

National Inquiry into Children in Immigration Detention

Sydney Public Hearing

Friday, 4 April 2014

President Thank you very much Mr Yousufi, we're really grateful that you were able to come today. I understand that you are studying as well and you've had to give up an exam to do this. Presumably you have to sit at another time so we really do appreciate it. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Yousufi Yes, sure.

President Thank you.

Mr Yousufi Hi ... my name Bashir and I am from Afghanistan. I came to Australia by boat in 2010 by myself when I was 14 years old. I will tell you about a day in detention centre. Once I reached Christmas Island the Department of Immigration send me straight away to detention centre. When I was in detention centre and the Department of Immigration told me that you have to share a room with 6 other kids in detention centre and I said 'Okay, I will share a room with other 6 people in detention centre'. And the room was very ... not very big and the room was very small and we were 6 people in the room. When I lay down on my bed in the detention centre and I was looking the ceiling and I was thinking how long do I have to be in detention centre? And also they ... I saw other kids in detention centre. Many other kids. They were hanging themselves. They are cutting themselves and I saw people in my face and I can see them within to ... 2 eyes, the people cutting themselves and hanging themselves, other kids in detention centre. I did go out of detention centre while I was going to school and I saw other kids at the school which is Australian kids. They were free and they were ... they were on the playground and they have fun but for me I have to go back into detention centre at the end of the day which has make me very sad and I wasn't happy to go back into detention centre. But the circumstance was that I have to go anywhere, I have to go with somebody and somebody has to take me there and somebody has to take me there and back into detention centre.

I also had a best friend. I call him brother. His name is [redacted]. He was also in detention centre with me. He didn't get a chance to go to school, to get education, to learn English. He fill out ... He did fill out a form for a couple of times and the form been rejected and he didn't get out of detention centre and he was in detention centre the whole years and ...

President Can I ask how long did you spend in the detention centre?

Mr Yousufi I was in detention centre for almost one year in detention centre.

President And your brother is how old, or was how old at this time?

Mr Yousufi He was in detention centre about more than a year.

President And how old was he? Was he younger than you?

Mr Yousufi He is older than me, just only one year. I was 14 years old when I was in detention centre and he was I think ... he was 16 years old when he was in detention.

President Then why do you think you had an opportunity for an education outside the centre and he was denied it?

Mr Yousufi I didn't ... they ,... we ... I couldn't find it. I couldn't find it that what was the main reason and what was the problems that I went to school and he didn't get a chance to go to school.

President You are not aware of any reason that was given for this distinction between you?

MrYousufi No. No. I didn't know.

President Sorry, I didn't want to interrupt, please go on.

Mr Yousufi The best way that I can summarise the impact of the detention centre. If I was in Afghanistan or somewhere in my own country the Taliban will come and they just shoot at me and they just either kill straight away but the Australian Government they will kill you very slowly with your mind. Also now I am here and I did get out of the detention centre and I had those very difficult days and difficult months for years in the detention centre but at the end I got out of detention centre and now I am a Year 12 student at Holroyd High School and I am also Vice Captain at Holroyd High School and this year I will do my HSC and I really look forward to going through uni and to do a degree which is business and commerce which I really hope this happen one day in my life. Thank you very much.

President Thank you very much indeed Mr Yousufi. Just to fill in a few of the details that you have been telling us about and thank you for sharing those experiences with us. We are very particularly interested in the impact of that detention in your case more than a year on you since you have left. You obviously still have very distressing memories of your time in there. Can you tell us the impact over the I think the three or so years that you have been out and how you have coped with the memories of that detention and now moving on as you clearly are to be doing HSC and university shortly?

Mr Yousufi Umm, yes, the memory that I had from the detention centre. I didn't forget the whole memories it is still on my shoulder and I am still carrying those hard days that I had in the detention centre but I am still carrying those harder days and those memories on my shoulders. But I am out of the detention centre and I am concentrating on my studies to go a bit further.

President Can you give us some examples of the continuing impact of detention now and clearly you are moving on and I must say we are very pleased to see that but could you tell us whether you have been vulnerable to depression or whether you think a lot about those days or whether you have mentally been able to move forward?

Mr Yousufi I do think about those days and I had a mental problem with those days that I spent in detention centre. As I told you, at the beginning when I was in the detention centre I was studying learning English and later on I spent a couple of weeks in the detention centre and I wasn't able to memorise things and I couldn't concentrate properly and I can't remember things like things my friend told me do this and after two seconds I forgot everything. I still I do carry those impacts.

President And do you still know of or keep up with any of the people that were in detention with you at the time presumably your brother but maybe others?

Mr Yousufi Yes, I do have a connection with some people that I spent in the detention centre. Some of them are in Melbourne and Perth and also some of them I am living with them right now with them. They are out of the detention centre and they are doing very great and some of them are almost finished their HSC and some of them are uni students right now.

President And do you talk with them or have any sense of whether they feel that the detention has had an impact on their ability to get on with their lives or have they mostly been able to bounce back?

Mr Yousufi They had very difficulties because they spent a long time that I spent in detention centre but they are still worry and carrying about those days spent in the detention centre and they still impact on their mind and still have memories back to the detention centre.

President Going back to when you were in the detention, did you feel safe and specifically and emotionally for that matter safe in detention?

Mr Yousufi To answer that question, No. I didn't feel safe when I was in the detention centre because I didn't know what I was going out of detention centre and how long I have to be in the detention centre and that was incredibly hard for me to deal with.

President So you found that, we are getting a lot of people saying things along the same lines, that the lack of information about what was going to happen to them was so distressing.

Mr Yousufi Yes.

President And that was your experience. I think we have to perhaps make the point clear that you were an unaccompanied child and can I ask you you mentioned that you mentioned that the Taliban would kill you, to an Australian, perhaps we would need to know the answer to this question for you it may be obvious but why would the Taliban kill you?

Mr Yousufi Well, the first reason why a Taliban wants to kill me, Taliban did kill my father a couple of years ago. Taliban did kill my father, I don't have any father anymore in this world and I was not feeling safe when I was in Afghanistan and they were trying to kill me to take my land or take anything that I have anything in Afghanistan and that was one reason. The other reason they were trying to kill me because of their ethnic because I am Shia, I am Muslim and do pray and that is why they thought it was another issue which is a religious issue that I have in Afghanistan.

President Thank you, it just puts it in context so to understand how this horror could occur to you. And your family now, is your mother alive and is she in Australia or is she in Afghanistan?

Mr Yousufi Unfortunately my mother she died with an illness she had an illness she died after two years my father had been killed. I have three younger brothers they are in Pakistan right now, the situation in Pakistan right now is also not safe for Hazara people for Shia and have only just those three brothers and I do not have any other family.

President Well I think your evidence is very, very moving, very important for us to understand that circumstances of young people have come unaccompanied so I do really appreciate you talking to us. Best of luck with your exams.

Mr Yousufi Thank you very much.

President Best of luck with your admission to university next year.

Mr Yousufi Thank you very much.