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# Taliban killed Afghan asylum seekers that Australia sent back, report claims

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The Australian government today said it would investigate reports that up to 20 rejected asylum seekers from Afghanistan were killed after being sent back.

Under the former government of John Howard, about 400 asylum seekers were denied entry to Australia after it was deemed safe for them to return home.

Their fate was traced by the Edmund Rice Centre humanitarian agency, which says it has documentary evidence that nine were killed by the Taliban. The organisation estimates a further 11 people died.

The Australian immigration minister, Chris Evans, told the Sydney Morning Herald he was "taking the claims very seriously".

Evans has asked for more information about the process of detaining asylum seekers on the Pacific island of Nauru. The so-called Pacific solution was scrapped after the Labor prime minister, Kevin Rudd, came to power in December.

The Edmund Rice Centre said other asylum seekers rejected under the policy had been forced into hiding in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Its investigation is featured in a documentary entitled *A Well-Founded Fear* to be broadcast next month.

The documentary includes the story of Gholam Payador, who was sent back to Afghanistan in 2002.

Payador holds up a photograph, taken on Nauru, of himself and two other people, both of whom are now dead, according to the Herald.

The former immigration minister Philip Ruddock accepted mistakes may have been made. But he added: "The [UN] refugee convention does not say you cannot be returned to a dangerous place.

"The fact that somebody might tragically die may well be as tragic as a road accident in Sydney."

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