



Adelaide Voices  
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## 353 lost lives

*The following speech was made by Dr U Ne Oo at the SIEV-X 2003 Commemoration Rally at Glenelg on 1<sup>st</sup> November.*

Two years ago, early on the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> October 2001, more than four hundred refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan set sail from the Indonesian port of Bandar Lampung to Australia's Christmas Island on a rickety-small wooden boat. The next day at noon, more than 12 hours out to sea, the boat's engine stalled.

The vessel, which has come to be known as the SIEV-X (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel Number 10) began to take water at 2pm and foundered at 3pm.

About 200 passengers went down with the vessel. After 20 hours drifting at sea, 44 of the remaining 200 passengers were finally rescued by an Indonesian fishing boat – too late for the other 150.

The story of SIEV-X highlights the refugees' plight and their un-failing faith in humanity. From the outset, the refugees on board SIEV-X knew the boat was overloaded and unseaworthy. Their journey to Christmas Island was dangerous and their future in Australia uncertain.

We must ask the question: why did these refugees take such a dangerous journey to Australia?

## remembered

The answer is that they had faith in the Australian peoples' kind-heartedness and humanity. For reasons which include the violence and repression in their home countries of Iraq and Afghanistan, and the hardships faced in Indonesia, these refugees had no alternative but to take that journey.

The refugees and their journey

on SIEV-X is not about a group of people gambling with their lives and venturing out for a new and better life. The story of SIEV-X is one of desperate people who have invested all their hope, faith and ultimately their lives, in Australian people's kind-heartedness and humanity.

Sadly, this time we have failed. Manipulated by power and driven by fear and greed, Australia has failed to show its humanity – not accidentally – but in a cold and calculated manner. Today, we la-



*Siev X - Rally; Speakers in the cage to highlight detentions of asylum-seekers.*



*Dr U Ne Oo addresses the SIEV-X rally Photos: Avante Media*

ment this failure of Australia and express our sadness for those who died in the SIEV-X tragedy.

The following are some stories, from the survivors of the SIEV-X, about their ordeal at sea.

Amal Hassan Basry, whose husband is in Australia on a temporary protection visa, was one of the passengers on SIEV-X. She said that at least three women gave birth as the boat was sinking. One of the mothers was just six months pregnant. The tragedy and distress induced the births prematurely.

Amal said (in her words) "I was waiting for my death, I saw everything clearly. I was like camera. I can still hear the shouting, the screaming. I see the people going

under, my son swimming towards me. Everything."

"I saw a dead woman in a life jacket, floating. I cannot swim, so I held onto her. It was cold and raining. I spoke to the dead woman. I said, forgive me, but you save me. I was drinking in water. I was waiting for my death".

At dawn, Amal saw no-one as she drifted on. Later that morning, she saw an Indonesian fishing boat. The Indonesian crew member jumped into the water to take her on board. Only then did Amal let

go of the dead woman's body which she had clung onto for about 20 hours.

Amal now lives in Melbourne, reunited with her husband.

Another survivor, Ahmad Hussein, lost nine of his family members, including his mother, in the SIEV-X sinking. Ahmad was very distressed and in tears as he recounted his story.

Ahmad said that he survived for 22 hours in the water. He saw the dead bodies of women and children with cuts from nails on the boat and with scars from where the fish were biting at them. In the end a boat came to rescue them. Ahmad said, "The ones who died have found comfort. As for us, our lives have been destroyed."

"The people on the top deck of the boat as it was rocking before capsizing, saw 2 large ships. They thought that they would be rescued. But none of the ships came to the rescue and when night came the two ships turned flood lights on and projected them on the people."

"On the second day the Indonesian fishing boats came. I asked them how they knew that we were here. They said that they had seen our luggage and this is why they came looking for survivors. They also told us that they never go this far to fish because of the sharks and whales in this area."

"We asked them about the ships that we saw the day before. They told us that they were Australian border protection ships (navy ships)."

Ahmad continues to ask questions about these Australian navy ships: "Has the Australian government given orders not to rescue us, not even the children?"

We don't know where Ahmed Hussein is resettled now. But he is not in Indonesia or in Australia.

There are many more testimonies of survivors of the SIEV-X. and more than one survivor has spoken of these mysterious ships that failed to rescue them.

The Australian Government initially claimed that the SIEV-X sank in Indonesian territorial waters. Two years later, it is revealed that SIEV-X sank in international waters and the Royal Australian Navy surveillance area. Today, we must not only remember about those lives lost at sea, but we must ask the questions that Ahmad had asked and actively seek justice for those who died at sea.

**Dr U Ne Oo**