



From the Tamil Refugee Council Press Office

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ASIO REFUGEE HUNGER STRIKERS REFUSE TO BUDGE

Melbourne, Tuesday – Hunger- striking refugees have refused requests by guards to abandon their protest in the grounds of the MITA detention centre in Melbourne.

“The guards have asked us to move inside, away from the outside area. We told them we are not moving, that we are determined to see this through until there is a resolution one way or the other,” one of the hunger-strikers said today.

“Our bodies are getting weaker but we still feel very strong in our hearts. The guards came and asked us to drink water. They have constantly been doing this. But all the boys told them to stop asking us that. They are trying to deter us, but we will not be put off by them.

“The guards have been doing all kinds of things to put us off. When we were preparing our banners, we discovered they had erected a secret camera to video what we are doing. They removed it after our protests at being watched like this.”

Twenty-seven refugees – 24 Tamils, two Burmese Rohingyas and one Kuwaiti -- indefinitely detained because of secret ASIO reports began the hunger strike yesterday at the MITA detention centre in Melbourne. Most have been imprisoned for between three and four years.

After the refugees were filmed speaking to a TV reporter across a cyclone wire fence yesterday, guards spread blankets across the fence to obscure the view of the protesters, who have erected protest banners and are camped in the middle of the outside lawns of the detention centre.

For a second night, they slept in the Melbourne cold, where the temperatures dropped below 10 degrees. One of the refugees said today: “It was cold again last night but we are able to endure it. We are determined and strong about this.

“We will continue our hunger strike and our outside protest until there is a resolution to our situation. If the Government won’t let us out, then we want them to kill us mercifully.

“We have been here for many years, even though we have been declared refugees by the Australian Government. We are innocent, law-abiding people but we have been kept in jail for years like common criminals.

“ASIO has made a secret report on us, a report that we can’t even see to challenge, and it means we are in jail for life.

“We cannot bear it any longer. We are not in detention. We are in a cemetery.”

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