

Ali Humanyun fights for freedom

Friday 18 May 2007, by [EVANS Rachel](#) (Date first published: 13 May 2007).

Ali Humanyun, a Pakistani queer refugee seeking asylum in Australia, has been incarcerated inside the Villawood detention centre for two years and four months. He was refused a Protection (Class XA) Visa in May 2006 and rejected by the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT) in October. Humanyun was not granted legal aid for a Federal Magistrates Court appearance, and so the RRT's decision was upheld on February 19.

Sydney,

I visited Humanyun in Villawood while his boyfriend, former Villawood detainee Julio Lorenzo, was present. Holding hands under the table and writing each other love notes, they were clearly a loving homosexual couple.

Giles Short from the RRT, in rejecting Humanyun's application, denied Humanyun's bisexuality (he now identifies as homosexual) and denied the weight of Humanyun and Lorenzo's relationship. "Having regard to the fact that the only real relationship he claims to have had with a man began after he was detained, I do not accept the applicant is in fact bisexual in sexual orientation as he claims", Short wrote. "I consider that his relationship [with Lorenzo] is simply the product of the situation where only partners of the same-sex are available and says nothing of his sexual orientation."

Short failed to acknowledge that queers from more homophobic backgrounds find it more difficult to come out. A May 2005 United Nations IRIN News Services article pointed out that "With denial as their constant companion, gay Pakistanis live in constant fear of being 'outed' in this staunchly conservative society which is largely ignorant and intolerant of sexual minorities ... To be gay is to be 'deviant', an aberration against God's will which gay men in Pakistan go to great lengths to disguise."

Humanyun explained: "I had casual relationships with four women and an overseas male student from Georgia before I met my current lover Julio in Villawood Detention Centre. Our relationship is the only real relationship I have had. I find it much more fulfilling than a straight relationship. It is like being in love for the first time for both of us. While in Villawood together — we had our own room, but were broken up when there was an asbestos scare. I was shipped to Melbourne, while Julio was moved to a local prison cell. We pleaded to remain together, but management laughed at us."

"We have spoken of marriage and want to live like a married couple when I am free." Lorenzo was released three months ago and visits Ali regularly. "It is harder without Julio", said Humanyun. "On my own I suffer more homophobia from other detainees. I miss my boyfriend."

Denial of the homophobic persecution Humanyun would face in Pakistan has featured in all the rulings against his case, which have merely acknowledged that he would have to "be discreet" in pursuing homosexual relationships.

The right to explore and express your sexual identity is a fundamental human right and calling for queers to be in the closet — as a way of avoiding persecution — is dangerous. It also undermines the potential to publicly challenge bigoted ideas and discrimination.

Courageously, Humanyun told his Pakistani family of his sexuality, but faces persecution from them. “I was sick of being secretive about my life”, he said. “My father and brother have threatened to kill me. My brother wants to ‘reclaim the family’s honor’. I fear for my life, as it would be impossible for me to live independently of them.”

Humanyun’s case is like hundreds of others that the RRT has knocked back. Australia is a rich country that should welcome and assist people like Humanyun instead of extending their suffering.

Community Action Against Homophobia is holding an action on May 17, International Anti-Homophobia Day, to highlight the plight — and flight — of queers across the world. CAAH is also calling for a laptop or desktop computer to be donated to Humanyun as well as pro bono legal aid. Phone Ali on 0434 109 387 or Rachel 0403 798 420 for more information.

P.S.

* From: Comment & Analysis, Green Left Weekly issue #709 16 May 2007.

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