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Kurdish Refugee in Indefinite Detention Re-Starts Hunger Strike after Immigration Breaks Promise of Community Detention

Refugee advocates have grave fears for the welfare of 36 year-old Kurdish refugee, Sardar Zahiri, who has re-started a hunger strike in Melbourne after being moved from Perth.

Sardar, was hospitalised in Perth after twenty days of a hunger strike in the Perth detention centre in February, this year

After continuing his hunger strike at the Royal Perth Hospital, he was told by the treating psychiatrist at that he had discussed Zahiri's case with Immigration and that Immigration had agreed, if Zahiri began eating, he would be transferred to a Melbourne clinic and then placed in community detention. Other hospital staff and IHMS are believed to be witnesses to the commitment given to Sardar.

Zahiri was transferred to The Melbourne Clinic, a private psychiatric hospital, but instead of being released in to community detention, Sardar, has now been placed in the high security, Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre (MIDC).

He waited five days to see if the promise of community detention was going to be kept. Then, Sardar began a hunger strike in protest at the broken promise four days ago, Monday, 21 March. His physical condition has deteriorated rapidly.

"We are seriously concerned for Sardar's welfare," said Ian Rintoul, spokesperson for the Refugee Action Coalition, "He has lost all hope, and any trust, which wasn't much, that he had in the immigration officers and doctors, who promised he would get community detention is gone.

"Why immigration would live up to the first part of its undertaking to Sardar, to transfer him to Melbourne, but has reneged on the issue of community detention is both cruel and inexplicable, unless they want to inflict yet more mental torture."

Sardar's case is eerily reminiscent of that of Fezal Chegini, the Kurdish man who was found dead on Christmas Island in November, last year.

In spite of being found to be a refugee in 2012, Sardar has been held in indefinite detention as a result of being given a good behaviour bond in 2013 following some property being damaged in an incident in the Darwin detention centre.

His detention nightmare has led Sardar to attempt suicide on 12 occasions. He has damaged neck vertebrae, giving him constant pain, from a hanging attempt in Darwin early this year.

Immigration officers at MIDC told Sardar this morning, that the Minister has not made a decision for him to be moved into community detention, and in relation to his hunger strike, that 'It was not important whether you live or die, that is up to you.'

“Sardar’s detention is inexcusable. He should not be in detention at all,” said Rintoul, “The last skerrick of hope have been snatched away from him. Immigration needs to urgently make good on the commitment that made to Sardar.”

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