

Behnam Satah: Witness to the murder of Reza Barati

Monday 30th of November 2015.

Behnam Satah has contacted me to say he wants to tell me the story that he feels people in Australia must know. We discuss the dangers of remembering this and how to try to stay as safe as possible and deal with the hurt and anxiety raised by speaking and remembering this time. He is determined to go ahead.

Behnam was Reza Barati's roommate and best friend. He witnessed the murder of Reza Barati at close range. Since witnessing the murder Behnam has been targeted by numbers involved in our black site on Manus Island.

Behnam, along with his friend Reza (not Reza Barati) who was also a witness to the murder, were severely tortured in Chauka soon after the murder. See article footnote #1.

Since this Behnam and Reza continued to be targeted by Wilson, ERT and other players. Eventually Reza returned to Iran. It is believed that things got so bad and Reza was offered a huge financial inducement to return which he eventually took.

- Janet Galbraith

Behnam Speaks:

[During the hunger strike of January 2015] I was 21 days in CIS jail and a day and a half in the police station jail.

I was the first person who was arrested and the last person who left the prison.

I didn't do anything wrong. I was just on hunger strike like everyone.

I was in the CIS jail with the 2 men who I saw murder my best friend, Reza [Barati]. There was only a 2 meter fence between us. A fence that a 5 year old boy can jump it.

Hunger Strike/Chauka/CIS

I was in Mike compound at the time of the hunger strike.

I was on hunger strike and I collapsed. They took me to IHMS. I was receiving drips. ERT boss came and spoke to Doctor. My drips were finishing and they said: 'Its finish, go and sit in that corner'.

I went [and sat in the corner] then a vehicle came and took me to Chauka.

I asked why are you doing this?

They said ***** Command 1 has ordered us.

I was the first person who went to Chauka. It was the place they tortured me a few months before that day¹.

I didn't want to see that place again. I had no power so I didn't do anything.

I was just walking around the 4x4 meter². It was changed. This time there was a camera. When I saw [the] camera I felt better. I thought that at least if they kill me the camera will record it.

I was there by myself and guards for about 2 days then they started bringing others.

There was just one good thing in Chauka, hot water for shower for 10 minutes. It was male staff shower as well.

No one [detained in our black site on Manus Island] has taken a hot shower in 28 months unless for people in Chauka. We don't have hot water in shower.

After 2 days they sent me with 3 others to Lorengau police station prison. They had cuffed all 4 of us. I couldn't believe they were doing this especially to me. I thought: 'Is it all because I am a witness'?

Then after a day and a half we went to CIS prison.

..... [breaks because feeling unwell]

Tuesday 01.12.2015

Janet it is important people know what crimes Australia did to me. I will try finish it today.

.....

Wednesday 02.12.2015

CIS/Hospital

We were about 60 people in there [CIS prison]. I didn't know I am in same prison with Joshua and Louie³.

Joshua [had been] my friend. He was working for recreation team on Salvation Army. He also was like a priest for christian asylum seekers. I was always his interpreter for Kurdish and Iranian [people in the centre]. Even we made a Persian/Pidgin (local language) together. We knew each other well and we were close friends.

They [Joshua and Louie] had all [of the] affidavits in jail with them. I think their lawyer provided them for them.

When he [Joshua] found out I am in jail next to them he told me: 'Come to fence. I want to talk to you!' We were in different cell. There was a fence between us. It was easy if they wanted to come to other side. I went to fence. I couldn't do anything else.

¹ [See the following link that details the torture that Behnam is referring to]
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/11/australia-again-justifies-torture-as-a-means-to-an-end-this-time-by-attacking-the-un>

²[Chauka is understood to measure 4m by 4m.]

³ The only 2 men to be charged with the murder of Reza Berati although it is said that up to 15, including 2 ex-pat Australian workers, were involved.

He started threatening me and he said you have to withdraw your affidavit. He said the sentence for murder in my country is top 3 years and murder is normal in PNG. He said 'I give you a chance of living if you withdraw your affidavit'.

Many times before jail I received threats from his relatives. They are still working in the centre. It wasn't just me it was other witnesses as well. I reported it to Transfield, Wilson, Red Cross, UN, IHMS. Everyone knew, they didn't do anything. Wilson tortured me and Reza [not Reza Barati, another Reza who was also eye witness to the murder of Reza Barati] in Chauka before and I reported it to ***** when we were released⁴. There was no investigation for that.

In jail I was interpreting for Iranian and Kurdish. I was going with them sometimes to Lorengau hospital for interpreting. One day ***** - Australian Supervisor - sent me alone with a guard to Lorengau Hospital for my ankle infection. I went inside and saw Joshua and Louie both in there. I sat in a corner then they both came to me. There was one Prison Guard with us inside. They said: 'Its very easy to kill you, you know. We can do it right now but we don't if you withdraw your affidavit'. They said: 'We can reach you whenever we want'. They said: 'You must do it'. I said, 'OK'!

I didn't have any other option, Janet. I saw how they murdered Reza. I saw how cold blood and brutal they kill. They said: 'You have to tell everyone we didn't kill Reza'.

Janet how could Australia send a witness and murderers at same time to a public place?

[Here Behnam is referring to conversations we have had previously where he has told me that he does not believe that it was a coincidence that the two accused of murdering Reza Berati were taken from the jail to the hospital as he was taken from the jail to the hospital and that they were at the hospital at the same time. The fact he was taken without other detainees was an anomaly. He was also aware that the guard with him seemed to be anxious prior to his realisation that Joshua and Louie were present]

Threats in Camp

Janet, I am in the middle of nowhere. I am from another country which is 25 thousand kilometres away from this island. I don't have anyone to protect me. Australia is exposing me to danger. I risked my life in ocean to live not to die. Its like I am still in that boat by myself and there is dangers of drowning in storm always.

I have gone crazy Janet.

It's very painful to witness your best friend's murder. It's hard to be exposed to all this.

Even we got threatened in other witnesses phone. I gave the phone to Wilson. We asked we want to talk to immigration. I sent a copy of those messages to ***** before we hand over the mobile. To this day still Australian Immigration did not come to speak about the phone.

Janet, they said 'Don't forget our deal' when I left CIS.

Janet its very bad to feel like someone might kill you always. It's very bad. I have to be alert all the times. I don't normally sleep at night because when someone walks I wake up. I sleep in the heat in that time. We have fans. I sweat while sleeping but who cares?

***** represents names redacted

- Behnam Satah with Janet Galbraith

⁴ see footnote 1