

and all my body feels pain but I want to get back to work.”

If any hero had come out of the tragedy, it was him, and the Australian government said his bravery would never be forgotten.

But the interview would not take place. Four years after the bombing, Syahromi was dead, his widow was missing, and no one seemed to know why.

BEHIND THE HEAVILY-FORTIFIED WALLS of the Australian Embassy, security guards Iswanto and Sudirman Talib had just finished their shifts when they sat down to talk.

The Australian Embassy agreed to let them be interviewed on the condition that an official from AusAID sat in on the conversation and recorded it.

Both men are part of what is known among the bombing victims as the “Kuningan 11”, a group of the most seriously injured survivors chosen to receive Australia’s support for ongoing medical treatment.

Iswanto’s injuries were so bad that rescuers ignored him, thinking he was dead. He lost an eye in the attack. Sudirman suffered major burns and is now an epileptic.

“It’s traumatic, especially when I am back working at the embassy,” Sudirman said. “But you have to move forward and don’t look at the past because I still have to pay the bills and I still have to pay for my family ... my wife is three months pregnant with our first child.”

At the time of the bombing, none of the embassy’s security staff was employed by Australia but brought in from an outside contracting firm. When contractors were changed in July last year, the seven injured guards were offered permanent positions at the embassy in recognition of the sacrifice they had made.

Syahromi would have been the eighth if he hadn’t died a few months before the changeover.

“The hospital didn’t give full details on how he died,” Iswanto said, when asked if he knew what had happened, “but according to what I hear, he was complaining about headaches and pain in the head from the injuries.”

IN THE MONTHS AFTER the bombing, Australian Embassy staff scrambled to get some kind of assistance program in place. Within weeks, John Howard’s initial \$1 million pledge had been boosted to \$3 million to pay for ongoing medical treatment for the most seriously injured victims. Six Indonesians were medically evacuated to Singapore and Australia, including a man named Mulyono, who lost his jaw in the bombing and spent the next year in Australia having his face reconstructed.

For longer-term rehabilitation, the Jakarta Bombing Victim Assistance Program was established and responsibility for this was passed by the Australian government to Aisiyiah, the women’s arm of Muhammadiyah, the second-biggest Muslim organisation in Indonesia. All queries, requests or pleas for help had to go through it.

But this formal relationship ended in February last year and it was at this time that nearly all of the victims and the families of the dead, except for the “Kuningan 11”, saw any assistance they had been receiving dry up.

The Australian Government is refusing to detail how much of the \$3 million was given to the families of the 10 official victims, except to say that \$2 million was for overseas medical treatment for the seriously injured and \$1 million went to a two-year victim assistance program, implemented by Aisiyiah, through the Red Cross.

In a statement to *West Weekend Magazine*, the embassy said: “The assistance given to victims was calculated using agreed criteria developed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Aisiyiah



SYAHROMI HAD DIED ANGRY AND CONFUSED. HE HAD BEEN IN AND OUT OF HOSPITAL BUT WAS ALWAYS TOLD THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH HIM DESPITE HIS PAIN. ON THE LAST VISIT, HE FELL INTO A COMA AND DIED.

based on the impact of the bombing on the victim’s family and means required to return the family income to pre-bombing levels. Due to privacy considerations, it would not be appropriate to release details of the support provided to the victims’ families.”

The embassy is understandably wary of perception, especially when it comes to putting a monetary value on a life. But if *West Weekend’s* investigations are any guide, the total compensation handed out to the families of each of the Jakarta bombing’s 10 official victims amounts to roughly \$3500.

IN THE SMALL LIVING ROOM of a house in one of Jakarta’s poorer suburbs, two portraits of Armansyah Putra watch over his family as they sit in a small circle on the floor. In one, a simple watercolour, the boy looks about 10 years old and is smiling meekly at the artist. The second is more serious, an enlargement of an expressionless passport photo taken just days after he turned 24 and shortly before he was killed when he rode his motorbike past the Australian Embassy at 10.30am on September 9, 2004, directly into the path of the suicide bomb and bore the full force of the blast.

He was the last of the victims to be identified and when his parents buried him a week later, the devoutly Muslim couple still did not know if the body parts they put into the ground were his.

His ID had been found in a wallet at the scene but police weren’t sure if unidentified body parts at the hospital were his. So his mother, Sumarni, gave a blood sample for DNA testing. Three days later, the results had not come back but the hospital called the family and told them to take the remains anyway. They prayed over the body at their home that afternoon before burying it at a funeral a few hours later.

Above Before and after. Even lying in a private hospital bed recovering from his bombing injuries, it’s clear to see that the then 35-year-old Indonesian security guard, Syahromi, and his wife Wartini are prosperous middle-class Jarkartans. After her husband’s death Wartini’s life has spiralled downwards. She now struggles for survival in Jakarta’s most notorious slum.