

To: The Honourable Australian Senate Members

From: Iraqis detained in Lombrum detention centre  
Manus Island (PNG)

Dear Sirs

Peace upon you,

We are the Iraqis who fled from the oppression of the dictatorial regime in Iraq seeking peaceful land in Australia. On behalf of all asylum seekers here we would like to say thank you to your efforts to give us a chance to explain the full details about our boat sank in Australian water and clarify our innocence from the accusation of throwing our children overboard. After you found we are innocent by the Australian court besides trying to give you the full view about the camp situation from all aspects. Your attention is proving to us you respecting to human rights, freedom and democracy.

On the 7th October 2001 at approximately 3.30-4.00 am the Australian frigate Adelaide (01) fired warning shots to try and scare us and to force the captain to stop the boat. They called to us in English and Arabic demanding us to stop the boat so they could give us supplies that we needed. The frigate intercepted our course so that the Indonesian captain reduced speed, while marines in 4 rubber boats took advantage of the low speed and entered our boat. Some headed for the bridge and engine room while other spread taking full control over all passengers by driving them into two groups. Men in the front, women and children in the aft, so no one could enter either the bridge or the engine. They took control of all the gates leading to every section of the boat. All the marines were in their full military equipment with weapons and electric sticks etc.

There was a navigator officer and the wheelman that forcibly took over from the Indonesian crew and changed course to the opposite direction, then all the passengers knew that they were lying to us about providing supplies, while their main purpose was changing our course towards Indonesia. Our people crowded and made many objections by shouting at them, crying, even begging by the women and children, but they ignored all that and asked for a backup force who came at once and they were onboard too, the frigate was still escorting.

By using the maximum speed can get from the engine they pushed the speed levers heading toward Indonesia, causing a heavy unnatural smoke getting out from the engine to the women's section, bridge and outside the accommodation causing asphyxia for the passengers, especially the women and children.

The boat kept on moving and after sometime the engines sound start to

splutter until it went out completely. We couldn't hear the engines anymore and there was no more smoke.

It was then that the Australian marines moved out the boat in a rushing way as if they were escaping and we were left by ourselves about 10 to 11 am, 7th October. After that the Indonesian crew told us they think we are in international waters and the engine was broken, water pump and rudder too. The Australian navigator left us a small compass besides it drawing an arrow that leads to the direction of Indonesia.

All the passengers were shocked when remembering the claims of the Navy who firstly offered to help and provide our needs such as food and water and now they had deserted us, left alone in the middle of nowhere and the wide ocean in front of us, with the terrible condition of the engine and water leaking through the boat, because the pumps connected to the main engine were stopped and no more fuel left to operate the portable emergency pump.

Because of the desperate situation all the passengers started to evacuate the seawater inside the boat using different kinds of available pails and jugs. After that we raised a white sheet over the mast asking for aid using the life-jacket whistles and the voices of the women and children calling the frigate which was watching us from a distance.

The boat came from the warship with marines, one of them speaking Arabic, he asked why we're not moving. We answered that the engines is not working and there's more water leaking inside and the health condition is very bad, that's why we're asking for SOS. The boat went back to the frigate and after sometime they came again bringing two mechanics with them to check the engine. They went inside the engine room, staying there for about two hours trying to fix it but didn't manage. When they were sure of our claims, they went back to the frigate about 6-7 pm to report the situation. It was then that the frigate herself came to us and started towing us to Australian regional waters in a very rough sea.

The towing, rough sea and high winds affected the boat's keel and mainframe. We could all hear the sound of breaking woods. As a result, the seawater inside the boat got higher. Together with 3 of the marines we started evacuating water manually, using pails and jugs and whatever is available.

The towing procedure continued for 24 hours, meanwhile the Navy provided us with technical and medical aid. Medically they sent two doctors who checked the women, children and men. They gave us medicine especially for sea sickness

The navy brought a portable pump that works on diesel to vacant the water but it didn't work. Manual pumps were also tried but these were broken too. They sent the pump back to the frigate for repairs and brought it back again

with benzine for our own but unfortunately it didn't work also.

During this time the seawater was increasing inside the boat and it was very hard to control it by the technical staff in spite of our request for aid. The technical situation of the boat was reported to the frigate's captain by officers on board.

When the level of water inside the boat was about one metre and the drowning was going on increasingly in such terrible excess, all the passengers were desperate and all been calling for help, especially the kids – from the crew of the warship which were on board with us. In that moment of horror some of us repeated attempts to lift our kids to gain their sympathy to show then we have kids and women on the boat. We appealed to the Australian Navy officer asking him to help the women and children to abandon the sinking boat and have them transferred to the warship before things got worse. He listened to them and called for the commander in his turn had called the Australian Government and they are both waiting for an answer.

The situation on our boat was getting very dangerous, water level increased inside the boat, all of us was facing death by the continuous sinking as women and children started to cry and prayed to God asking for mercy. This situation been told to the Australian Government by the commander of the warship time by time. The only answer we've heard from the officer on board our boat was that they were reporting directly to the Prime Minister's Office and the order must come from them so they can help you abandon your boat – that answer kept the same until the boat was sinking then we had the answer which was – we will make the rescue when your boat is completely submerged and you all must go in the water with the kids and women. Then and only then, our orders will give us the permission for helping you from drowning.

Whilst all this was happening we wrote a letter to the president of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan, declaring our tragic situation and asking for an urgent rescue. An officer onboard said that it had been sent to him, but still there was no answer, no reaction.

The water level inside the boat reached 130cm, so they sent us a hose from the main pump inside the frigate for taking water out but this didn't succeed and things were getting worse.

The officer onboard said that they were still waiting for an answer and told us not to worry for they were going to rescue us if the boat sank and we were actually in the water.

Things were getting very bad so they brought us some life-jackets although we have our own from the first moment we were onboard – some had lost them

so they took the new jackets.

After a while events were happening rapidly, the boat went down and we were dropped into the ocean with all our possessions which included money, jewellery, personal belongings, documents, etc. Whilst many of our personal belongings were simple things, they mean a lot cause they were the most precious we were able to bring. All these were possible to be saved if the decision to abandon ship was taken earlier. With the help from the Navy nothing would have been lost.

The Navy picked us (children, women, the elderly and men) from the water. They were very capable in doing the rescue and we like to take this opportunity to thank them for helping us, especially the Australian girl which was the doctor who jumped from the frigate deck to the ocean without a life jacket, just to save a child with her mother before going underneath the ship. Also there was a brave sailor who jumped in with a life-jacket which exploded from the sudden shock, but he kept on saving passengers.

All these events shows how brave were the navy, how impressed they were by our desperate position, their kindness and their deep respect for human rights and life.

One of our women was deeply hurt in her back by the rope used to lift her from the ocean to the ships; deck.

This thing gives you a very straight view of the way the Australian Government dealt with us, they were well known of the whole situation and never gave the order for the Navy to help us until the boat was fully submerged with water, never considering that we have on board infants and babies.

All this drama took place with the full knowledge of the Australian Government which didn't give the order to the Navy at the right time, before the boat sank, then all this tragedy would not have happened.

After our boat sank the war ship rescued us putting us on the ship for two days transferring us to Christmas Island according to Australian decision read it by Australian Immigration officer they apprehend us for 11 days in a basket ball hall, after that they banished us outside Australia to Manus Island in (PNG) according to the decision we are going to Australian Camp to apply for asylum status but the truth was under night darkness forcibly and secretly on military planes and bad treatment by ACM they put manacle in the hand under restricted media isolation without informing us about our destination.

We like to point out a very important event that during our lifting from the airport on Manus to the camp some of our people were pushed out the military plane – Hercules and force was used to get into the cars. Also there were a lot of soldiers and police cars used to escort us to the gates of the camp.

Then the whole force separated around the camp with the cars facing the fences aiming their lights toward the inside of the camp and the police and the policemen and soldier rising up also towards us as if they were into some kind of exhibition or a film well done to scare and terror us.

In spite of all this our people stuck to patience, quite, and hold their nerves because we are peaceful people seeking peace not violence.

We like to highlight the main reason was to apply for asylum status there secondly the Prime Minister resolution of past accusation of throwing our kids and we are terrorist not deserving entering Australian soil.

In 21/10/2001 they apprehended us in a camp which is old military base from the second world war used by American army lacking the minimum living condition beside the hot weather.

We are living inside isolation due to these circumstances. Some people choked and other attempt to commit suicide, spreading many kinds of disease some known some unknown like Malaria, Typhoid fever adding to this existing many kinds of snakes and rats.

Though there's been a local media visit to the camp in the early of February and they were forbidden from entering the camp by IOM for both governments of Australia and PNG didn't approve their permission for them to contact us. Also in the Australian reporter Greg Roberts came to the camp to visit us and was not allowed to enter.

There's been a report on the newspaper called Post Courier issued on Monday 11/2/2002 at the no. 8353, sec page under the title – Media Tour show refugees are well – written in it that the health status in the camp is good!!

We would like to inform that, recently been announced officially that we are innocent from charges that we been accused of which is called children overboard by the High Australian Court for there was no evidence of what been claimed about us throwing our children overboard the boat to the sea. As was said by some of the Australian officials that this charge had our destinies and our innocent children and women in the political fight used cruelty to win the elections.

In that time, under the hard circumstances we're suffering ... that we ask you

by the name of everyone of us especially the kids and women, by the name of Human Rights, liberty and democracy.

You who have a living conscience, brighten minds and fair hands. To re-consider our case and deal with it in a fair human way, especially that all of us including the children are imploring you to be our legal defenders and lawyers.

We ask you to accept an invitation to send some delegation from your honourable senators to examine the tragic situation in our camp on Manus Island.

If that is not possible we request your approval to call our committee which represent the whole camp to come further word to Australia so we can declare all the events been written in our report.

Also we ask your generosity to make an appointment for a good professional lawyer to support us in defending our case, as well as sending the media and investigators to our camp here.

Especially we are a nation who have been suffering from persecution in Iraq and that was admitted by the President of the United States, Mr Bush, who said that both Iraq and Iran and North Korea are considered to be the worst terrorist governments in Asia.

That's without mentioning the dangerous sea voyage we've had and the bad situation we are facing here in PNG.

We hope you make us a reconsideration an purify our reputation from those crimes that we've been accused, by accepting us as part of your society as helpful numbers at all levels, scientifically, practically and enlightenly. Taking into consideration we have completed our processing and medical checks.

On behalf of the whole community we hope you, the Australian Government, the Australian people, PNG Government and IOM, you'll accept our apology. Wishing you all a happy life and to continue in your appeals defending human rights and justice

Sadiq Mzeraa Hussain Almallah Faez Alzubaidy Dyari Alkadi Majid Alghanim

Manus Asylum Seeker Camp Committee (First Arrival Group) – representing all those who arrived at Lombrum on 21 October 2001.