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Australian state violated human rights in COVID lockdown-report

By Reuters Staff

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SYDNEY (Reuters) - An Australian state's decision to lockdown more than 3,000 people in public housing towers to contain a second COVID-19 outbreak was not based on direct health advice and violated human rights, Victoria's state Ombudsman said in a report.

Australia's second-most populous state, Victoria, locked down nine public housing towers for several days in July due to a surge in coronavirus cases.

Victoria's acting chief health officer had only 15 minutes to consider and approve the lockdown, including the potential human rights impacts, Ombudsman Deborah Glass said in her report released on Thursday.

"The rushed lockdown was not compatible with the residents' human rights, including their right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty..., the action appeared to be contrary to the law," she said.

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Some were left without food and medicines while many others waited more than a week to be allowed outside, the report said.

The state government conceded mistakes were made, but said decisions were made to ensure the safety of the residents.

"We make no apology for saving people's lives, absolutely no apology for saving people's lives," Victoria state Housing Minister Richard Wynne told reporters.

It was not immediately clear on Thursday whether the findings would open up any legal remedies for residents to pursue against the government.

Victoria was placed into a statewide lockdown days after authorities shut the towers to contain fresh outbreaks but it has since effectively eliminated the virus due to the lockdown.

No new cases have been reported in the state for 48 straight days as of Thursday.

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