

October 03, 2021

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Documentary detailing Japan's immigration injustice awarded in Korea

**Public scrutiny continues to grow following the death of Wishma Sandamali in detention, a detainee's claim of choking by a guard, and the recent case of a detainee who suffered a broken arm in detention.**

The Asian Premier of *Ushiku*, a hard-hitting Japanese documentary about the long-term detention of refugees and asylum seekers to Japan, was held during the 13th DMZ International Documentary Film Festival in Goyang City and Paju City, Gyeonggi Province, Korea. At the closing ceremony held in Goyang City and online on September 16, *Ushiku* was awarded the Asian Perspective Award, the top prize in the Asian Competition.

### AN INJUSTICE OF OLYMPIC PROPORTIONS

With Japan out of the global spotlight following the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the country's unjust immigration system has again come into focus, with two incidents being reported in the past month of harm suffered by detainees at the hands of immigration officials.

Consisting of uncompromising interviews filmed with a hidden camera in an attempt to bypass the media blackout the government has imposed on its immigration centres, *Ushiku* takes viewers deep into the psychological and physical environment inhabited by foreign detainees in one of the largest immigration centres in Japan.

### A FESTIVAL PROMOTING "PEACE", "LIFE", and "COMMUNICATION"

The DMZ International Documentary Film Festival, one of the leading international documentary film festivals in Asia, focuses on programming documentaries promoting 'peace', 'life' and 'communication'. In their statement, the jurors commended the film, saying *Ushiku* "uses the limitations in filming as its cinematic medium, drawing the audience into reality and making it an issue for all. The film demonstrates the power of documentaries." This is the second major award for *Ushiku*, after it received the Audience Award for Best Documentary at its World Premier in the 2021 Nippon Connection Film Festival in Frankfurt, Germany.

## A MISSION FOR IMPACT

Coinciding with the film's screenings on the international film festival circuit, the first stages of an impact campaign have been launched on the film's website. The campaign has been designed to provide useful resources to the public on topics such as the history of immigration in Japan, Japanese immigration law, and links to learn more. Defined by the vision of an immigration system where all refugees are recognised through a just, timely, and transparent process, the goal of the campaign is to foster meaningful engagement with audiences, and seek to uplift marginalised voices, while dedicating its mission towards systemic change. The impact campaign is being headed by South African Impact Producer, Daniel Ndevu.

## BRINGING THE STORY HOME

The Japanese Premier of *Ushiku* was recently announced. Taking place in the renowned Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, the October 9 screening will be held online due to the pandemic. Programming it in the Japan Perspectives strand, the festival describes the film as a "work of watchdog journalism that sounds the alarm about state power run amok."

At a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, ahead of the World Premier in May, *Ushiku* Film Director, Thomas Ash, spoke to the courageousness of the participants in the film, stating that "they are taking a massive risk in speaking out." Appearing alongside Ash, were two of the film's participants, Mr. Deniz and Mr. Louis Christian, who both shared their experiences of being detained at the Ushiku immigration centre in north-east Japan. Louis Christian, speaking to the necessary reforms that would alleviate the injustice of long-term detentions, noted that "even if we change the law, but they [immigration authorities] don't change the way they see foreigners, it's not going to work, they're going to keep doing the same things."

## DOMESTIC SCREENING AMID FURTHER ABUSES COMING TO LIGHT

This domestic screening comes as the public's eyes are on Japan's immigration system following a spate of accusations of abuse and mistreatment in detention facilities. These include the death of 33-year-old Wishma Sandamali Rathnayake in an immigration detention facility in Nagoya, central Japan, on March 6<sup>th</sup> of this year. Wishma's death while in the custody of immigration authorities was the 17<sup>th</sup> over the past 14 years. Then on August 27, at the immigration facility in Ushiku, the same centre where the documentary was filmed, a detainee was choked by a security guard and was diagnosed with a sprained neck that required two weeks to heal. The security guard claimed to immigration officials he had put the detainee in a headlock as a "joke". Then on September 15, a case was filed by a former detainee at the Osaka Immigration Bureau relating to a 2017 incident during which he was handcuffed with his hands behind his back for 14 hours. Later, he was found to have a fractured arm.

## FILM FESTIVAL CIRCUIT SCREENINGS CONTINUE

*Ushiku* will next be seen in Rotterdam (Camera Japan Film Festival, Sept 22-26), Vienna (Japannual, October 6-10), Munich (Underdox, October 7-13), London (London East Asian FF, October 21-31) and across Japan (Yamagata International Film Festival, October 9). Details and additional screenings can be found on the *Ushiku* website ([www.UshikuFilm.com](http://www.UshikuFilm.com)).

## ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

Thomas Ash, best known for his work surrounding the Fukushima nuclear disaster and its health effects on children, which includes the feature documentary *A2-B-C (2013)*, has lived in Japan since 2000, and holds an MA in Film and Television Production from the University of Bristol (UK). *Ushiku* is Ash's sixth Japanese-language feature documentary.

ENDS

### **For more information, production stills or to request a copy for review, please contact:**

E-mail: [press@UshikuFilm.com](mailto:press@UshikuFilm.com)

### **Additional Information for Editors:**

Film Website: [www.UshikuFilm.com](http://www.UshikuFilm.com)  
Film Twitter Account: <https://twitter.com/ushikufilm>  
Film Twitter Handle: [@ushikufilm](https://twitter.com/ushikufilm)  
Film Instagram Account: <https://instagram.com/ushikufilm>  
Film Instagram Handle: [@ushikufilm](https://instagram.com/ushikufilm)  
Yamagata Int Doc FF <https://www.yidff.jp/>

### **Synopsis**

"Ushiku" takes viewers deep into the psychological and physical environment inhabited by foreign detainees in one of the largest immigration centres in Japan. On the eve of Japan's recent – and highly contentious – immigration reform efforts, the media blackout the government has imposed on its immigration centres is bypassed, bringing viewers into immediate contact with the detainees, many of whom are refugees seeking asylum. Detainees are held indefinitely and subject to violent deportation attempts by Japanese authorities against a background of the ensuing COVID-19 pandemic and with the spectacle of the Tokyo Olympics looming on the immediate horizon.

### **Logline:**

Seeking asylum in Japan, detainees at the infamous Ushiku immigration centre speak out in secretly recorded interviews.

### **Tagline:**

An injustice of Olympic proportion

### **Technical information:**

87 minutes, Japan  
Japanese/ English with Japanese/ English Subtitles

## **Thomas Ash Biography**

In his films, Thomas Ash broadly focuses on issues surrounding health and medicine, including two feature documentaries about children living in areas of Fukushima contaminated by the 2011 nuclear meltdown, 'In the Grey Zone' (2012) and 'A2-B-C' (2013). His recent work has focused on death and dying and includes '-1287' (2014) and 'Sending Off' (2019). Thomas served as Executive Producer of 'Boys for Sale' (2017, dir: Itako), a documentary about male sex workers in Tokyo.

## **Thomas Ash Filmography**

おみおくり～**Sending Off**～, 77 min/ Japan/ 2019  
売買ボーイズ (**Boys for Sale**), 76 min/ Japan (dir: Itako)/ 2017  
-1287, 70 min/ Japan/ 2014  
**A2-B-C**, 71 min/ Japan/ 2013  
グレー・ゾーンの中 (In the Grey Zone), 89 min/ Japan/ 2012  
**Jake, not finished yet**, 81 min/ Japan & UK/ 2010  
**the ballad of vicki and jake**, 84 min/ UK/ 2006

## **Editorial Appendix**

### OFFICIAL TRAILER<sup>1</sup>

(link below)

### FCCJ PRESS CONFERENCE<sup>2</sup>

"*Human Rights Abuses In Japan's Detention Centers*" at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021

(link below)

### THE DEATH OF WISHMA SANDAMALI RATHNAYAKE<sup>3</sup>

"*Her Death Shook Japan. It May Not Shift Refugee Rules.*" in The New York Times, By Hisako Ueno and Ben Dooley, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021

(link below)

### DETAINEE CHOKED BY SECURITY GUARD AT USHIKU<sup>4</sup>

"*Security guard injures detainee at immigration facility*" in Asahi, By Ryo Sasaki / Staff Writer, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021

(link below)

### DETAINEE LEFT WITH BROKEN ARM AFTER 14-HOUR CUFFING<sup>5</sup>

"*Japan immigration footage shows mistreatment of detained foreigner*" in Kyodo News, September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021

(link below)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://youtu.be/HadlfyQ-dH8>

<sup>2</sup> <https://youtu.be/kJIT5Hkdb8w>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/10/world/asia/japan-immigration-refugee-wishma-rathnavake.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/14429565>

<sup>5</sup> <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/09/d1c38981c9a5-japan-immigration-footage-shows-mistreatment-of-detained-foreigner.html>

UNITED NATIONS CONDEMNATION<sup>6</sup>

*“Japan’s immigration policy under scrutiny: United Nations levels criticism at Japan,”*

November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020

(link below)

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/backstories/1394/>