

## MINA'S DIARY

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WOOMERA, August 22, 2000 Twenty three or twenty four have been released today. Um-Laila received her rejection letter. Poor woman, crying too much and she is very upset. Everyone argues with each other too much. Oh God! Give everyone patience. Today M's birthday and he was expecting release as his birthday gift, but we are all still here. Today they distributed cake and coffee. I want to make gloves for myself. In Zeenat's room I had an argument with my mum. She thought I was making fun of her.

WOOMERA, August 23, 2000 Some people got refusal letters today. The poor people, are they criminals? My father and Morteza (her older brother) received their blood test results today. Morteza's blood has some fault, I hope it won't be a big problem. We received a letter from our uncle today. Um-Majid was called by her lawyer and she was very scared and trembling. She asked my mum to pray for her, but nothing bad happened, it was only her signature they wanted.

WOOMERA, August 24, 2000 A few people have gone out today. In fact, this week only a few people have gone. We heard shouting in Arabic "God is Great!" They have started demonstrations and threw away fences. People were very angry and anxious. The DIMIA manager told them they can't release many people at once. Oh God, help everyone. People asked the DIMIA manager: Either your Government has to accept us or send us to another country. They also asked him: could you live here with your family? He didn't respond. But

they were promised that on Tuesday many would be released. People told him that we will continue demonstrations until Tuesday. Really, life in this desert with freezing weather is very difficult.

WOOMERA, August 24, 2000 There was to be a demonstration today, but they didn't have one. ACM promised a new food menu to improve the meals, but I think it is to trick them [into not demonstrating]. Today when I wanted to go to the toilet, there was a man in there brushing his teeth. I was scared. One person has decided to go back to Iran, but he was told by DIMIA that they can't send him back, as Iranian airports are not accepting anyone. Some people say Woomera will close in a few weeks.

WOOMERA, August 25, 2000 People are demonstrating. They arrested four people on Thursday, but two were released. People decided to riot on their behalf. They have thrown away fences, and decided to do the same with the big, barbed-wire fence. They were stopped with water cannons and people responded by throwing stones. Mum is very angry, asking why Morteza and my dad participated in the riots. They gave us lamb for lunch and they gave us a nice dinner. Oh God, just you can help us!

WOOMERA, August 27, 2000 Yesterday's demonstration was very aggressive, and ACM used tear gas to disperse the people. Some people are expecting to be released next week, everyone is very nervous and angry and says that they will continue demonstrating until their release. Farid is going to the RRT

(Refugee Review Tribunal) tomorrow. I will pray to him to be accepted. Oh God! Accept everyone! Zeenat and I are learning English. They have given us a notebook with some words, we are trying to learn.

WOOMERA, August 28, 2000 Mr Jawad came today and told us some demonstrators were shifted to the high security compound with the double fences, but they are still demonstrating. We got dressed and went out to see what was happening, the numbers of demonstrators were increasing and we went to the kitchen. They have burned the school and the library and they threw stones in response to tear gas and water canons. Some people didn't riot. Everyone was very scared.

WOOMERA, August 29, 2000 They have taken Mr Jawad this morning. Zeenat was very upset and cried too much. She asked the Iranian interpreter many times about Mr Jawad. I think they took him to some other place. No-one has been released today. The situation in the camp is very tense, everyone is upset about the arson as they know it is a crime in Australia. Oh God! Help us, help everyone!

### **Author's Note**

Mina and her parents spent two years at Villawood detention centre before returning to Iran. She was 14 when she wrote this diary. These extracts from "Mina's Diary" were first published in 2004 by Halstead Press in the book *Another Country* and edited by Rosie Scott (of Sydney PEN) and Thomas Keneally.