



This is a transcript from *The Messenger* – a podcast series produced by Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre. *The Messenger* brings you into the Australian immigration detention centre on Manus Island – and reveals, in intimate detail, one man's experience of what it's really like to flee tragedy and seek asylum by boat.

Warning: This episode of *The Messenger* contains graphic content and mentions self-harm. If you or someone you know needs help, you can contact one of Australia's national 24/7 crisis services such as Lifeline on 13 11 14 or at lifeline.org.au, or the Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

Episode 9: Freedom Is Not Free

Michael Green: From Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre, this is The Messenger.

MG: Ok, so it is the 22nd of December, and Aziz is in Port Moresby at the moment to see a doctor about his knee and possibly have some knee surgery, depending on what happens. But, because he's there, that means the reception is gonna be much better. So I'm gonna try and call him. Gonna to try and call him now.

[Phone ringing]

Abdul Aziz Muhamat: [indecipherable] Hello?

MG: Hello?

A: Hello?

MG: Hey Aziz! How are you?

A: I'm very good, thank you. How are you?

MG: It worked.

[Sound of Aziz walking, crackling phone]

MG: Well – not perfectly. There was a bit of background noise, but Aziz and I managed to find an okay connection. We talked a bit about his knee, and doctors' appointments, and detention, of course. And about Christmas.

MG: Christmas isn't like a religious thing for you, but do you, is it something that you ever pay any attention to?

A: Well I normally, normally celebrate Christmas with my friends actually ...

MG: Yeah.

A: It's a lot of fun because like from where from where I come from like we do have a ... you know a Christian there as well ... so friends whenever they come by me for Christmas what I do is I either, you know, try and buy some gift for them or ... you know my mum, she cooked and then I carried all the way to their houses.

And it's really amazing, especially like, you go ... you see some of your friends on a Christmas day and then you give them, like, a gift to their mums and then like, have a Christmas dinner with them, like ... although even you are not a part of their family, but you can feel like, you know, the you know ... the honour that family has to have you there with them and then like they feel very, very happy to have you among them. Especially during the dinner part, you know.

MG: But there was something different about this call. Maybe it was just because it was nearly Christmas. In Melbourne, things slow down towards the end of the year. It's hot. The rhythm of the city changes. The streets are quiet, and there's something laidback and pleasant in the way people talk to each other when they're looking forward to the summer break.

Not that Aziz could look forward to any kind of break. But even so, our conversation felt slower, and more reflective.

MG: Yeah, it's also like a time of year where, um, I dunno, like ... normally, for me Christmas and New Year's, it's like I have a little bit of a think about what happened over the last year and what I might want to happen over the next year. And it's a bit of a sort of time for reflection, but I ... I guess ... you've ... all you've got time for is reflection, right?

A: Well, for me like um I don't actually wanna think about it what happened, you know.

MG: Yeah.

A: But the whole year because it's just, you know, it's a painful, like, it's just a painful thing and once you keep, you know, when you keeps pushing yourself and you wanna remember what you did for the last, you know, for the whole year, and what are you gonna do for the next year it's like you're gonna end up without consequences.

Because you're still ... you're still, you know, controlled by other people, and you can't even, you know, take a step by yourself. Like, people give you kind of instructions to do things in your life and so it's really hard to think about it in either way.

A: Ah so for me, like, I don't wanna know what I did. I don't wanna know what I did for the whole year, or what I'm gonna do next year. Because as long as I'm still in their hands like I don't have actually, my own ability to think about my next year. I just think about my next year, I might be inside the fence, that's only way I can see. Yeah. And, you know, the weird thing this morning when I was um going to the hospital, so...

MG: Aziz explained that he'd been on the way to the hospital that morning, and suddenly remembered an incident where a detainee had a heart attack, playing soccer. Aziz thought it happened only a few months ago. But on the bus, a security guard told him he'd got it wrong.

A: And he say, like come on man, you got to be kidding man. I say why? He say 'it's not a three month ago', he say one year, that was like it's a how it's one year, and I say come on man, sorry, I can't remember thing now ... Like I said to him it's just like a three months ago for me, you know because like, accidents like that, every incident that happen you know for us we can just feel like it's happen yesterday or before yesterday. Why? Because we've got nothing else to fill in that gap between the, you know, between the period of a time.

MG: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

MG: Well, um ... You've spoken to me a lot this year. [laughs] That's one thing that's happened.

A: Well, do you think that, you know, like, I remember? I don't remember actually. I did speak but don't remember. If you ask me how, if you ask me how many times you speak to me this year, I say, like I can't remember how many times I did speak to you this year.

MG: Oh, it was a lot Aziz, you said a lot of stuff. [laughs]

A: Oh, well, I wish if I could remember what I did or say. I'll let you can keep remembering, you know, reminding me.

MG: Well, I've got it all on record and you're gonna listen to it back in the podcast project.

A: [laughs]

MG: That's what's happened now, you know? You've ... You might not remember, but you've created a this like archive of what's happened all throughout the year.

MG: That afternoon, Aziz and I spoke for over an hour on the phone. Five months had gone by since we'd met on Manus Island.

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You're listening to The Messenger. This podcast is about Abdul Aziz Muhamat, and his life inside the Australian-run immigration detention centre on Manus Island. My name is Michael Green.

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Soon after I got back from my visit to Manus Island, a Pakistani refugee named Kamil Hussein drowned at the waterfall near Lorengau. Just a week earlier, we'd been swimming right there.

A: I met with the Pakistani community leader and then we discussed the issue how we can help and to send the body back ... So, we are just trying to do a contributions of each person, like maybe 20 Kina or maybe more, it's just depend. And we wanna send money to his family, because he came from a very, very poor family.

To be honest Michael, the situations is really messed up down here you know, people are really just flat and that's the only word I can use for them. They're flat, depressed, tired of everythings and then like, they have got kind of anger in their face.

MG: A few weeks later, Behrouz Boochani interviewed a close friend of Kamil's, for Behind the Wire. The man said they'd both come from poor villages in Pakistan, and Kamil had been targeted there by religious extremists. He said Kamil had been a quiet person. That he had a wife and child, and his family waiting for him.

As the days and weeks went by, Aziz and I still sent each other voice messages, nearly every day. There always seemed to be something urgent that I needed to discuss with him right away, some crisis or flash of hope. Court dates about the closure of the centre were scheduled, and then delayed. The rules in detention seemed to change every other day. And rumours about the refugee deal with the US emerged – and were then confirmed. But despite all that, nothing changed. Aziz was still stuck.

I was learning that in detention, time moves differently. There are spikes of adrenaline, critical incidents that make you feel like time is running out. But when

you take a step back, you also see time running on a loop, sometimes so slowly that it may as well have stopped dead in the yard.

When Aziz looked back over past months or years, moments and events were often hard to place. Of course, that upset him – and it had been upsetting him from our very first conversation, when we started talking more than a year ago now.

On our call before Christmas, we talked again about all the things Aziz does to keep time moving.

A: Yeah, you know being busy for me is, like, part of a ... it's like a, you know, a meditations or, it's just like, anything, you know, kind of medication or ...

MG: Yeah.

A: ... pills that help me to, you know, to release the stress and the depressions and also like, step away from, you know, all the, you know, negative– negativity and trying to look forward no matter how ... Although the situation is really tough, but I don't wanna just like, you know, lay down there. And so I wanna create something for myself that can you know be like a substitute of the medication. You know what I mean?

MG: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

A: Yeah.

MG: You like to be busy.

A: Yeah, so, being busy is really good. Especially with the situation that we are in. So if you are not actually busy, you're not keeping yourself busy, there the time will come – no matter how strong you are – but their time will come when you are like even if they are not gonna break you down, but they will break you down because ... You know, you think ... You keep imagining something about your life, and you keep thinking about the situation that you in. And then you know, you look at your friends, they are in the same situation. And every day you wake up in the morning, you see the silver fence in front of you, or you see the same guards with the, you know, same uniforms in your face. And then, when you go back to your room you see the, you know, bedsheet that is put around your room, still white. You know, the quotes that you wrote on the wall, you know, the bed, the bunkbed ... You know, like, stuff like that is always like, you know... too much. Gonna be too much for you so you can't actually manage to survive it.

But if you keep yourself busy and you like – it's make you tired for all the day. Like, I keep walking, writing, talking, doing this, doing that. Like, very tired. So when I'm ... so,

when I go to the bed, I feel like I'm really exhausted and I just wanna sleep, I don't wanna care, I don't wanna think about anything. Throw my phone away, throw myself on the bed, bang.

Maybe I can get to sleep six hours, five hours. But if not, you're just gonna end up thinking in the bed, maybe for 24 hours? For all the night you're gonna keep thinking in the bed, rolling, you know, rolling around the bed, and then you can't sleep.

MG: Mm. Well, you've done a good job at keeping yourself busy. You've done a good job.

A: [laughs]

MG: Mm. Hey, I just wanted to tell you, so in my, I'm sitting in my office in my backyard and um the next door neighbours have, uh, this big um ... tree, which is a Jacaranda tree. And this time of year it has bright purple flowers ... And so it's this amazing old tree and it's covered in bright purple flowers. So I'm just looking – I'm looking at the moment, and this ... on this low branch of the tree just over my fence, there are these three owls all perched together, there's a like um mother and father and a new little baby owl. And they're all like huddled really...

A: Wow.

MG: ...they're huddled really close to each other on the branch and they're these biggest-

A: Wow!

MG: ... fur, like, feathery fat things, they're called, um, Tawny Frogmouths and there's like a native ...

A: Wow.

MG: ... native owl and they're just like sitting and looking at me and it's the most beautiful thing.

A: Wow. Wow.

MG: Yeah!

A: That's one of the most, you know, view that you have in your office there!

MG: Yeah! It's amazing. They're like um they're like a f—I guess, well, they are a family. They're like they're in this big tree but they're sitting really close to each other like, like, keeping each other warm or something and ... they're incredibly cute.

A: Maybe, maybe they are trying to encourage each other.

MG: Yeah.

A: [laughs]

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MG: As the years go by, there's a lot that Aziz is missing. I felt this acutely during our phone call before Christmas.

MG: Yeah and so, I'm going away, um, to the beach with Maddie to visit her parents. We're leaving tomorrow morning, and we'll be gone for about a week.

A: Yeah.

MG: And then back, um, just after New Year's.

A: Wow.

MG: But I'll still have my phone with me, yeah.

A: Great. So no problems, we're gonna keep in touch but, you know, you need to have a break as well, like you know, specially like at Christmastime and New Years' time you need to have a break.

MG: Yeah, I'm looking forward to going to the beach, it's gonna be good.

A: Yeah. Spend some times with Maddie.

MG: Yeah.

A: Yeah, that'll be really nice. Will be nice.

MG: How do y—what does it, how do you feel about it when you hear about like, other people's lives who are just ... who are free? Like, does it ... does it make you feel a bit ... bad? Or um, I dunno, is it strange to hear about ... yeah, people living their normal lives, I would you prefer not to hear or how do you feel about it?

A: Yeah, first, you know, like back then on 2013, when like, I used to sit with the security guard and they tell me, you know, they used to tell me some of their stories, like I feel very sad. Why am I just a half person, why these people they have got their freedom and like you know and they hang around, they do whatever they want and like just, why me? Why me, you know.

Just I feel very sad about it, and a bit nervous, but now, it's become normal. Because you know those guys they keep talking to me about what they did every three weeks, every three weeks they go home, they come back, they tell me their home stories, like oh, the first week I did this and second week I did this, so, you know and, you know, when something is just people keep repeating to you, you feel like you're, you know, sometimes I feel like I'm really not lucky.

I'm not really lucky. Ah, and I feel like I keep imagining you know like what if, what if I'm in their position, what would my life be? But I can't get out with the consequence. I just end up in a ... you know, dropping the imagination and just walk away.

MG: Yeah.

A: And ... I was talking to um, you know, to someone like, this morning, and ... you know, just a friend of mine. And you know what she said? Like, she said to me, you know, there are four in her, you know, in her parents and then like her father is like, you know, a pilot ... her two sisters are pilot as well and then her brother is a policeman and then she is a lawyer.

And like, um ... ah ... And then like, I was just I end up speechless you know, I didn't know what to say.

MG: You wanted to be a pilot, didn't you, Aziz? When you were a kid?

A: Yeah, like I end up— yeah, when I was kid I want to be a pilot but I end up like ... I got nothing to say to her. I say just, 'You are very lucky, you are very lucky,' and ... she say like, 'Why do you say that?' And I say like, 'You are very lucky because all you know all of your family, they, you know, they have got a great job. And they are like, you know, you guys like following the step of your, you know, of your father.' And she say like, 'Yeah, yeah,' and like I just end up a speechless like I don't know to what to say, like just, I was just I was just quiet maybe for maybe you know 10, 20 minutes and then like say okay, no more and then I just ... I forgot about it.

MG: Since our early conversations, I had wondered about whether Aziz'd had the opportunity for romantic love, given all that time he'd been searching for a safe place to live. I asked him once, but he didn't reply. Then, when I was with Aziz on Manus Island, I asked again.

MG: Behrouz the other day said that you should get a local girlfriend...

A: [Laughs]

MG: Yeah, like, I don't know, what age do you – in Sudan – would you normally get married? What's a normal age?

A: The normal age I think, the average I can say is 27, 25–27, that's the average for a man and then for a woman it's like 24–25, I think this is average ...

MG: and so, what's, so how do you feel about your ... situation, like, so you know you're here...

A: Well, um, my future is still really blind ... the thing I'm worried about is like, I need to have my degree that is first thing, if I've got a chance I've got to finish my study and then I will think about the marriage.

MG: And, so do you think, like do you think about it a lot? Like, that you would like to meet someone?

A: Well, I, I never thought about it actually, because, ah, my current situations wouldn't, like give me any chance to think about stuff like that ... because you know hard, it's really hard to think about it, even though, if you have, if you know someone, you know, in high school and you spent really good time with them and you kind of build trust between both of you and suddenly like you been in a place here for kind of four years and then you never, you still like kind of, you don't even have a chance to see them ...

And then if she's put you in her mind, like she wants to you know get married with you, probably she's going to get very upset because four years is a very long time for her, so she's just waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, so she's going to be devastated...

MG: Are you talking about someone in particular?

A: Ah, well, um...

MG: [laughs] I think you're talking about someone in particular.

A: [laughs] Well, I'm talking about ah, well, let me say yes, I'm talking about someone in particular ... because one of my friends actually, she's trying to be like my girlfriend, but I don't want to call her my girlfriend so I just want to say my friend. Well, in high school we been together for quite a long time, and then what happened she thought um, one day we gonna get married with her ... That's what she thought about and then even till the final day when I left Sudan and I just left a message for her that I'm

leaving. So, I don't know when I'm going to come back but ah, anyway we will keep in touch, that's all that I said on my message.

And then she thought that, oh, maybe Aziz is just going to come back and, you know, get married with me, that's what she thought about it. And like... she haven't even heard from me, because I'm the one who never called her, because my situation will not allow me to call her and even if I did I can't even lie to her.

I need to tell her the truth and I feel bit embarrassed and ashamed that if I call her and say like I'm in a detention centre until now and it's gonna be like a heart attack or something like that for her ... and the last news that I heard, which from one of my friends that, ah, he called me... I think, yeah before yesterday, he told me that now she got married and then that she's got a nice, beautiful, you know angel daughter you know.

MG: Oh, Aziz.

A: And, I— you know, I don't want to say to him, please send him my gratitude, because means, she's start to think, she's gonna go back to those memories. So, I just say, oh, anyway, fine um ...

MG: Aziz, this is heartbreaking.

A: Well, I'm get used to it. It's really heartbreaking, you know, but I get used to it now. So I'm just trying to forget it, that's why. I remember even the other time when you just asked me about it and it's on my mind but, ah, I'm kind of ignoring your question, you know, [laughs] and ah ...

MG: It's something that people don't really talk about so much, you know, like the absence of their loved ones, or yeah, or not being able to get on with their love life or have families and things.

A: Well, I actually heard about it a little bit ... And I heard that some people lost their loved ones ... they lost a part of their family like their mother or their father and then they were just, they got upset, and then they were trying to take their lives with their own hands. Which is something very, very disappointing. So, for that reason actually, I just want to say, hang on I just need to push these things back away, and I just don't want to think about it.

MG: Yeah, I can imagine that you guys would talk a lot about it, or maybe you don't, maybe you don't want to, but from the outside it's like, yeah, just this thing that we don't hear about. But, you know, it's just such a human thing, you know...

A: Well, yes, we are human beings like, we are human beings and then we actually create to love each other. Right?

MG: During that phone call before Christmas, I also asked Aziz what happens in detention on New Year's Eve. He said for the first three years, it was nothing. Then, the last year, they were allowed to borrow a stereo. About 50 guys gathered in Foxtrot compound.

A: ... and then we collected some USB with some music and then we just had fun like we danced—

MG: Yeah?

A: – you know, just dancing. We had enough for anything to share. But we just danced there, and like, we put like, you know ... the cultural music, like for Iranians and Sudanese and then Somali, and then like, we had a great time actually for maybe two hours ... And they stop, they stopped the music maybe around 11 o'clock. They went to the speaker they say only you guys allowed to use the speaker for two hours so after 11. It's not allowed.

MG: So you didn't even make it to New Years, you didn't even make it to midnight?

A: Ah no [laughs] No. Not even very close.

MG: Aziz was speaking to me from a hotel room in Port Moresby, rather than the detention centre on Manus. And while that was something different, he was basically still cooped up in a room.

The phone reception was better. It made our call possible. But it wasn't only the phone line. Talking just felt ... easy.

MG: Ok. Well, um hey it's really nice to talk to you, um.

A: Nice to talk to you too, man. I'll keep you in touch actually if there's anything, I'll let you know.

MG: Yeah, please do.

A: As soon as I hear from the doctor.

MG: Please do.

A: Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

MG: And to you too, Aziz, and to you too. It's been my—

A: Thanks.

MG: –yeah, it’s been real um pleasure to be able to get to know you this year and talk to you, so. Um, even if you don’t remember it, I remember it. [laughs] I’ll remind you about it.

A: [laughs] Thanks, man, thanks, man. That would be a really kind of you. [laughs]

MG: Ok. Alright, well I’ll, ah–

A: Yeah.

MG: –I’ll speak to you again soon.

A: Thanks. We will.

MG: Alright, thanks my friend.

A: Have a good afternoon.

MG: Yeah, you too.

A: Thanks.

MG: Bye.

A: Bye.

—

MG: Hi Aziz, it’s Michael here, it’s Christmas Day. Um I don’t have any phone reception at Maddie’s mum’s house so, I haven’t been seeing the news in the last couple of days and I just drove out to, um, get some phone reception and I heard some terrible news about Faysal Ahmed. I just looked at a link on the news, and it seemed to say that he died yesterday. Um, I’m really sorry to hear that and yeah, I just wanted to say that I’m thinking of you and ... I hope you’re getting some support from your friends and you can spend some time together, talking about it and getting support from each other.

A: Hey Michael, good morning. Thanks for your messaging and honestly I was really devastated and I was shocked and like, I feel even I don’t have any courage or even energy to send a message. But what I just wanna say is like, Merry Christmas, and thank you for, you know, thinking of me and, and I wish you have a great time with your family and Maddie family, especially on Christmas time.

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[Audio from SBS News, 25 December 2016]

Newsreader: There are calls for a royal commission into medical care in offshore detention centres after the death of a refugee. Faysal Ishak Ahmed collapsed on Manus Island but died in a Brisbane hospital yesterday.

[Malcolm Turnbull wishing happy Christmas to protesters]

Reporter: Another Manus Island detainee dead. The Prime Minister again forced to defend his government's policies on asylum seekers who arrived by boat.

Malcolm Turnbull: We've secured an agreement with the United States, to enable them to be resettled in the United States and of course we'll continue to work, they can't settle in Australia.

MG: Within a few days, Faysal's death had become a matter of politics. All the talk was of royal commissions and government policies. But Faysal, the man, was mostly glossed over. A footnote. For Aziz, though, Faysal was a friend, a member of the close-knit Sudanese community in the detention centre.

A: Let me tell you something then about Faysal and I'm sure that nobody know about it. Faysal, he was er, one of the guys that, one of the cool guys, compassionate, determined person and he's an open person to everyone. And Faysal always, um, although he suffering, you know, the pain and he was a sick but he is always, he's got a very, very big heart and open heart. And he is like, a very, very intelligent man. And he used to engage with each and every community around the er, you know, inside the detention centre and in each and every compounds ... And, also he likes reading and writing and ... he used to draw, you know, some kind of animals that we have back home and paint them and give it then to the guys as a gift.

So, he is such a nice person, but guess what happened? We had a great gift from Australia, which means this is our gift of Christmas and the reality is that every Christmas, every Christmas we used to have a gift from Australia, which is a dead body and I don't know how they did it or how they play it or how they plan it but ...

He's from north Darfur and I'm from west Darfur so there is a distance of a ... 500 km from his place to my place, and I met with him only on Manus, not even Christmas Island because he's not my boat mate. His number is BRFO63 and my boat number is QNK002.

You know, it's really such a painful to talk about it but what I don't have other choice so I have to tell the people the truth what happened to him.

[Audio from SBS News, 25 December 2016]

Reporter: The refugee known as Faysal was flown to Brisbane for urgent treatment on Friday. He died from injuries the Department of Immigration says he suffered in a fall and subsequent seizure.

MG: The official story is that Faysal died because of a series of sudden incidents. But Aziz sent through several long messages that painted a much more complicated picture of Faysal's health in the months before he died.

A: And normally Faysal ... he always wearing, you know, a mask which is he covering his mouth and nose 24/7 ... So I ask him at a time and why you wearing that, he say ... 'because of the dust that's why I'm wearing this and then the doctor told me that to wear this' and... he say like 'it's really scary and I feel like I, like I do have a, you know, a contagious disease that can affect other people.'

So six months Faysal looks totally different from the Faysal that he was. Faysal looks like, you know, he lost weight and he was too weak and he can't walk, you know, he can't walk normally... He stop exercising. Faysal, he stopped everything and he was like just by himself. He was just like by himself. So and ... we really, as a community, we did our best to support him but his, you know, his problem is not in our hand, it is out of our hand. So what, the only thing we did to him is, er, we start supporting him by writing some complaints and talking to his er, you know, case workers so they can help him out ...

Some of them, they try to help him out but I don't know they just end up, you know, like with nothing. So we chase it up, we chase it up, we chase it up and even we end up with nothing. So on Thursday of 15 of December I met with Faysal and ... I haven't seen him like this before ... I said to him sit down and just gave him a water and I ask him what's going on and he say, I went to the IHMS today, I saw the nurse and she say to me, hey Faysal, you are pretending to be sick. Faysal we did our best, you know, like we did our best and we can't see what's exactly you have so please, if you are not sick, don't come to us. And you don't, you don't look even you are sick so please stop pretending just go and stay there, don't come to us, if you write it a request again to us we will not reply to your request so don't come to us ... When he left he was very upset. So he came to me and he say Aziz, I need you to help me by writing a complaint.

When he passed the complaints around the community, everyone in the community know that, you know, Faysal is sick and he need our support so they start signing on it ... That was on Thursday. and then on Friday I left to Port Moresby but I was still in touch with his roommate and with him as well and, he's keeping me up with the updates about his health.

MG: After Aziz went to Port Moresby, Faysal was taken to a separate compound. Aziz kept checking in on him. And then, he heard about the fall.

A: I don't know what exactly happened to him, he was dizzy or, and he just like collapsed and he make a very, very loud noise inside the toilets and by the time when the guard, you know, came and found him, he was like, he broke the back of his head ... so on the last minute on Friday before even they put him on the plane I got a message from, you know, a reliable resources on the island that he say the Medivac is here and then with the, er, they're gonna take Faysal to Brisbane er Royal Hospital ... I feel like my heart is just, you know, pinching me and telling me like, and it tells me that there is something wrong with this guy.

MG: Finally, Aziz read a [statement on the Department of Immigration's website](#) saying that Faysal had died.

A: ... We were shocked and we don't know what to do exactly or what to say. So, the only things we did is we just holding each other ... so we just, you know, we cry and so what we do nothing else we start praying for him. And then from there we were looking for the family contact to tell them. And we thought like, what we gonna say to them? Because when the guy left the country he was seeking for asylum, he wasn't seeking for a death, and he was, and if he was seeking for a death he would have to stay there in Sudan and he get killed.

So we got the number and we just call them and first like, we don't want to pass the message directly but and then like I start, you know, telling them, you know, this is the way of life and this is the God way, so ... And I told them that I'm very sorry to give you this bad news but Faysal is a friend of mine and he is, er, we are here living together on Manus Island ... one of the Australian detention centre and they say yes, we know that you guys are there. And, so he passed away. And they say, what? And we say he passed away.

So the only person that I talked to him was his brother ... So he was like he scream on a phone and he start crying and he couldn't, you know, he couldn't talk so I was like holding on the line and I keep saying, hello, hello, hello, just to get him back talk but he couldn't so I just turn off the phone.

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[Audio from SBS News, 25 December 2016]

Reporter: It's put international health and medical services, which runs the clinic on Manus under the spotlight ... In a statement, IHMS said it could not respond to inquiries about Faysal's death because the matter is now before the Queensland coroner. It says it will participate fully, in a coronial inquest. But the anger on Manus is palpable. Overnight, unrest at the detention centre saw detainees take control of two compounds causing minor damages.

A: ... we say like Faysal is very, very lucky man because, you know, he was very lucky man because, now he is free and he has got his freedom so he is not gonna suffer anymore. He's not gonna be tortured anymore, either by Wilson Security or by IHMS or

by whoever working under that system. He is not gonna be humiliated. He is not gonna see any, you know, rough time. He is not gonna be called by his boat number so he is free now. They can call him by his name at anytime they wanna see him.

Freedom is not a free, and freedom is not a free, and freedom is not a free. You have to pay for it. And we pay, now we are paying for our freedoms. Now we are paying for our freedoms. And one day will comes, like ... none of us here will be existing in a detention centre, which means we will be free like Faysal.

And we will be free like Faysal here. Because what I see now, all of us we are on our way, on a queue, waiting for our time to come, each and every one of us has got his own turn. So, those four guys they got their turn, 'cause they were like, lucky and they were standing on a queue and then they get call, they went, so now it's our time. We are waiting, you know, in the queue. And I hope our turn will come sooner, than later because we can't bear it, we can't bear this. We just want this to be, to end up.

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[Audio from ABC TV New Year's Eve coverage, 31 December 2016]

Presenter: Moments away now we're going to be counting down to the new year. Goodbye 2016, good to see the back of you ... it's very close now ... we hope you've enjoyed the show as much as we have. Over here it's 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, *Happy New Year!*

[Sound of fireworks]

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MG: The new year brought no changes for Aziz. He stayed in Port Moresby, getting treatment on his knee. Some men began their interview process for resettlement in the US, but Aziz's name wasn't one of those called. Days and weeks passed, and memories came and went like clouds in the sky.

A few months ago, in April, I got this message.

A: Oh hey Michael, good afternoon. How are you my friend? I'm sorry that I haven't replied to you for the last couple of days. I just, I had a little bit of you know, rough time. Um. Yeah. I just called home yesterday and I've got a bad news ... so my ... grandma ... my grandma she passed away. Yeah, my grandma, she passed away yesterday, so I was just little bit you know, sad, and you know, and depressed so that's why like I just turn on and off my internet but I don't have actually mood to talk about it, so that's why.

MG: Oh Aziz. I'm so sorry to hear that. Oh. Yeah. Uh. Well, best wishes to you and your family, and I'm glad at least um, you got to speak to the rest of your family about it. I, um, yeah, maybe you can speak to them again soon. And um, yeah, it must be really hard to hear that kind of news after these years.

Yeah, and you know, it was really nice to hear you talk about your grandma and um, how she raised you and, and your relationship with her. Yeah. I'm thinking of you and um ... I hope you're okay.

MG: Over the next couple of weeks, I checked in to see how Aziz was taking it. He said he'd spoken to his parents, that he was doing ok. Aziz had told me that freedom is not free, that there is always a price. And he'd been paying. In missed opportunities, in family and friends lost, and in time itself.

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Next time, on The Messenger ...

A: You know, although the detention centre doesn't look nice, but I'm used to this place now because this place is become part of me, it's run on my blood, it's run on all away on my system. Even though it's not a good place, it's not a nice place, but I really prefer to be here rather than being away. So I kind of call it like, I feel now I am at home, you know.

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To find out more about The Messenger, and to subscribe, visit wheelercentre.com/themessenger. The Messenger is a co-production of Behind the Wire and the Wheeler Centre. It's produced by Michael Green, André Dao, Hannah Reich, Bec Fary, with Jon Tjhia and Sophie Black and the team at the Wheeler Centre. Theme music by Raya Slavin. Thanks to Ben Doherty and also to Claire McGregor and our team of volunteer transcribers.

Behind the Wire is a volunteer-run oral history project that helps people who've experienced immigration detention in Australia tell their stories. To find out more and to support their work, head to behindthewire.org.au.