015. Despite having