

24 February 2016 Refugee Action Coalition Media release

Another Fezal Chegeni? Fears for Welfare of Perth Refugee in Indefinite Detention

A 36 year-old Kurdish asylum seeker, Sardar Zahiri, who has been in closed and community detention since 2011, is on the 19 th day of a hunger strike at the Perth detention centre.

He was brought from Christmas Island with injured discs in his neck following an attempted suicide, two months ago. The man has made about 12 other suicide attempts.

Sardar was placed in community detention in 2012. It is believed that Sardar was found to be a refugee in 2012. But he was not granted a visa because of an outstanding court matter regarding an incident in the Darwin detention centre.

Then, in 2013, Sardar, was given an 18 month good behaviour bond as a result of property damage in an incident in Darwin detention centre. Despite being found to be a refugee, Sardar was taken back into closed detention as a consequence of that conviction.

“We are extremely concerned for the welfare of Sardar. The similarities between his history and treatment at the hands of the Immigration department is chilling, with the treatment that led to the death of fellow Kurd, Fezal Chegeni on Christmas Island is chilling,” said Ian Rintoul, from the Refugee Action Coalition.

“Sardar is extremely mentally distressed. He is already very weak from the hunger strike. But it is the only way he can bring attention to his impossible situation.

“The Immigration Minister is holding Sardar in indefinite detention on the basis of a relatively trivial conviction. Such detention is a form of torture and violates any understanding of the normal rules of justice. Sardar has been given a life sentence and has been robbed of his mental and physical health. It was precisely this treatment that led to the death of Fezal.

“Sardar must be released. There must be an urgent review of ALL such cases of people being held in detention on the basis of criminal convictions and breaches of so the so-called code of conduct.

“There must be an urgent review of the Ministerial powers that allow extra-judicial punishment to be inflicted on asylum seekers. It is a disgrace that such a review was not ordered in the aftermath of Fezal’s death.

“While all eyes are presently focused on the cruelty and lack of safety on Nauru, there is also unconscionable cruelty being inflicted by the Minister in detention centres on the mainland.”

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