**WRITE AN ISLAND**

*Erasure poem created from the source text: “Asylum seekers write letters from Manus Island.” SBS.com.au, 26 Aug. 2013. http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2013/01/03/asylum-seekers-write-letters-manus-island*

Manus Island landowners have threatened to shut down power after the arrival of asylum seekers.

Asylum seekers held at Australia's regional processing centre on Manus Island in PapuaNew Guinea have begun writing about conditions there, and their reasons forseeking protection.

By Phillippa Carisbrooke

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Following is a transcript from World News Australia Radio

Asylum seekers held at Australia's regional processing centre on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea have begun writing about conditions there, and their reasons for seeking protection.

They hope the stories will raise public awareness of their situation, and lead to an improvement in their treatment.

In their accounts, many of the asylum seekers comment on the heat, and the quality of the food they are receiving.

Another regular theme is how long they will be on Manus Island.

Here, with some edits, is a little of what they have to say.

of anything but wanting freedom and safety."

"We have never committed a crime. We have always sought to help others and be co-operative

"Our situation is insane. Our children go to school that has no air conditioning in it... They have difficulty in eating because they don't like to eat because of the hot weather. Some people can't breathe in this weather.... Why do they place us in a high risk area to get a disease like malaria? People are being bitten and have sores all over their arms and legs... The water is not hygienic, it is not of a high quality, and we run out."

The Salvation Army is providing support to asylum seekers on Manus Island, and has been encouraging them to channel their frustrations in a positive way.

Its director of offshore missions, Major Paul Moulds, says for those feeling distress, putting their feelings on paper can stop them taking action that harms themselves or others.

"We are trying to help people top understand that they are free to be able to express feeling of discontent, objections to government policy, these are things that they have not often been free to do or known how to do. And so to write a letter to a parliamentarian, to put a submission to people, to contact a human right organisation, to be able to have a strong voice is something that is a new experience."

And the exercise is already yielding results.

In one of the stories by the asylum seekers, a mother describes how her family fled Iran to escape religious persecution.

"My daughter was born Muslim, but three years ago she said, "I want to be an agnostic." I was worried about her, that she may get in trouble because of her beliefs and political views. I saw lots of boys and girls arrested by the government and never returned back to their families. I didn't want anything to happen to my daughter. She is my everything. My husband and I really love her..... We left everything behind in search of freedom, justice and safety."

A man in his 20s writes about the dangers he faced in Iran for playing heavy metal music.

"Heavy Metal is completely prohibited and illegal in Iran... it's known as "Evil Music."..... At an underground concert more than 60 fans were arrested, charged and locked up. Players were taken to Intelligence. Two teachers of mine were arrested also. After those happenings, I changed my job .... I sold my drums, changed my place, changed my mobile phone..... I deleted every history of my music from my life because of my fear of being arrested by the government who were intent on stopping this music."

In a letter to the media entitled "Submission to the People of Australia", some of the Manus Island detainees have made a joint appeal.

"We write this with tears, having come to your country with so much hope and expectation, only to find a policy that treats us unjustly and unfairly, without compassion or respect for our individual situations. We are so far away here, living on a remote Island, unseen, without permission yet to leave the small compound where we live. We ask the people of Australia, do not forget us or abandon us. We respect your values, your laws and your defence of the right of freedom for all people. We want that for ourselves and our children. It is why we undertook this journey."

* Natalie D-Napoleon

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