

Ju Pack is ill and wants to go home

Ju Pack entered the Netherlands in 1998, and remained here illegally until 2008. He earns money by working illegally in an Asian restaurant in Groningen. In early 2008, the rumour starts circulating in the Asian community that a one-off general amnesty will be declared for asylum seekers. As a result, in a very short span of time, hundreds of Asian foreign nationals report to the Application Centre in Ter Apel to apply for asylum.

For two years now, my colleagues and I have had various interviews with Ju Pack. In spite of the fact that we tell him he cannot stay in the Netherlands, he does not make any effort to leave. I have completed the application forms for a replacement travel document and sent them to the embassy, yet I have not received an answer.

I have another interview with Ju in March, unfortunately to no avail; he does not want to leave the Netherlands. Later that day, I hear through the grapevine that Ju has gone to see the general practitioner, complaining of pain. The GP does not trust the situation, and has him urgently admitted to a hospital. After a series of tests, the doctor arrives at the conclusion that Ju is seriously ill, and requires surgery immediately. He has a tumor in his head that has spread to several other locations.

After his surgery, Ju Pack is admitted to a nursing home. He cannot leave the Netherlands for the time being as he must first recover from the surgery. Late May, I try to contact him to see how he is doing. The nursing home staff tells me that he probably doesn't have much longer to live. I go to visit Ju. He tells me that he would really like to go home for the time he still has left.

I get in touch with my contact at the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). In spite of the fact that Ju says he would like to go home, he does not give me all the information I need for the IOM. Ju is actually very afraid that his son will find out that he is so ill. Since I don't have all of the information, the IOM cannot help me in the short term.

My contact at the IOM and I discuss if there is another route we should take to help Ju Pack to go home. I call a colleague and we discuss how we can help him.

We think that it would be best for Ju to first fly to Pyongyang, followed by a domestic flight to Kangglye. Ju has a copy of his family record book containing all information about his family so I do not need to arrange a replacement travel document.

I still hadn't received a response from the embassy regarding my first application .

Ju can fly to Kangglye via Pyongyang using only the family record book. My colleague books the flight. In order to avoid harming various positive developments in the relationship with the consulate, also with regard to other pending cases, I decide to apply for a replacement document anyway.

Since the flight has already been booked, I request an expedited processing of the application. Not long after that, an employee from the consulate contacts Ju by telephone. The employee asks him several questions to make sure that he is really ill.

In June, half an hour before Ju Pack is picked up to go to Schiphol, the flight is suddenly cancelled. When I investigate why, it appears the consulate doesn't want Ju to go home. I ring the consulate but can't get anyone on the phone. That same afternoon, the consul informs me that he had made an appointment with Ju for the following day. I ask Ju if he knew he had this appointment. Ju says that no one rang him, but that he doesn't mind going to The Hague the next day.

No sooner said than done, he leaves the next day to take the train to The Hague to speak with the consul.

The consul rang me a few days later to say that Ju Pack had told him that he was declared completely cancer-free, and the consul therefore sees no reason to allow Ju to travel back home.

The result of this is that Ju does not get a replacement travel document.

I am rather surprised by this announcement that Ju has recovered, and contact his doctor. The doctor denies that Ju Pack is cured. He emphasises again that Ju is terminally ill, and that he will die as a result of his illness. The doctor explains that the radiation therapy Ju received in June had shrunk the most significant part of the tumor, and thus extended Ju's life expectancy. This caused Ju to think that he was better. The doctor added that the cancer has spread to several different locations which cannot be treated. I go to see Ju and explain to him what the doctor told me. He calls the consul straight away to clear up the confusion and request permission to go home.

The consul doesn't believe Ju Pack however, and says that he cannot issue any replacement travel documents. Ju is now working hard to try to go home with the help of the IOM, and has given them all information they need.

At this time, Ju is still in the Netherlands, even though he would very much like to return home.