

Statement from Behrouz Boochani, read at Deathscapes Sydney Launch

The Australian policy of exiling of exiling people to Manus Island and Nauru has essentially been established by a colonial mentality, it must be interpreted in relation to the colonial character of Australia's modern history. Australian authorities have used Manus Island and Nauru for holding innocent people for years and throughout this time I have talked to the Governor, MP, many other officials here on Manus who say that the Australian government representatives have never talked to them directly; that is, they have never involved them in the process at any time. They only engaged with the Prime Minister and other politicians in Port Moresby and refugees were then brought to Manus Island based only on their communication and agreements. They never talked to Manusians and never tried to engage with them in developing and implementing this policy. This shows clearly that the Australians do not respect local people and have no concern for their needs and thoughts. Believe me when I say that many people on Manus Island are very angry at the Australian government because of the way they have played with the reputation of the people on the island and made Manus and its local population look bad in the media. The Manusians are not satisfied with the policy and its consequences. In addition, when the Australians exiled refugees to Manus Island they told us that the locals are dangerous people and even used harmful terms to refer to them and their culture; we were told that these people are cannibals and are prepared to hurt us. Also, they told the Manusians that the refugees are dangerous criminals who could create trouble at any point in time. So they created unfounded fears between the refugees and the local community; they have used these fear tactics to keep refugees on Manus Island for years. In my film *Chauka*, *Please Tell Us the Time*, my articles and my book *No Friend but the Mountains* examine the colonial mentality shaping this policy – through my work I have tried to break the rules and regulations that allow for this situation to become a reality, I have tried to break the borders created to keep people apart. I think people are people and we should trust in humanity and rely on each other.

I would also like to raise a point about some of the Australian guards and other employees working on Manus and the crimes they have committed. Some have raped women on the island and also an Australian guard and a New Zealand guard were both involved in killing Reza Barati in 2014. They were never tried in a PNG court, the Australians do not even recognise the PNG justice system. This is another part of the colonial mentality. Australia does not respect for local people on Manus and no respect for PNG as a sovereign nation.