

# THEY CANNOT TAKE THE SKY

“Around you, everything is metal fences. But the sky – they cannot take the sky.”  
Behrouz Boochani

*They Cannot Take the Sky: Stories from Detention* is a touring exhibition of personal stories from people who have sought asylum in Australia and have been detained by the Australian government under its mandatory detention policy.

Through personal perspectives, explore one of the most complex issues of our time. The people you will meet in the exhibition are diverse and individual, their experiences are unique and often surprising. You will hear about the reasons people flee their homes, their perilous journeys in search of safety, the banality of daily life in detention, and the afterlives - both lived and hoped for - of people resettling in Australia.

*They Cannot Take the Sky* was originally developed by Behind the Wire and a volunteer reference committee of individuals with lived experience of seeking asylum, in collaboration with Melbourne’s Immigration Museum. The regional tour of *They Cannot Take the Sky* is being co-presented by Behind the Wire and Road to Refuge. The tour is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

Aran Mylvaganam lives in Melbourne with his wife and young child. He tells the story of his village in Sri Lanka being bombed in 1995, resulting in the death of his brother.

3 min 19 sec

Ali and Rahila Haidary are father and daughter originally from Afghanistan. Ali lives in Shepparton, and Rahila lives in Perth with her husband. They describe how Rahila snuck into school when she was six years old, and then had to flee their village.

2 min 14 sec Read by Nakkiah Lui and Omar Musa

Munjed Al Muderis is an osseointegration surgeon in Sydney. He describes his escape from Baghdad, when as a young doctor he was ordered by Ba'ath Party officials to punish army deserters.

2 min 52 sec

Neda is a PhD student in Melbourne, who shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. She describes how she became involved in the Green Revolution in 2009. When she was summoned to court, she decided to leave Iran.

2 min 35 sec Read by Nakkiah Lui

John Gulzari is a real estate agent and entrepreneur living in Dandenong. He tells the story of listening to a favourite Hazara song one last time in Indonesia, before getting on a boat for Australia.

1 min 37 sec

Maya lives in Melbourne and she shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. She describes her feelings about the boat journey she took to seek asylum in Australia, and explains that she hates talking about it.

1 min 11 sec Read by Nakkiah Lui

Hani Abdile is a poet and a lover of life. She sought asylum in Australia in 2013 from Somalia. She performs one of her recently published poems about her relationship with the ocean.

2 min 44 sec

Hani Abdile recalls the first night of the eleven months she spent on Christmas Island in 2013. People were singing and dancing—celebrating their relief at being on dry land.

1 min 21 sec

Mohsen is a young man from Afghanistan who hopes to become a police officer. He describes being welcomed to Christmas Island in 2010, and his observation of the sadness in the other boys there.

49 sec Read by Omar Musa

Sara is living in Melbourne on a bridging visa, where she volunteers for numerous community organisations. She shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. She recalls her feelings about arriving in detention in 2013, and what life was like for her there.

56 sec Read by Nakkiah Lui

Munjed Al Muderis spent ten months in Curtin Detention Centre from late 1999. He explains the initial processing in which he was marked with his boat number, 982, which would replace his name in the centre.

1 min 32 sec

Ali Haidary remembers the first time he called home, from detention on Christmas Island. His daughter Rahila recalls answering the call and telling her mother the news.

1 min 52 sec Read by Nakkiah Lui and Omar Musa

Hani Abdile describes her experience of being assigned a boat number for daily use in detention, rather than her first name, on Christmas Island in 2013.

52 sec

Behrouz Boochani is a Kurdish journalist who was detained on Manus Island from 2013 to 2019. He tells the story of an unusual connection he formed with an old woman living in a village on the island, far from the detention centre. This footage was shot at Lorengau, a town 25 kilometres from the detention centre on Manus Island, in July 2016.

2 min 36 sec

Donna Sherwani arrived in Australia in 2000 at the age of 13. She recalls watching Australian television in Port Hedland detention centre, and the tensions which grew between and within families there.

2 min 16 sec

Jamila Jafari is a university student in Perth, who fled Afghanistan in 2001, with her mother and younger brother when she was 5 years old. She shares her childhood memories of being scared by men arriving in cars at the fence of the Woomera compound, as she played in the heat.

1 min 48 sec

John Gulzari talks about medical care at Curtin detention centre in 1999, in a story common to many people who have lived inside detention. He describes the treatment for many complaints—Panadol and water.

1 min 46 sec

Imran Mohammad is a young stateless Rohingya man who was currently detained on Manus Island when he shared his story. He tells a story about apples, allowances and the intensified effect of unpredictable rules in detention.

1 min 8 sec

Neda, a young woman who left Iran after the Green Revolution, shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. She recalls her delusion that she had died and met an angel, following her medical evacuation from Christmas Island to Perth. After that, she began to have panic attacks.

Read by Nakkiah Lui

2 min 5 sec

Reza Yarahmadi lives in Melbourne with his wife and young child. He talks about the medical care he received whilst suffering with kidney stones in detention on Christmas Island in 2009.

1 min 41 sec

Ali Bakhtiarvandi arrived in Australia by boat in 2000, and over four years was detained in three different centres. He shares his memories of sudden deportations of detainees from Port Hedland.

2 min 50 sec

Abdul Aziz Muhamat was detained on Manus Island, where he documented his experiences in The Messenger podcast, co-produced by Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre. In this recording he talks about what, if anything, he and his fellow detainees tell their families about their situation. This footage was shot at Lorengau, on Manus Island, in July 2016.

1 min 38 sec

Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish poet and journalist, reflects on his life before he escaped Iran, and his decision to call an ex-girlfriend from detention on Manus Island. This footage was shot at Lorengau, on Manus Island, in July 2016.

3 min 31 sec

Hal-Hal arrived on Christmas Island in 2013 and now studies and works in Melbourne. She shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. She recalls following the news and rumours from detention, and the days she didn't feel like seeing visitors.

1 min 9 sec      Read by Nakkiah Lui

Abdul Aziz Muhamat, a 25-year-old refugee from Sudan, talks about how he has learnt to relate to people from many different cultural backgrounds in detention on Manus Island. This footage was shot at Lorengau, on Manus Island, in July 2016.

2 min

Imran Mohammad is a young stateless Rohingya man from Myanmar. He talks about how his case worker Rebecca supported his mission to learn English whilst in detention on Manus Island. Three years on, he is writing an autobiography.

2 min

Ali Bakhtiarvandi recalls the unusual day, in his fourth year of detention, when he and a fellow detainee secretly bought beer and whiskey to have a party in Port Hedland detention centre.

3 min 46 sec

Lina is a young woman living in Melbourne, who was detained in Christmas Island and Darwin in 2013. She shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. She talks about the wonderful but sometimes challenging friendship she formed with a young woman named Ranya.

2 min 21 sec      Read by Nakkiah Lui

Nima was living on Nauru and he shares his story anonymously. He left Iran following torture and sexual assault because of his sexuality. He tells the story of meeting and falling in love with Ashkan in detention. Please note this story contains an adult reference.

2 min 6 sec      Read by Omar Musa

Jamila Jafari, now a university student, was detained in Woomera detention centre as a child. She describes the events she witnessed in 2002, at the Australia Day protests in the centre. One of the people mentioned in her story is the subject of an SBS documentary, *The Man Who Jumped*. Please note this story contains descriptions of self-harm and injury.

4 min 18 sec

Abdul Aziz Muhamat constantly kept himself occupied in detention on Manus Island. He explains that one of his coping methods is to imagine he is busy preparing to travel into space—it takes a long time to plan a space journey. This footage was shot at Lorengau, the main town on Manus Island located about 25 kilometres from the detention centre, in July 2016.

1 min 59 sec

Lina began drawing when her family was hiding in Syria. She shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. In detention in Darwin in 2013, she again turned to art to find comfort and self-expression. Encouraged by the detention centre staff, she discovered painting in colour.

1 min 56 sec    Read by Nakkiah Lui

Ali Bakhtiarvandi tells the story of his 48 day hunger strike to protest his detention and conditions at Port Hedland in 2000. He describes his solitary confinement and the intervention by medical staff to force-feed him by tube.

5 min 15 sec

Hani Abdile talks about writing poetry to stay strong while in detention in 2013 and 2014. She talks about sharing her poem *Born in Endless War* on Facebook and connecting with Australian writers. She recently published her first book of poetry, *I Will Rise*.

2 min 11 sec

Behrouz Boochani describes how nature on Manus Island is an ongoing source of calm and inspiration for him in detention. He talks about coconut palms, birds, and the constancy of the sky. This footage was shot at Lorengau, on Manus Island, in July 2016.

2 min 46 sec

Ali Bakhtiarvandi explains how he managed to conceal a forbidden mobile phone in his room in Port Hedland detention centre, in order to stay in touch with the friends he had made whilst detained in Melbourne for eighteen months.

3 min 44 sec

Maya shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. She recalls the lack of privacy in detention, her constant sense of being watched, and shouting—just to feel something, and to keep hold of her personality.

1 min 31 sec    Read by Nakkiah Lui

Jamila Jafari's father had travelled ahead of her and was already living in Sydney when she and her mother and brother were released from Woomera in 2002. She recalls the day they took a bus to join him in Sydney and she saw him for the first time in years.

1 min 28 sec

Neda shares her stories anonymously in this exhibition. She describes her joy at being released in 2010, as well as her realisation that she was severely affected by anxiety. She shares her experience of managing her anxiety and learning how to thrive at university. Read by Nakkiah Lui

2 min 36 sec

Imran Mohammad describes his aspirations for a meaningful and productive life, despite the difficult memories from his early experiences so far.

1 min 32 sec

Behrouz Boochani is a prolific writer and activist from detention on Manus Island. His articles appear regularly in Australian and international media. He shares his view about what future generations of Australians will look back and see. This footage was shot at Lorengau, on Manus Island, in July 2016.

1 min 27 sec

Peter lives in Melbourne and shares his stories anonymously. He talks about the feeling of freedom upon release from his six years of detention, and the changes many years of institutionalisation had made to his body and his psyche.

Read by Ram Chandrasegaram and Peter

1 min 39 sec

Hal-Hal is a volunteer reference committee member for the development of this exhibition, in which she shares her stories anonymously. She remembers the joy of her own release in 2013 and tells of her wish that no-one still in detention loses hope.

Read by Nakkiah Lui

1 min 10 sec

Aran Mylvaganam shares his experiences of depression following the traumas he experienced as a child and his separation from his family. He explains how he began, and continues, to learn how to cope.

2 min 19 sec

Jamila Jafari has recently begun speaking and writing more about seeking asylum and being detained at Woomera detention centre as a child in 2001 and 2002. She describes feeling guilt about her background, and then, how it came to be a source of pride.

4 min 30 sec

Reza Yarahmadi has been an advocate for refugee and detainee rights ever since his release from detention in 2010. He tells the story of organising a blockade to prevent detainees being deported from the Maribyrnong Immigration Transit Accommodation centre to Nauru.

2 min 2 sec

Lina has been a volunteer reference committee member for the development of this exhibition, in which she shares her stories anonymously. She talks about her urge to volunteer, her happiness at her freedom, and yet, the sense that her heart will always be in detention.

Read by Nakkiah Lui

1 min 12 sec

Aran Mylvaganam is an advocate for his community, and co-founder of the Tamil Refugee Council. He was on the reference committee for the development of this exhibition. He tells the story of the death of Tamil refugee Leo Seemanpillai and his role in supporting Leo's family.

1 min 48 sec