

Families' Statement on the News of the Death of Yusuf Zahab

إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

We belong to God, and we shall all eventually return to God

We are devastated to learn of the passing of our beloved Yusuf Zahab.

Yusuf grew up like any other Australian kid in South West Sydney – going to school, playing with his cousins, and enjoying sport on the weekends. He was a happy child who showed care and compassion to those around him.

Even in the final messages we received from Yusuf, he asked us to tell his mum that he loved and missed her.

He was 11 years old when he was taken into Syria.

At 14 years of age, he was separated from his mother and imprisoned in a men's jail because he was deemed to be reaching an inappropriate age for the women and children's camp.

Yusuf was the boy who pleaded for help during the fighting at Guweiran prison, in Hasaka city, in January 2022. In a recording that made it outside the jail, Yusuf begged for help from the Australian Government as he witnessed death and destruction around him.

The terror in his voice was palpable. He had suffered severe injuries and he knew he could die at any moment.

Today we are heartbroken and angry. We are heartbroken and angry because Yusuf didn't need to die.

The previous Australian Government knew about Yusuf's predicament for more than three years. We are unaware of any efforts to support, care or inquire about him. His family are still unlawfully detained in Syria and waiting to be repatriated.

The Kurdish authorities have asked for help from the Australian Government and the United States has offered its assistance.

Other Australian children will also die unless immediate action is taken.

There are two Australian boys nearing the age of 12 who are at risk of being separated from their mothers and being placed into men's jails. We have received reports that Camp Administration are unable to look after the numbers of people in the camp.

There are children who are severely malnourished, some with shrapnel wounds that need surgery, and others with severe illnesses.

We are pleading with the Albanese Government. Please repatriate the remaining Australian women and children. Please act before another life is lost.