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BY: MIG

I began visiting people in Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre in 2002 and continued to visit at least once a week for more than a year.

The people I met spoke of the humiliation and despair they felt at being treated as criminals, when they sincerely believed (as I did) that under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, they had a right to seek refuge in another country.

They spoke of being deprived of sleep by having torches shone in their faces at odd times of the night, of sharing their accomodation with drug dealers, of being placed in solitary confinement if they were seen to have caused any disruption, of inedible food and worst of all, of not knowing for how long they would be held. In many cases, it turned out to be years.

On perhaps my most memorable visit, I met an Iranian man in the depths of despair who told me his 11 year old daughter had just attempted suicide. She had witnessed horrifying events whilst in Woomera, such as men cutting themselves and others sinking into deep depression. Philip Ruddock at first denied the girls' mother the right to stay with her young child in hospital, but eventually relented, after some pressure.

After some of my detainee friends were released, recognised as genuine political refugees after years of appeals and endless court cases, I turned my attention to assisting them to settle into life 'outside'. It was clear to me that their imprisonment had had long-lasting effects and they were often fearful, particularly of anyone in any sort of uniform. They all had health problems, rotting teeth, bad backs and a list of ailments, some of which I put down to hypochondria.

I have witnessed the deterioration of relationships as these people try to deal with paranoia and fears that to us seem irrational. One friend in particular has shown severe symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress and has been treated at Foundation House. I know he's not the only one, and I fear for all those who have endured life in Australia's detention centres only to find the state of their mental health does not allow them to lead a 'normal' life now that they are free.

If necessary, I would be happy to give a one-to-one interview with details about my experiences, but do not wish to name anyone via email.

I will also forward a letter from a teenager who was held in Port Hedland Detention centre and to whom I wrote regularly. It gives a clear picture of the life this young boy endured whilst in detention.

Yours sincerely,  
Diana Greentree

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I am forwarding this letter that was sent to me by a teenage boy who was in Port Hedland Detention centre for several years (and is now free). He gave me permission to use this piece as I wished, and it was presented by my group, Actors for Refugees, at schools and universities throughout Australia.

I am withholding his name at present.

Diana Greentree

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Dear Diana,

BY: *mib*

Thank you very much for your lovely letter.

I will tell you what my life is like in Port Hedland . Port Hedland Detention Center is like

Graveyard . No body knows about you & you can not do any-Thing , even if we dead or some thing happen to us , nobody Will know & nobody their hear our voice & our pain. I have Big pain & I hurt & I am oppressed & I lost my future – I lost My parents – I lost my hope - & now I am here in this graveyard & hell. I want to know how the people thinking about what my life is like in detention center , or let me say if they put you in five star hotel & you got every thing you want , but you are not allow to go out , you have to stay just inside so How long you can stay ... one year – two years ... & then ?

when I woke up , in first moment I think that I am not in detention center , I think that I live with an Australian family but when I look around my room I see that I am still in detention center , but I don't want to believe that , I go outside & still I do not want to believe that I am still here , but when I see there is fences around me ... that time I believe that yes I am here not some were else , & then I start my day with spite & inconvenience . There is nothing to do when I wake up , because that time every body sleep , so I go to bed & trying to sleep. Here every body sleeping during the day & waking all the night. When I wake up again at 11.00 am there is one thing I can do Walking & walking ... & thinking about : When all of this thing Will finish ? When I will be free ? When my nightmare will finish Have I a good future ? Will I live with my Australian foster family ?

Many & many questions ... but where is my answer ? who can Answer me ?

Please dear Diana let every body read my letter – my pain I want them to see my tears & my pain from my letter .

I would like to ask a question from people who living there , far-Away ...one question , How their children thinking every day About : Life , world , future , family & every thing ?

I am 17 years old & I am thinking about things that I shouldn't Think about it ...like what ? like ... I don't have future & I don't Have a real life & my life is not mean any thing ... going back

To Afghanistan just to die... twice I was thinking to kill my self  
And many feeling & thinking .

When I go to get my lunch , same lunch that I had it yesterday  
& one month ago & one year ago , almost two years every day  
same lunch & same food ... even I cant look to the food ,  
because I feel the food is disgusting . After that I have nothing  
to do , maybe just one thing ... sleeping . And when I woke up  
again & I am in perplexity that what I should do now ?

There is nothing just nothing ... empty life, & my world is full  
Of pain & hurt & darkness & no hope & etc .

There is some nice guards , they help us when we need help &  
They telling us what will happen next & there is some very bad  
Guards , they are always looking for troubles & making us  
Nervous & angry . This peoples abusing our name when they  
Talk about us , when we smash or break something , they are  
Saying we are CRIMINAL or TERRORISM & poor Australian  
People , they believe every wrong idea about us .

Sometime they push us to smash & breaking , that time they  
have something to tell the news & news papers . They are doing  
Anything to keep us in detention center ... anything you can  
Imagine , I cant say what they are doing because I afraid if they  
Look to my letter & then they will make trouble for me .

Any way at 5.00 pm every body woke up & that time we have  
Many thing to do like : walking – talking – playing – or siting in  
Our room , most of the people here like to sit in the room & me  
One of them , I sit in my room all the time or walking & walking  
& thinking about how long how long I should be here ? How  
long they will keeping me here ? When I can see the world ?  
When I can breath ? WHEN I WILL BE ... FREE...Like a bird ?  
WHERE IS THAT THING THAT EVERY BODY KALLED Freedom?  
Where is my freedom ? I think people , same like me they should  
Not Have a good live , we should not live in this planet .

Sometime I think maybe I am not a human , I am not same like  
All of you , maybe I am different .Actually during the day there  
Is nothing to do nothing at all , even at night there is one thing  
Can keep me busy Walking & walking ...life in Port Hedland  
Is very boring , specially when you are detainee in Port Hedland  
Detention Center & you have no name only ID number they call  
You by it. Now is their any one can tell me if I am a normal boy

*I don't think so , I lost many thing here ... my mind & my -  
Memory & my feeling ... Do you know who am I ? I am a little  
Crazy boy without father & mother & sister & brother ...  
This is my day & every day since I live in Port Hedland .*

*Regard & lots of love :*