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RabbleRouser

Committee for a Revolutionary Communist Party in Australia

RECONSTITUTE THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF AUSTRALIA ON THE BASIS OF MARXISM-LENINISM-MAOISM!

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Tragedy: Ms Hassan, above, in Bogor, and her husband, Mr Akram, below, in Melbourne. Below left: Mr al-Sobbi's drowned children
Pictures: Reuters, Brett Faulkner, Richard Cesar-Wright

PROTECT OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST,

24-10-01
Don Greenlees AUSTRALIAN.
□ Gunung Putri, West Java

SONDOS ISMAIL is slumped on the floor of a bedroom in the Palar guesthouse, 20km south of Jakarta. Her head, covered in a blue scarf, rests on a bare mattress. She has been crying most of the morning and her face is still streaked with tears.

But she is strangely composed as she describes, through an interpreter, her frantic efforts to save her daughters Eman, 8, Zhra, 6, and Fatimah, 5.

Like the other survivors, she spent 19 hours in the water before being rescued by a fishing vessel. She says of her rescue: "I am not happy for it. I hurt about my child. I feel now empty. I have lost everything."

Ismail's story of loss is only one of many recounted yesterday by the 44 survivors of a refugee boat that sank in the Sunda Strait, taking down 353 men, women and children — mainly Iraqis, but also Iranians, Afghans, Palestinians and Algerians — trying to reach what they believe is the promised land of Australia.

The stories of anguish and survival are repeated over and over to anyone who will listen, forming a mosaic of tragedy.

"If I die in the sea, don't leave me alone here," was the last appeal of a drowning five-year-old girl to her father. She drifted away in the wash and was not seen again.

When the overcrowded and leaking refugee boat listed sharply to one side and began to capsize at 3pm on Friday, Ismail, 26, was wearing one of the few life vests on board.



She clutched her children around her, hoping that by staying together they would all be kept afloat by the life vest.

Around her was utter confusion, people screaming and shouting, others being thrown into the turbulent sea. Suddenly the old wooden boat rolled violently and Ismail struck her forehead on a beam, leaving a scar.

She can't remember whether she was knocked unconscious or simply disoriented. The next thing she knew she was in the water, alone. Fuel was spilling into the sea, choking survivors and stinging their eyes.

Spinning her body quickly in all directions, Ismail realised she had been separated from her children. They along with 350 others, including Ismail's sister, were presumed drowned. "I didn't have any

feeling again after that," says Ismail in a quiet voice.

The goal of her journey was to be reunited with her husband, Achmed, in Sydney. When she telephoned him on Monday night to tell him his daughters were dead, she says he pleaded: "Not one left? What did you do? What did you do?"

If her husband has been processed in Australia, she could have applied to enter under family reunion, making the boat trip unnecessary.

She had been convinced to pay \$US1000 (\$1965) to a people-smuggler by other asylum-seekers who said the official avenues for placement through the UN High Commissioner for Refugees took too long. The people-smugglers in Indonesia are believed to have made a \$250,000 profit from their human cargo.

In another room of the guesthouse, 37-year-old Iraqi Fawziqasim has badly cut and scarred feet from when the boat overturned. On board were his wife, two sons and three daughters, aged between 1 and 10. Only one of the boys survived.

"I was jobless over there," he says of why he made such a perilous journey. And he is not deterred. "If the UN does not help us, we will try again."

Amal Hassan, 43, was relatively fortunate. She and her 19-year-old son are alive, although she lost five nieces and nephews. A former bank employee in Baghdad, she speaks with conviction, in strong, clear English.

She says she survived clinging on to a piece of wood and a dead woman. She says her will to survive drew on a desire to "tell someone what happened to us".



From apart: Ziba, 6, Eman, 8 and Fatimah, 5, who died with 350 other asylum seekers, and their grief-stricken father Ahmed, below left, and mother Soudos in *The Australian* yesterday.

Thrown into the water and initially trapped under the boat, she broke free, came to the surface and watched as it slipped under the waves with as many as 200 people still trapped in the hull.

"Beautiful girls, beautiful children, quickly, quickly die," she says.

"We know this boat is not good. But what's the choice? If we stay here what do we do? Our hope is to be received in Australia."

LET THE REFUGEES IN.
UNITE AND FIGHT IMPERIALISM.

NO MORE REGIMENTS FOR AFGHANISTAN.