

Abdul Aziz Muhamat – Biography

17 February 1992

Abdul Aziz Muhamat (Aziz) is a compelling and tireless advocate for refugee rights. He has been held in Australian immigration detention on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, since October 2013. He belongs to the Zaghawa ethnic group of Darfur, in north-western Sudan. In 2013, he left Sudan to seek asylum in another country. He flew to Indonesia and travelled onward by boat for Australia. His boat was intercepted by Australian authorities, who forcibly transferred him to the country's offshore immigration detention centre at the Lombrum naval base, on Manus Island. He was granted refugee status in early 2015, but remains on Manus Island, along with several hundred other men who were transferred there after arriving in Australian territory by boat and seeking asylum.

Aziz is one of the primary public voices among the men held on Manus Island and regularly speaks out on international news media. For two years, he sent over 4000 thousand voice messages to report on his experience in detention for the multi award-winning podcast, *The Messenger*.

Aziz has worked continually as an organiser among the detainees with several Australian and international human rights and refugee advocacy organisations, and also with lawyers preparing numerous court cases in both Papua New Guinea and Australia. He is a determined community leader among the Sudanese men and the detainees in general, both in their campaign for their freedom and in addressing immediate health and mental health crises. He has been deeply involved in various kinds of peaceful resistance against detention, including letter writing to politicians, a mass hunger strike (for which he and dozens of others were arrested and held in PNG police and prison cells for up to four weeks without charge in January 2015), and various periods of non-cooperation and peaceful and silent protest.

The detention centre fell into its worst crisis on 31 October 2017, when Australian authorities and contractors left Manus Island, having sought to close the site in the naval base and force the refugees and asylum seekers to move to three other detention facilities close to the main town on Manus Island. The men refused to leave. From the beginning of August, they held daily peaceful protests – demanding instead to be granted freedom in a third country. The men remained in the centre without provision of food, water, electricity or medical care for 24 days, until they were moved by force by PNG authorities. Aziz was one of the leaders of the protest movement, speaking at the daily protests and giving interviews to a range of international media outlets. During a 24-day standoff, Aziz also played the role of the welfare coordinator, overseeing the equitable distribution of smuggled food and medicine; facilitating doctors' consultations by phone for those who were ill; and liaising with donors and advocates in Australia who sent money to pay for necessities.

Aziz remains committed to achieving freedom for his fellow refugees and asylum seekers in Australian offshore detention.