

Palm Sunday speech

Hello everyone,

My Name is Walid Zazai and I have been held against my will at Manus Island Detention Centre since January 2014.

I was 20 when I had to flee Afghanistan and I was 20 when I was incarcerated.

There has been much written about how horrible the detention centre is.

In short, the food is terrible, the hygiene poor, there are putrid smells, sticky and oppressive heat, the rooms are tiny for many men, there is a lack of privacy, and daily we are treated like criminals.

On top of this are all the things we have lost and things we have gained, by being here.

We have LOST.....the ability to see our families - both the family we left, or for many of us also, the family we were trying to reach.

For some that has meant not seeing their parents or siblings, but for others it is has meant not seeing their wife or their children.

I haven't had a punch in the arm by my brother, a hug by uncles, a kiss from my mum for nearly 4 years.

We have GAINED the unbelievable burden of our family mourning for us.

We have gained maturity and an understanding of the world well beyond our years.

Many of us sought the safety of Australia when we were just boys....and now we are men.

But men with heavy hearts and knowledge of the worst of humanity.

We have LOST the ability to work. We cannot use our skills and our abilities. We cannot earn money.

And this fact robs us of so many other things.

We cannot support our families – and many of us on Manus should be the primary care giver of our families.

All of us cannot even help our families put food on their tables.

For four years we have wanted to help our families - yet cannot.

But it is not just our families we want to help, this world is hurting, so many people need help.

We want to work to help widows, and orphans, and homeless people. We want to help. And financially, and physically, we are not able to.

We have GAINED a rest a HORRIBLE and frustrating and heart breaking REST.

For nearly four years we have not been able to do ANYTHING.

The same nothing everyday for nearly four years. A rest that has nearly driven us insane.

We have LOST all, and any, form of privacy.

We have GAINED..... nightmares of the horrors we have seen and experienced.

We cry ourselves to sleep and we pretend we don't notice when our friends do the same.

For nearly four years we have LOST the opportunity to study - to learn employment skills, or upskill so that we can find work when we are finally free.

After nearly four years many of us have GAINED a dependence on medication to sleep.

A dependence on medication to attempt to ease the anxiety that continually knocks on our souls and screams 'how much longer can they hold you here?'

And medication to attempt to ease the depression that screams 'this is worse than before, you can't handle much more of this'.

Here on Manus we have lost the ability to have physical love.

For nearly four years some men have not been able to see their wives, or their fiancés.

For the rest of we have lost the opportunity to meet women who one day might become our wives.

We all long for special smiles and tender hands and soft lips.

We all long for love.....and that opportunity has been stolen from us.

After four years we have GAINED the ability to see right through the lies, deceit, and indifference of the people in charge of making the policies that have held us here.

The Australian government says they are stopping the boats and they are saving lives at sea.

These are lies that cover the whole of the truth.

People are still dying at sea.

It is simply that Australia is pushing the boats out of its waters.

But what they are really doing is slowly killing us day by day.

Are our lives not worth saving?

We have LOST friends here.

We lost Reza Berati when he was murdered.

We lost Hamid Kehazei to a simple infection from a cut on his foot.

We lost Kamil Hussain who sadly drowned whilst swimming.

And most recently, during the celebration of Christmas, we lost Faysal Ishak Ahmed because his medical condition was given no care.

But....we have also lost friends we made with those who have worked at the detention facility.

Some kind workers have been ripped from their jobs because they treated us kindly.

And in 2017 we have lost friends who have either been forced, or made to sign deals to be sent back to their homelands.

Sent back to danger back to the same situation they needed to flee.

All of these friends we have lost because of a system that refuses to look at the people behind the problem.

And finally we have gained a small but precious army of people who care.

Thank you to our advocates and friends.

Thank you to the people who act who are writing to their MP's and talking to their friends to share the injustice of this place.

Thank you to the religious who take the love for your neighbour seriously.

Thank you to the people who know the equality in humanity and act upon it.

You have empowered us and given us a small voice.

Please let me finish by asking you to keep speaking for us, to yell for us, to scream for us.

Please keep putting peaceful, but loud, democratic pressure on the people who hold our freedom in their hard hands.

To the Australian Government please consider our lives as important and end the pain detention inflicts upon us.

Please bring us to Australia, we will make it our home, we will give you our hearts and we with every action we will show our thanks.