

# Lost for 42 days, another tragedy on the horizon

## EXCLUSIVE

Natalie O'Brien

THESE are the faces of some of the 97 other asylum seekers feared to have perished at sea while en route to Australia from Indonesia.

Frantic relatives of 14 of the missing people say they last had contact with them on November 13.

Relatives from Iraq and Iran who have contacted welfare groups in Australia said they last received a call from relatives saying they were in Jakarta and were due to leave by boat the next day with a group of about 97 people bound for Australia.

Although the journey from Indonesia by sea usually takes from two to four days, and a boat did arrive in Australia early this month, no further contact has been made.

The missing boat was due to arrive more than three weeks before the boat tragedy on Christmas Island on December 15 in which at least 48 asylum seekers died.

"We have been receiving many phone calls from family members that have lost contact with their beloved ones," said Jamal Daoud of the Social Justice Network.

"They told us that there were 97 persons on the boat. A few of the family members contacted Indonesian authorities to explore if their family members are in jail or detention, but the answer was always negative."

Mr Daoud said if they had already arrived in Australia it was unusual not to have heard from any of them. He said when asylum seekers were taken into detention they were given access to telephones to call their families to say they had arrived.

Refugee advocates who have been making inquiries in Indonesia say they have been told the missing boat had been organised by an Algerian people smuggler and was "lost".

Mr Daoud said there was a possibility the boat's engine had failed and they were shipwrecked on a remote island.

"We are thinking of sending someone to Indonesia to investigate," Mr Daoud said.

A spokesperson for Customs and Border Protection said it was unaware of claims of a missing boat.

"If Border Protection Command, which manages day-to-day mari-



Missing ... (clockwise from bottom left) Abdel Kadhem Al Imarah, Mohammed Mohammed, Ali Mohan, Hussein Eisa, Abbas Eisa, Nadia Darwish, Ali Jabbar Eisa, Hussein Al Maarej, Hmoud Suleiman, Fares Samer Katee, Hayder Al Imarah, Raed Al Imarah and Aymen Ali.  
(Above) A suspected asylum-seeker boat heading to Australia.

time surveillance and response operations, holds any safety concerns in relation to a vessel that has been detected, such information is passed to the Rescue Co-ordination Centre in the Australian Maritime Safety Authority to co-ordinate a response," a Customs spokesperson said. "No such detection was made and no rescue action was taken in the period which is the subject of the question."

Mr Daoud said the photos of the missing people were sent to the Department of Immigration and to

others in detention centres more than a week ago in an effort to determine if anyone had seen them.

The Department of Immigration told *The Sun-Herald* it could not comment on the case but did say it had an established policy for identifying people in detention when inquiries were made.

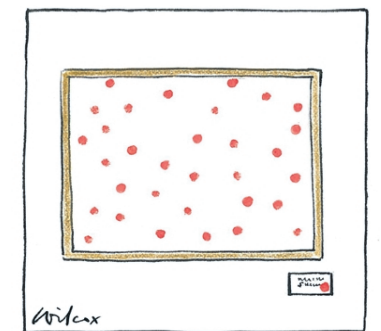
A spokesman said if a positive identification of a person in detention was made, the detainee was told someone was looking for them and given an opportunity to respond. Alternatively they could give the

department permission to contact the inquirer and tell them their status.

It is believed none of the missing people was on the boat tagged the SIEV 221, which crashed into the cliffs at Christmas Island almost two weeks ago.

Yesterday a boat carrying 57 asylum seekers was intercepted north-east of Ashmore Island. The passengers were expected to be transferred to Christmas Island.

Do you know more? Email [n.obrien@fairfaxmedia.com.au](mailto:n.obrien@fairfaxmedia.com.au)



## Galleries see red over sales

Andrew Taylor

THIS year has been "more desperate" for the Australian art market than the months after the onset of the global financial crisis, an art dealer says.

In a newsletter to clients, Michael Reid wrote that the past three years had been some of the most difficult since the Great Depression.

"For many in the art economy ... 2010 ... was even quieter and more desperate than those initial months of world economic shock."

Mr Reid's dire observations may explain the rumours sweeping Sydney's art scene that a prominent eastern suburbs gallery covered the opening night of an art show with red-dot sale stickers when, in reality, few paintings had sold.

"Your cutting-edge contemporary art market is only two or three people deep," Mr Reid said, "and if they disappear then the market is gone completely."

Auction results have also been patchy. After dismal interest in its Aboriginal art auction in July, Sotheby's Australia fared even worse last month, selling only \$625,620 worth of indigenous art, against pre-sale estimates of \$1.7 million to \$2.4 million.

Australian art sales are expected to reach \$105.8 million this year, says *Australian Art Sales Digest*, up on last year's total of \$88.1 million but below the \$114.7 million of 2008.

Galleries are loath to reveal sale results but insiders say Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery sold few works from Imants Tillers's show in March and Patricia Piccinini's exhibition last month. Nor were many buyers willing to part with \$30,000 for a photo from Bill Henson's exhibition in May; just 11 works from 31 had red dots when *The Sun-Herald* visited more than a week after it opened.

*The Sun-Herald* does not suggest that any of these galleries falsely claimed paintings were sold by placing red-dot sale stickers.

# Sale



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