



FOUR YEARS TOO MANY

Offshore processing on Manus Island and Nauru

GetUp!



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GetUp is an independent movement of more than a million people working to build a progressive Australia and bring participation back into our democracy. GetUp campaigns on human rights, democratic participation, economic fairness and environmental sustainability.



Human Rights
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The Human Rights Law Centre protects and promotes human rights in Australia and beyond through a strategic mix of legal action, advocacy, research, education and UN engagement.

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FOREWORD

My first trip to Manus Island was back in March 2014, just after Reza Barati was murdered.

I'll never forget what I saw. Conditions were appalling. There were guards everywhere. The facility was shockingly overcrowded. But by far the most awful part of the whole scene was the fear and exhaustion on the faces of the men trapped inside.

Everywhere I walked I met desperate people. They'd point out the bullet holes, show me their injuries and describe their fears. But what caused them the most anguish was the indefinite nature of their situation. Would they be there a month? A year? Forever? They had no idea if, or when, or where, they'd ever get a chance at life in freedom and safety.

Almost four years later, they still don't. And neither do the families stuck on Nauru.

I've been back to Manus twice since then and have come to know some of the truly extraordinary people our government continues to torment.

People like Imran, who didn't speak a word of English when sent to Manus but who has now written a book and published opinion articles in Australian media.

People like Behrouz, a journalist who bravely produced an entire documentary from inside the detention centre on his mobile phone – a film which recently screened at the Sydney Film Festival.

People like Farhad, whose paintings and poetry have been exhibited in Melbourne and Canberra and who, through his art, defiantly expresses the humanity our government has tried to deny him.

These are men of different ages, from different parts of the world and with different stories to tell. But what they all have in common is they are completely exhausted. They were exhausted when I met them back in 2014. It's hard to believe – with all the violence and shootings and suffering and deaths in the interim – that they still remain in limbo almost four years later, languishing behind the same fences.

Every single man, woman and child on Manus and Nauru has already lost four years of their life. Every single one of them deserves a future.

All they want – all they've ever wanted – is a chance to build a future in freedom and safety.

And that future must start now.

Daniel Webb

Director of Legal Advocacy, Human Rights Law Centre



INTRODUCTION

On 19 July 2013 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced that no person seeking asylum by boat would ever be resettled in Australia. Every single person arriving after that date is subject to being indefinitely detained on Manus Island, PNG, or in the Republic of Nauru, under 'processing' arrangements between the Australian Government and those Pacific states.¹

Four years later, over 2000 refugees and people seeking asylum, including 169 children, still remain trapped in limbo on Manus and Nauru.²

Successive Australian governments have supported, managed and funded the offshore processing regime begun on 19 July 2013, and its detention camps on Manus and Nauru.

In the interim, five Parliamentary and Departmental inquiries,^{3,4,5,6,7} more than six UN investigations,^{8,9,10,11,12,13} a report by the the Australian Human Rights Commission,¹⁴ and numerous whistleblowers have repeatedly told us the same horrific truth – the offshore camps are sites of gross physical, sexual and psychological abuse.

This abuse and its impacts continue today. This report can reveal that the Department of Immigration and Border Protection's most recent statistics for 2017 demonstrate that, on average, there was a critical or major incident in the Manus Island camp or surrounding community almost every day. The impacts are clearly felt, with actual incidents of self-harm about once a week.¹⁵

The Department's own statistics make crystal clear that conditions on Manus remain truly desperate, harmful and abusive. Despite being forced to endure four years warehoused in such an unsafe and painful limbo, the men the Australian Government has trapped on Manus Island continue to try and find a life of dignity.

[1] 'Australia's offshore processing of asylum seekers in Nauru and PNG: a quick guide to statistics and resources', Parliament of Australia website, Updated 19 December 2016

[2] Question Taken On Notice, Immigration And Border Protection Portfolio, (AE17/049) - RPC statistics - Programme 1.5: IMA Offshore Management, Additional Estimates Hearing: 27 February 2017

[3] 'Serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers in relation to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, and any like allegations in relation to the Manus Regional Processing Centre', Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 21 April 2017

[4] 'Select Committee on the Recent Allegations Relating to Conditions and Circumstances at the Regional Processing Centre in Nauru: Taking Responsibility: Conditions and Circumstances at Australia's Regional Processing Centre in Nauru', The Senate, Parliament of Australia, 31 August 2015

[5] 'Review into recent allegations relating to conditions and circumstances at the Regional Processing Centre in Nauru', Mr Phillip Moss, 20 March 2015

[6] 'Incident at the Manus Island Detention Centre from 16 February to 18 February 2014', referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee, 5 March 2014

[7] 'Examination of Legislation in Accordance with the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011: Migration Legislation Amendment (Regional Processing and Other Measures) Act 2012 and Related Legislation', Australian Parliament, Joint Committee on Human Rights, and Henry Alfred Jenkins, 19 June 2013

[8] 'UNHCR Mission to the Republic of Nauru 3-5 December 2012, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 14 December 14, 2012

[9] 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment', Juan E. Méndez, 6 March 2015

[10] 'Preliminary Observations on the Official Visit to Papua New Guinea - Press Statement', Christof Heyns, UN Special Rapporteur on Extra Judicial, Arbitrary or Summary Executions, March 14, 2014,

[11] 'UNHCR Regional Representation, Canberra, UNHCR monitoring visit to the Republic of Nauru 7 to 9 October 2013', United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 26 November 2013

[12] 'UNHCR monitoring visit to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea 23 to 25 October 2013', United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, October 2013

[13] 'UNHCR calls for immediate movement of refugees and asylum-seekers to humane conditions', United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2 May 2016

[14] 'The Forgotten Children: National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention', Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014

[15] Question Taken On Notice, Immigration And Border Protection Portfolio, Offshore Management, (Be17/219) - Manus – Incidents Since Last Estimates - Programme 1.5: IMA, Budget Estimates Hearing: 22 May 2017

Offshore processing on Manus Island and Nauru

19 July 2013 to 19 July 2017

2013

19 Jul 2013

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announces that no person seeking asylum by boat in Australia would ever be allowed to settle here. He also announces a "Regional Resettlement Arrangement" with PNG to detain and process protection claims in PNG.

1 Aug 2013

Case filed in Supreme Court of PNG contesting the legality of Manus Island Detention centre.

3 Aug 2013

Australia signs new agreement with Nauru to detain and resettle refugees in their community.

18 Sep 2013

Tony Abbott becomes Prime Minister of Australia.

18 Sep 2013

Operation Sovereign Borders, a military-led border security operation designed to prevent boats carrying asylum seekers from arriving in Australia, commences.

26 Nov 2013

The UNHCR reports on conditions in the offshore processing facilities in Nauru and Manus Island. It finds that men, women and children were being held in "arbitrary detention in conditions that do not meet international standards."

11 Dec 2013

Amnesty International Australia visits Manus Island Detention Centre and publishes "This is Breaking People", a report that finds offshore processing in PNG had resulted in "a host of human rights violations".

2014

16 - 18 Feb 2014

Protests at the Manus Island detention centre lead to violence when detention centre staff and locals enter the centre and attack people seeking asylum held there. One person is killed and seventy-seven people are injured.

17 Feb 2014

Reza Barati, a 24 year old Iranian man, is murdered by detention centre staff during protests at the Manus Island detention centre.

4 Mar 2014

Leaked documents reveal up to 14 children are held in Manus Island detention centre.

11 Mar 2014

PNG Government attempts to amend constitution to allow detention of people seeking asylum.

17 Mar 2014

PNG National Court Inquiry into attacks on Manus Island detention centre commences.

21 Mar 2014

The Human Rights Law Centre and Amnesty International inspect the Manus detention centre, the only time that journalists and advocates have been allowed inside the detention centre.

22 Mar 2014

Second PNG National Court Inquiry into attacks on Manus Island detention centre commences.

27 May 2014

Senate estimates uncovers that Australian Government paid PNG's legal bills to halt human rights inquiry into Manus.

5 Sep 2014

Hamid Kehazaei, a 24 year old Iranian man, dies in a Brisbane hospital from septicemia he contracted on Manus Island after cutting his foot.

8 Sep 2014

New UN High Commissioner for Human Rights condemns Australia for violating the human rights of asylum seekers in his maiden speech.

24 Sep 2014

Gay men seeking asylum on Manus Island write of fear of persecution in PNG, where homosexuality is a crime.

26 Sep 2014

Australia makes deal to send refugees from Nauru to Cambodia.

2 Oct 2014

Scott Morrison accuses Save the Children staff on Nauru of 'coaching' people seeking asylum to self-harm, and 9 staff are deported from Nauru. Morrison announces Moss review into abuse and sexual assault on Nauru under cover of these accusations.

29 Nov 2014

The United Nations Committee Against Torture condemns Australia's asylum seeker policies.

11 Dec 2014

A Senate Committee publishes its report into the incident at Manus Island detention centre from 16 February to 18 February 2014, concluding that the Australian Government failed in its duty to protect the asylum seekers.

13 Dec 2014

Men held in Manus Island detention centre begin 2 week hunger strike.

2015

11 Feb 2015

Australian Human Rights Commission's national inquiry into children in immigration detention tabled in Parliament.

5 Mar 2015

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture finds that various aspects of Australia's asylum seeker policies violate the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

20 Mar 2015

Department of Border Protection releases Moss Review into allegations of sexual abuse on Nauru.

14 May 2015

High Court challenge to offshore detention commenced after suicidal woman (whose husband lives in Australia) secretly deported to Nauru overnight.

1 Jun 2015

Refugee Mohsen Sakhravi beaten by PNG Immigration officials outside hotel on Manus Island.

30 Jun 2015

The Migration Amendment (Regional Processing Arrangements) Act 2015 (Cth) takes effect. The Act retrospectively authorises payments to service providers in offshore detention and seeks to thwart ongoing High Court Challenge to offshore detention.

1 Jul 2015

The Australian Border Force Act 2015 takes effect. Secrecy provisions in the Act make it a crime punishable by two years' imprisonment for medical professionals, teachers and other people employed in detention centres to disclose certain information about conditions and incidents in detention.

16 Jul 2015

The Human Rights Law Centre and Human Rights Watch launch report on their inspection of Manus 'The Pacific Non-Solution' highlighting that more people have died than been resettled.

31 Aug 2015

The Senate Select Committee on the Recent Allegations relating to Conditions and Circumstances at the Regional Processing Centre in Nauru releases its final report.

15 Sep 2015

Malcolm Turnbull becomes Prime Minister of Australia.

25 Sep 2015

The UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants postpones his planned visit to Australia due to the lack of cooperation from the Government regarding access to detention centres.

5 Oct 2015

Nauru suddenly declares its detention centre 'open' 48 hours before High Court case on legality of offshore detention on Nauru due to be heard.

7-8 October 2015

High Court of Australia hears Plaintiff M68 v Minister for Immigration and Border Protection and Ors.

2016**31 Oct 2015**

Save the Children leave Nauru.

20 Nov 2015

GetUp! and the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce launch report "Business in Abuse: Transfield's complicity in gross human rights abuses within Australia's offshore detention regime".

2 Feb 2016

#LetThemStay movement begins, thousands of people campaign to ensure that the 267 people at risk of return to Manus and Nauru are allowed to remain in safety in Australia.

3 Feb 2016

The High Court of Australia rejects a challenge to the legality of the offshore detention regime. The decision largely rests on retrospective legal changes made after the case commenced.

4 Feb 2016

Churches across Australia offer sanctuary to the 267 at risk of deportation to Nauru and Manus.

6 Feb 2016

Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews writes to Malcolm Turnbull asking him to let the 267 people stay in Australia. Other premiers shortly follow suit.

12 Feb 2016

Lady Cilento Children's Hospital refuses to discharge 1 year old 'Baby Asha' without a government guarantee that she won't be returned to Nauru.

21 Feb 2016

Immigration Minister Peter Dutton bows to public pressure and releases Baby Asha into the Australian community.

26 Apr 2016

The Supreme Court of PNG rules that the transfer and detention of asylum seekers on Manus Island is illegal.

29 Apr 2016

Omid Masoumali dies in Australia after setting himself on fire in Nauru.

1 May 2016

Manus Island detention centre becomes an 'open centre' in response to being judged unlawful by the PNG Supreme Court.

2 May 2016

22 year old Somali refugee sets herself on fire on Nauru and is evacuated to Australia with life threatening burns.

11 May 2016

A Bangladeshi man dies in Nauru.

26 Jul 2016

The Human Rights Law Centre and GetUp! launch report 'Association with Abuse: The financial sector's association with gross human rights abuses of people seeking asylum in Australia'.

2 Aug 2016

Kamil Hussain, a 34 year old Pakistani man, dies on Manus Island. Australian government initially refuses to help repatriate his body.

9 Aug 2016

Two refugees on Manus are attacked by a group of seven locals armed with an iron bar. One of the men is rushed to hospital after collapsing.

9 Aug 2016

Ferrovia, which took over Transfield, announces its will discontinue providing services to regional processing centres on Manus Island and Nauru.

10 Aug 2016

The Guardian releases the 'Nauru files' - the largest cache of documents to be leaked from within Australia's asylum seeker detention regime. It details assaults, sexual assaults and self-harm.

1 Sep 2016

Wilson Security announces withdrawal from Nauru and Manus by 31 October 2017. It also confirms it will not tender for any further offshore detention services.

24 Sep 2016

Eaten Fish, a cartoonist detained in the Manus camp, given the Award for Courage in Editorial Cartooning for 2016 by Cartoonists Rights Network International in absentia.

8 Oct 2016

Refugee and former aid worker Masoud Ali Shiekh, is hospitalised with serious head injuries after being attacked by a group of locals with rocks in an unprovoked attack as he walked with a friend near the transit centre at East Lorengau, Manus Island.

5 Nov 2016

Amin Afravi, Iranian refugee on Manus attempts to set himself on fire for the second time in 5 weeks.

8 Nov 2016

Donald Trump is elected President of the USA.

13 Nov 2016

The Australian Government announces that some refugees detained on Manus Island and Nauru will be resettled in the USA.

24 Dec 2016

Faysal Ishak Ahmed, a 27 year old Sudanese man, dies in Brisbane. Faysal had fallen and had a seizure at the Manus detention centre. Before his death Faysal had sought medical assistance numerous times.

2017**27 Jan 2017**

US President Donald Trump signs executive orders imposing a four month freeze on all refugee resettlement to the USA, and travel bans for citizens from seven refugee producing countries, which form the majority of the refugee populations on Manus and Nauru.

27 Jan 2017

Government issues an apology to Save the Children employees and pays them compensation.

28 Jan 2017

Loghman Sawari escapes PNG to claim asylum in Fiji.

3 Feb 2017

Loghman Sawari forcibly deported from Fiji back to PNG - charged by PNG police and held in prison.

14 Feb 2017

Global Legal Action Network and the Stanford International Human Rights Clinic submit a communication to the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court alleging politicians and directors of companies providing services in offshore detention are criminally liable for abuses.

13 Mar 2017

24-year-old Pakistani refugee attacked on Nauru, resulting in a deep head injury.

31 Mar 2017

International Health and Medical Services forced to abandon Manus Island after it is found to be practising without a license.

14 Apr 2017

PNG soldiers go on a drunken rampage, firing up to 100 shots at the Manus detention centre. They assault an immigration official and try to ram a car through the fence in an attempt to storm the centre.

21 Apr 2017

Senate Committee publishes report finding that the Australian government clearly controls both centres and owes a duty of care to the people trapped inside.

24 Apr 2017

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants regarding Australia and Nauru denounces 'systemic human rights violations' in both countries, and tells Australia to bring all asylum seekers and refugees to safety in Australia.

16 May 2017

Treatment of refugees in the Manus Island detention centre becomes increasingly harsh, to force them to move into the transit centre in Manus capital.

14 Jun 2017

Government settles Manus Island class action case, with \$70 million damages to be paid to people who have been unlawfully detained and injured on Manus Island.

20 Jun 2017

Refugee hospitalised after violent machete attack in East Lorengau.

29 Jun 2017

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights calls on Australian government to end offshore detention, close the centres on Manus and Nauru and repatriate every person held there to Australia.

14 Jul 2017

US 'deal' thrown into doubt as US fills yearly refugee quota without settling even one refugee from Manus or Nauru.



Imran

From: Burma

Age when detained: 19

Age now: 23

Photo credit: Matthew Abbott

I love writing. I wasn't a writer before I came here, in fact I didn't really speak any English. But after about a week of being on Manus, I went to a class. There was a teacher there who told me to find something to do to help get through each day. So I started writing every single day.

At the beginning I had no idea what I was writing. Writing was more about survival. But after a few months I realized I was writing my autobiography – a book about who I am, where I come from and why I am here.

After four years, my book is almost finished. But I have not yet written the last chapter. The last chapter will be about the country where I go to in the future. I am saving the last chapter for that.

MY 4 YEARS

In 2014, during the riots, I came very close to dying. I saw Reza Barati killed.

My room was the first the locals attacked. They broke the handle off our door and broke the windows but they couldn't get in, so they moved to the next room. We tried to escape the compound but as soon as we left our room, the local people ran for us.

I hadn't slept peacefully since arriving on Manus. But it got worse after that.

I have lost many things in the last four years. I've also lost my father - who disappeared in Burma. The rest of my family escaped but he has been missing for over six months. It is the most devastating thing that has ever happened in my life.

I have lived with fear and sadness for the last four years. But the worst part is being without hope. Wasting away without a glimpse of hope for the future. Our hope has been destroyed again and again. The Australian government has no proper plan. They have deliberately made us feel like this is the end of the world.

"I would still thank him for the shelter he has given me. But I would say that there was no need to imprison me for four years."

MY FUTURE

For me, I would love to study and I would like to have a family. My father's dream was for me to become a doctor. If I can, I would try to become a doctor.

But right now, things are getting worse. They're about to close the centre but we have nowhere to go.

If Malcolm Turnbull was in front of me I would tell him that I am just a young person who left my country because I was persecuted. I came to your country with an open heart - I have been stateless for my whole life. I would give my sweat and blood for your country.

I would still thank him for the shelter he has given me. But I would say that there was no need to imprison me for four years. We deserve the right to safety. We should not be left in PNG.

I'd like to thank many people in Australia for their support over the last four years. Because of their unconditional love and unwavering support, we have survived. They have never been to Manus and they have never met us in person but they understand we are just the same - people, like them.



Amir

From: Iran

Age now: 23

Photo credit: Matthew Abbott

When I was a little kid – just five or six years old – I had my own bike. I loved it but one day the chain came off. I had a look and was able to fix it myself, I remember feeling so proud. Ever since, I have taken pride in being a bit of a repairman. By the time I was about 12 I was always carrying a little bag of tools with me wherever I went. Whenever I visited friends or relatives they would always ask me to fix things: cars, video games, air conditioners, basically anything.

Throughout my life there have been a lot of things I have had to teach myself. I was only 14 when I had to leave my country. I escaped and made it to Malaysia all by myself, leaving my family behind. I was on my own and for the first time I had to cook for myself. I didn't have a recipe book, I didn't have anyone to teach me. There I was at 15, just making it up.

MY 4 YEARS

Many people would say that your early 20s are the best years of your life. These are the years when you set yourself up. When you develop skills and relationships that set you up for your future. But for me, I've been forced to spend these years in the Manus prison.

The worst part about being here is the disempowerment. You have no control over your life. You don't get to decide where you sleep, where you shower, what you eat or even the toilet that you use.

The system is implemented this way to make you suffer. To take away your power and your hope.

For me, the worst moment of the last four years was when we were all on hunger strike. We felt humiliated and like they were breaking us. So we went on hunger strike.

They sent in the Wilson guards. They picked us up off the ground. They forced us to stand and they took us to solitary confinement in Chauka. That was the first time I found out about that secret place.

When I came here I had many friends who were single, but now they are married and have children who are about to start school. My best friend – I remember when he told me he had become a father. It was a very bittersweet moment.

So much has happened in his life in four years, but I thought to myself, "Where are you? What has happened in your life? You are just a piece of flesh in the corner of a cage. Not an identity, just a number."

MY FUTURE

I feel like everything the Australian government is doing is designed to force us to go home or go into PNG. They are squeezing us out of the camp, but not to the airport where they will take us to safety, they are squeezing us into the PNG community where we are not safe.

It's hard to have ambition and hopes and dreams right now. If I ever get out of here, I'll need some time to get back to who I am. I will need to go to a peaceful place, a sanctuary.

My dream has always been to be a useful person – to contribute to the world. Really I want to be a human rights lawyer because I believe in a world that is fair to everyone and where all people have rights.

"They forced us to stand and they took us to solitary confinement in Chauka. That was the first time I found out about that secret place."



Madu*

From: Burma (stateless Rohingya)

Age when detained: 17

Age now: 21

Photo credit: Matthew Abbott

I've always been a shy person. I'm friendly, but I am shy. Movies were always my escape. I was always watching movies as a kid. I saw my first movie when I was 7; it was Rambo. Since then I haven't been able to stop. My mum and dad were always telling me off for spending too much time watching movies and not enough time studying.

It's hard to get movies here, so I listen to a lot of music instead. Music makes me happy. It's my escape. I love pop music; right now my favourite song is "What Do You Mean?" by Justin Bieber.

MY 4 YEARS

So much has happened in the time I've been stuck here. The hardest moment was when my father passed away. He was attacked and badly beaten. He was taken to hospital and was there for two months - I thought he would get better. He died at 12pm on 18 March 2015, but I couldn't call my mum for a week.

I couldn't even see him. I couldn't see his face or say goodbye, I couldn't even hug my mother. I couldn't do anything at all. It was the most painful moment of my life.

When I was sent here I was only 17. I was a child. When I turned 21, my friends organised something to celebrate. But the truth is I have only had bad experiences in here. These are the years in my life when I'm meant to be going to university and building my future. But I've been here for four years and I can't do anything.

"On my first day in safety, I would call my mum. I would call my mum to tell her that I finally have my freedom. My mum has been waiting a long time for me to be free."

MY FUTURE

The situation here is getting worse and worse. They have shut down classrooms. Closed the gym.

They tell us every day that we can't stay here. They say go back to your country or go to the Transit Centre. But we aren't safe out there in the community. That is the worst thing – they are trying to push us somewhere where we will not be safe. I don't know why they are doing this to us.

I think some people will get to go to America, but not everyone. I'm frightened that I won't be picked to go to America. I don't know what they will decide, but we can't stay here.

I came to Australia for safety - I came to seek safety. I suffered a lot when I was in Burma. I escaped but now I am here and still suffering.

I still have hopes and dreams. I want to study. I would like to study civil engineering because I'm good at math.

On my first day in safety, I would call my mum. I would call my mum to tell her that I finally have my freedom. My mum has been waiting a long time for me to be free.



Farhad

From: Kurdish, stateless, fled persecution in Iran.

Age now: 36

Photo credit: Behrouz Boochani

I like to paint, write poetry and to sing. I'm a creative person.

I used to make guitars – classical guitars. I've been playing classical guitar for 16 years. Music is my biggest passion and it's what I want to do. After about three years they've let me have a guitar in here. Now I play every day; I'm working on a new Kurdish song.

They have also let me have some painting materials sent to me by friends in Australia. I find humanity in my art. I've had some of my art put in exhibitions in Australia in big cities like Melbourne and Canberra. I got some letters after those exhibitions from people who saw my art – their words and kindness made me happy. Art is like its own language – people see my art and understand something about me.

MY 4 YEARS

The world changes every day, it changes every second. Four years it is not a short time. It's been like a nightmare that has put my life on pause.

While I've been here, my brother has gotten married. My brother had a son and he asked me to choose a name for him. I was so happy and honoured - I think about that day a lot. I speak with my nephew on the phone now. He is almost four. He always says he wants to meet me, "Uncle, you named me. Why can't I meet you?"

I hope one day I will meet my nephew.

"We've had so many hard times, we've been attacked, we've been punched and we've been fired at with shotguns."

MY FUTURE

**Freedom so sweet
Yet for me
Merely a mirage.**

– *Farhad*

This place is not safe. We've had so many hard times, we've been attacked, we've been punched and we've been fired at with shotguns. My friend, Reza, was killed. He was a gentle man. But they didn't care who we were.

Every day here is stressful. It is not safe and I don't know what will happen next. I think the Australian Government wants to force us into East Lorengau. They want to push us out or push us back to our own countries. They want to force us somewhere, after four years that is not fair or humane.

**They must take us somewhere safe.
I just want to be free - I want to be
released from this place.**

We just want to feel alive, to be free from this place and to be somewhere safe.



Atom

From: Sudan, Darfur

Age when detained: 18

Age now: 22

Photo credit: Behrouz Boochani

I'm a big Barcelona fan, Lionel Messi is the best player of all time. I love to play – I've always loved playing soccer. I'm a defender and very fast - no one can run past me!

I grew up in a big family, I have four brothers and three sisters - I'm the youngest. My father died in 2002 when I was only 6 or 7 years old. It was very hard for my mum with seven kids. She worked very hard, we all worked hard. We needed her and she needed us.

I just hold onto the dream that one day, I will have the chance to study at university and play soccer with my friends.

MY 4 YEARS

I've been in this very hard situation for the last four years - it feels so complicated. I don't understand anything about my future, we have no answers about anything.

The worst moment was when my friend Faysal died. Faysal was from Sudan like me. He was a very kind person, whenever we felt sad we would talk to him. He was kind to everybody, but then when he got sick he wasn't looked after.

Faysal was sick for a long time. He kept telling them he was sick but they didn't believe him. They didn't help him and then he died.

I was so sad and frustrated. He had come to Australia to live a real life, but the Australian government sent him here and let him die. He lost 4 years here, and then he lost his life.

I was so upset. I was upset that there was nothing I could do to help my friend. I was so upset that he was gone. And when he died I also felt really afraid - what would happen if I got sick? Would anybody help me or would I just be left to die as well? That is our reality here.

MY FUTURE

We don't know anything. They keep saying they will close the centre in October but we don't know where we will go. Refugees have been attacked many times here - it's clear that it's not safe.

I just want to continue my education and to have freedom - that's it. That is all I have ever wanted.

"I just hold onto the dream that one day, I will have the chance to study at university and play soccer with my friends."

A close-up portrait of a man with dark hair and a light beard, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. He is wearing a white t-shirt. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Naseem

From: Pakistan

Age when detained: 19

Age now: 23

Photo credit: Behrouz Boochani

My childhood dream was to be a famous cricketer. I was a pretty good medium pace bowler. Wasim Akram and Sachin Tendulkar and Ricky Ponting are my three favourite players.

In Pakistan I was studying a Bachelor of Economics before I had to flee. I also worked for an NGO. We worked in education, health and anti-drug programs. I was really passionate about our work on women's education – helping young girls to go to school.

Back in my village there was a lot of suffering. There was a high rate of illiteracy and women did not go to school. I remember going to school and seeing the look in the eyes of my little sister and my cousin. I could see they wanted to go to school too but my community didn't give girls that opportunity. I wanted to change that.

My little sister has always been so brilliant – much smarter than me. Now that she is able to go to school she has been top of her class every year. That's why I worked for this NGO, but our work started to cause problems with the Taliban and that is one of the reasons I was forced to flee.

MY 4 YEARS

The last four years... Really I have no words to describe how we've suffered. Every minute, every second, every night, we die a little bit.

I have missed many Christmas celebrations, when we cook food and the whole family comes together. My mum always calls me and tells me that she wishes I was beside her. It leaves me shattered.

The worst moment of the last four years was when my friend Kamil died. I will never forget speaking to his wife and mother. They were just crying and crying. His little daughter came on the phone and said she to me that she needed her papa's body. Her voice took my sleep away from me for a long time.

From the beginning, they have tried to break us. When the Taliban tell you they will kill you - you know you are going to die. But here in this centre, you just wait with no hope, and get told to go back home.

I have missed out on so many things over the last four years – good things and bad things. My cousin died in bomb blasts. My uncle was shot in front of my house. I didn't get to say goodbye to them.

MY FUTURE

Manus is always a hard situation. People are so stressed and depressed. There is always a lot of pressure. The Australian government wants to close the centre but we don't know where we will go. There is the US deal but we don't know what will happen.

Personally, I have family and friends in Australia. I have cousins in Melbourne and Sydney who are Australian citizens. So I want to go to Australia.

I would also go to America, but I have nominated and not heard anything yet. I haven't even had an interview. We don't know when anything will happen. Or if anything will happen. We are just waiting.

"I have family and friends in Australia. I have cousins in Melbourne and Sydney who are Australian citizens."



Ben

From: Iran

Age now: 25

Photo credit: Matthew Abbott

My friends would all say that I am a very ambitious person. I hope they would also say that I am very easy to get along with, that I love my family, that I am thoughtful and sincere (and that I have a great sense of humour!) They would also say I drink a lot of tea. If I had 10 cups of black tea in front of me made by my mother I would drink them all. I love my mother's tea!

One thing I am passionate about is the rights of LGBTI people. Here I know so many guys who are homosexual. It is hard for them, but personally I believe that love is love and I respect them for who they are.

One of my wishes is that one day I will become a disability support worker. I had a cousin in Iran who lived with a serious disability. He could not be by himself – he needed care all the time. When I had free time, I would look after him. I would take him out and we would eat ice cream. I saw how important that support was for him and I would love to do that for other people too.

MY 4 YEARS

I miss so many things. I miss when my mother would call us all together for dinner and we would all get around the table as a family. I miss the smell of flowers. Most of all I miss just being who I am and living without fear.

Four years is a long time in anyone's language.

The hardest moments for me are when I call my mum. She always asks me if I have news and always sounds so hopeful that I will tell her that my situation has improved. But for four years I have had to keep saying, "Sorry mum, I have nothing to tell you". Sometimes I can hear that she is crying. She tries to pretend that she isn't but I can hear it in her voice.

I hope that one day I can tell her some good news.

MY FUTURE

The situation on Manus is getting worse and worse and there is no end in sight. The pressure is growing and things are getting more tense. The majority of guys, they feel sad and don't believe we will ever be free.

They have the USA deal to keep us calm, but from what I see and hear, it's not going to be enough for everyone.

They have taken four years of my life. I just want to have a future. We are humans - I have a mum, I have a family, I want to have a future – just like any human being.

"Here I know so many guys who are homosexual. It is hard for them, but personally I believe that love is love and I respect them for who they are."

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Four years after then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's commencement of the offshore refugee processing regime, over 2000 refugees and asylum seekers, including 169 children, remain in limbo on PNG and Nauru.

Successive Australian governments have managed and funded the offshore processing regime and its detention camps on Manus Island in PNG and Nauru. The people who are detained there are clearly our responsibility. Four years after the Australian Government's commencement of the offshore processing regime, it is unconscionable that people continue to languish on PNG and Nauru.

Beyond the reports of gross physical and sexual abuse, including of children; inadequate medical attention; degrading living conditions; and numerous deaths; the extinguishment of hope and endless wait has pushed people to the edge.

The majority of these people have been recognised as refugees. We owe them protection and safety now. The US resettlement deal was announced 8 months ago, yet not a single person has been resettled, and it is likely the deal will not provide safety for all. The most obvious and humane solution is to evacuate the offshore camps and bring these people to Australia until a safe long term, appropriate outcome for them can be guaranteed.

We are calling on both major parties to form a bipartisan commitment to immediately evacuate the offshore camps and bring these men, women and children to safety.