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### ***Waiting: wisdom from an asylum seeker in Hong Kong***

Kaze, 47, fled from Cameroon to Hong Kong to seek asylum in 2006. Here, where less than 1% of those who apply are granted refugee-status (the global rate is 67%), Kaze's fate is still being processed.

Asylum seekers in Hong Kong are not permitted to work nor volunteer; instead, they must rely on government subsidies and NGOs to survive. In one of the most expensive cities in the world, asylum seekers are given just 3000 HKD (385 USD) per month for housing, utilities, food and transportation.

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

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"My name is Kaze. I come from Cameroon. I've been here for more than 15 years. Been waiting. Been waiting, been waiting, been waiting, been waiting.

"Time doesn't wait for anyone. Time goes. If you like it or not, you cannot stop the time—you cannot stop the watch. When it's time, it's time. When it's not time, it's not time.

"When you wait, and you are expecting something, you know exactly for what you are waiting. When you don't know exactly for what you are waiting, or even if you know but you have no idea for how long, you may think that you are a free man. But, actually, there is not much difference between you and someone who is in jail.

"The consequences of my actions are simply that I have been an asylum seeker. The price that we pay it is what? They deny you your right for this, for that, for so many things.

"If you blame me for something, I do understand. But when people decide that you have no right to do anything at all—just sit down and wait... who does that? Even in prison, they give you something to do. Who does that?"

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"Freedom is a tricky word, but freedom is when you are able to work, to achieve, to grow, to decide. When you are not free, you cannot decide. You are not in control of anything. You are just like a screen, and people are holding a remote control, controlling you. So, in this case, you are dead. That is it."

*And you are unable to leave until now?*

"No. I have no travel document. I cannot leave, I cannot do anything.

"The planet is a global village actually. It is we human beings who start putting boundaries and pointing fingers—Hey! You are black. Hey! You are white. You are this, you are that—and start putting barriers and implementing it as a law.

"I always say to people that, most of the time, racism doesn't start at school; it starts at home. When a kid is born, they are born innocent. When you have that kind of education in your home, you're going to bring it out. And when you grow, we cannot blame your parents anymore because you have the freedom to choose. If you keep on doing the same things that your father or your mother taught you, it is not the blame of your parents anymore. It is your blame because you refuse to change.

“What you can do now, because you are young, it is not what you are going to do when you are 50. No, the energy, the vigour, the aggressivity—it will reduce. And if at that time they tell you: ‘Okay, now you are 50, now you are 60, you are free.’ How are you going to compensate all that time? You have no savings. Right now, people are saving knowing that when they will be powerless, they will use their savings to compensate for their energy. But you have no saving and after 17 years they tell you: ‘Go.’ At least, if you don’t want them, don’t make them wait.

“But if you oppress me just because you want to show me your power—we know you are strong! You don’t need to show me your muscle. I am just asking a favour. Please, can I breathe? Please, please, as a human being, please, I am dying, please, help me, please open the window I need the air, please, the time is going, please, time is not waiting for me.

“Time is equal for the entire planet. One day is 24 hours everywhere on this Earth. Why do you think that your life will be positive tomorrow? It is because you are able to manage your 24 hours in a positive way. If in 24 hours you manage positively, you may end up having a positive result. Because success is what? It is the total of good action, positive action, that you have been doing in the whole year. If you spend more than half of your time doing good, the chance for you to get a positive success will be large. But if you spend more than half doing nothing, doing negative things, how do you expect a good result at the end of your life?”

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*So what do you spend your time doing while you wait?*

“My passion is creativity. I like to create, I like to work around, I like to showcase, to say to people: hey this is what I found, this is what I create, this is what I do. I like to exchange my ideas with people. I like to interact with people. In my own way. Because I am thinking that I have only one life to live. I’m living right now, I’m now in the present. It is facing me—I am facing the present. It’s asking me questions; I need to answer. I need to sit down, need to wake up. That is the present that I know. The future, how it looks like, I don’t know. If I keep on only wishing for tomorrow, I may miss the chance to live today.

*Do you regret choosing to seek asylum in Hong Kong?*

Regret will always make you feel bad. For me, there is no time to regret. What’s past is past. Like I told you, let’s face the present now. Regretting does not help, it just hurts you. I can just write it down and make a book for the next generation to know what is going on and maybe it will help them, people are going to read and avoid all this, that’s all. Regretting only creates sorrow.

*Is there any place that you consider ‘home’ if that word still has any meaning to you?*

“That is a very good question. I don’t even know who I am. I consider myself that I belong to the world now. Home. Home for me it is where I am right now. I have my kids over here. This is home for me. Hong Kong is home for me, but actually I belong to the world. Yes, I come from Africa, but I do not belong only to Africa. I belong to the world.

Because what we do, it is not only for specific people; it is for all mankind. What we're supposed to do is to elevate all mankind. So, I consider myself as an African who is there to save the world. So I belong to the world—the entire world.”

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Kaze can hardly be described by a single label. Effortlessly expressive, his creativity extends beyond the spoken word. It shines in his drum beats (he brought 'drum therapy' to the Refugee Union in 2012 and started a fusion percussion band called Afritude), his community gatherings (he started One Love Community in 2014 which combines music, food and creative engagement) and his art. Kaze began exhibiting in 2015, and held a month-long solo exhibition at the Fringe Club in Central. In accordance with his belief that our purpose on Earth is to serve, create and elevate life, he has been waiting, but he has not been idle.