

# **VOICES from DETENTION II**

**testimonies from immigration detainees  
in the United Kingdom and Australia  
in their own words**



*Donations welcome*

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**Barbed Wire Britain**

### **Acknowledgements**

**Above all we would like to thank the detainees and ex-detainees who have been prepared to tell us their stories in the interest of making things better for the people who come after them. Funding for the pamphlets has come from Barbed Wire Britain and the Edward Vinson Trust. Thanks to Bill MacKeith for editorial support. Front cover photo: Migrant Media.**

## **Escape?**

Arrived

Immigration

Interrogation

Detention: detained, imprisoned

Group 4: abuse, threat, discrimination

Case: adjudicator, hearing, appeal dismissed

Meanwhile: abuse repeated, threats

Fed up: protests, demonstrate

Arrested, interrogated, charged

Court, magistrate, solicitors

Remanded, suppressed, but supported

Court, adjourned, Crown, barristers, court case

And still

They continue to remind me of

Horrors faced back home

# VOICES from DETENTION II

**A collection of testimonies from immigration detainees  
in the United Kingdom and Australia  
in their own words**

This is a collection of accounts by detainees in UK and Australian immigration detention centres. These are people for whom the unthinkable has happened. They have been imprisoned without charge, without conviction, without time limit. They have been imprisoned by governments which boast of their democratic institutions. The accounts in this pamphlet are in the detainees' own words as far as possible. The identity of the individual detainees has been withheld when that has been requested. The accounts span the last nine years and are largely in date order.

This second edition of *Voices From Detention* has been put together by a small group including ex-detainees. It is published to coincide with a month of actions calling for an end to immigration detention in Australia, the UK and other countries. This follows days of action on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2004 and 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2005 across Europe, in some 50 locations, to protest at detention and call for the right of migrants to freedom of movement.

If you are able to add another voice to these accounts, email [lizperetz@aol.com](mailto:lizperetz@aol.com). The collection will continue to grow on the website for Barbed Wire Britain [www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk](http://www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk) and to be printed regularly in hard copy until the voices can no longer be ignored and the practice of detention is ended.

*The editorial team included Jo Garcia, Edward-Kennedy Nasho and Liz Peretz.*

*April 2006*

## INTRODUCTION

The idea for this collaboration arose from the growing realisation among Australians and British people that their two countries share much when it comes to immigration detention. For a start, it is private companies – some of them the same – that are working, hand in hand with the governments, to increase in the numbers of people detained under immigration law. Many of the people who come to seek political asylum come from the same parts of the world – from South Asia to Central Asia, for example. Finally, the British and Australian governments conduct probably the most draconian and unjust regimes of immigration detention in their respective hemispheres of the world, leading the way on numbers detained, duration of detention and lack of judicial oversight.

Immigration detainees can be asylum seekers who have arrived legally and whose claim is under consideration. They may be people who have not arrived legally or who have overstayed their visas. (In the UK many of these are white Australians and South Africans, but they are not detained.) Some are rejected asylum seekers of whom some have received a deportation order while others have not. A few people have served a prison sentence and face the double punishment of being deported. There are overlaps between these categories. All detainees are held on the orders of an immigration officer.

Immigration detainees have the right to apply for bail but this can be very difficult to get in practice. Many have no contacts in the UK and little chance of finding someone to stand surety. Access to good legal advice is difficult – especially since legal aid has been cut – but is imperative if a person is to be recognised as a refugee. If you want to know more about this labyrinthine subject – the half world of ‘immigration courts’ – contact Bail for Immigration Detainees (see back of pamphlet).

Some people have spent years in detention, and most spend months there. The helplessness, uncertainty and fear of deportation are extremely stressful, as the accounts in this pamphlet make clear. Some detainees have already been imprisoned, even tortured, in their home country. Mental health problems are common and health care in detention is often poor. It can be difficult for friends or family to visit because of distance or cost, so visitors from local support groups can be very important.

Despite these difficulties, detainees constantly protest at their detention and the conditions, through individual complaints to authorities in the detention centres and to politicians, through mass complaints and demands – examples of which are published here – and through actions including hunger strikes and revolts.

Immigration detainees are the tip of the iceberg in terms of need. Many of those not detained have the same problems of fear, isolation and stress and are often limited in their ability to move around and communicate. In the UK, the government is forcing refused asylum seekers into destitution if they refuse to co-operate in their removal from the country by removing all benefits, and even threatens to remove children from parents. Asylum applicants are not allowed to work legally. Welfare

benefits are fixed at two-thirds of the what is deemed to be the bare minimum to live on.

Since *Voices From Detention* was first printed in 2002 little has improved and much has got worse.

In the UK, what the government calls the 'detention estate' – think Campsfield 'House' and Oakington 'reception centre' – comprised a total of 2,663 places in January 2006. That includes 320 for members of families with children. (A considerable further number of immigration detainees – the government won't say how many – are in prisons.) The January 2006 total was more than the 2002 figure of around 2,000 places, but still some way off the government's target of 4,000 places. Furthermore, the trumpeted 'immigration policy centrepiece' of at least four 750-place open-prison style 'accommodation centres' has been abandoned following widespread opposition and a decrease in the numbers of people able to reach the UK to seek political asylum.

The 10 detention centres in the UK are (male detainees only unless stated): Campsfield, Oxford 198 places, Dover 314, Dungavel, near Glasgow Prestwick airport 190 (male, female and family), Hamondsworth 501 and Colnbrook 263 near London Heathrow airport, Haslar, Portsmouth 160, Lindholme, South Yorkshire 112, Oakington, Cambridge 265 (male and female), Tinsley, Gatwick airport 137 (male, female and family), Yarl's Wood, Bedford 405 (female and family) (total 2,545). There are also small detention centres inside ports and airports at Dover, Harwich, Heathrow, Manchester and elsewhere (including Coquelles and Calais across the Channel in France). The above figures accompanied a government announcement in March 2006 that a new detention centre would open at Gatwick in 2008 with about 420 places, following the closure in late 2006 of Oakington. (It is not unusual for the government figures – total 2,663 in January, 2,545 in March – not to match.) Dover, Haslar and Lindholme are run by the prison service, the others by private companies.

Elsewhere in Europe detention has been stepped up, for example in Italy and Greece. In Italy in France the maximum length of detention has been increased, from 12 to 30 and from 30 to 60 days respectively, in the face of the continued failure to introduce a time limit in the UK. The European Union is about to discuss a proposed directive that lays down a standard 60-day maximum detention period. EU governments are collaborating with governments to the east and in North Africa to build detention centres, deport people into the desert, train border guards and introduce technology in the vain effort to stop ('manage') migration.

Back in the UK, the government has re-named detention centres (which we might call migrant and refugee prisons or concentration camps). Now they are 'removal centres' (six of them) or 'removal prisons' (three); in fact many of those detained are not subject to 'removal' (deportation), but still await a final decision on their application for asylum. The average length of stay is less than it was and there is vastly increased movement of detainees from one place of imprisonment to another. This is both to disrupt collective organisation by detainees and part of the 'fast track' procedure to deport people from 'safe countries'. (Again, it is private companies that profit from this traffic.) The Home Office reported in October 2005 that 99.6% of

asylum applicants in detention in Harmondsworth had been refused; at Yarl's Wood 93 out of 94 people applying for asylum who were subjected to this 'fast-track' system were rejected.

At Yarl's Wood ('Europe's largest detention centre' at the time) a fire destroyed half the brand new centre in February 2002. A subsequent show trial failed to convict any detainee for arson; the judge condemned Group 4 that ran it as incompetent. At Harmondsworth a revolt following a suicide in July 2004 closed the centre for a time. The Colnbrook centre – likewise next to London's Heathrow airport – with over 500 places is currently the UK's largest. Beatings of people being deported have been well documented (Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, *Harm On Removal: Excessive Force Against Failed Asylum Seekers*, October 2004). Television programmes have exposed this and also the racism of detention guards. A recent overview of detention of asylum seekers was Amnesty's *Seeking Asylum Is Not a Crime: Detention of People Who Have Sought Asylum* (2005).

In August 2004 Asylum Aid and Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) published *They Took Me Away: Women's Experience of Immigration Detention in the UK*, focusing on violent treatment during deportations, length of detention, and failure to meet specific needs of women and children; the report is available via their websites. Children continue to be imprisoned at Dungavel, Yarl's Wood and Tinsley.

The year 2000 saw the first suicide in ten years by an asylum seeker detained in the UK. Since then seven more young men have killed themselves while in the care of UK detention centres. At least four others have killed themselves in prisons, and dozens more men and women in the community. Some of the reasons for this tragic development are outlined above – injustice, racism, neglect, violence, uncertainty. (More information available on the website of the Institute of Race Relations in London.) The devastating effect of detention upon the mental health of detainees was described in an editorial article in the *British Medical Journal*, 'Detention of Refugees', by Mina Fazel and Derrick Silove (332:251-252, 4th February).

The UK government figures show that in the ten months to January 31st 2006, 185 people in detention attempted self-harm, requiring medical treatment, and 1,467 were considered to be a danger to themselves and put on self-harm watch. Non-governmental organisations working with detainees believe the figures to be under counted.

There is an increase in publications intended directly to aid detainees, such as, in the UK:

*Preparing Applications for Release and Representing yourself in Bail Applications*, notebooks on bail 1 and 2, Bail for Immigration Detainees, 2004,

*A Self-help Guide Against Detention and Deportation*, Legal Action for Women, 2005,

*Know Your Medical Rights: An Advice Leaflet for People in UK Immigration and Detention Removal Centres*, Medical Justice Network, 2006, and

*Guide: How to Set Up a Public Anti Deportation Campaign*, National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns, 2004.

It would be wrong not to stress the importance of private business in driving the growth of the construction and running of detentions centres. (The same commercial interests drive developments in prisons, transport of prisoners/detainees, and other 'security' operations.) The same companies operate in different countries, from the USA to the UK and (less) elsewhere in Europe, and to Australia. Prominent among these are GSL (Global Solutions Limited, once the detention arm of Copenhagen-based Group 4 Falck), now owned by investment companies Engelfield Capital and Electra Partners Europe in London; Boca Raton, Florida-based GEO (formerly Wackenhut); Serco (includes Premier Detention Services, PDS); and Belgian firm Sodexho, which owns UK Detention Services (UKDS). Ownership and names often change in this field, for reasons which may be guessed at. Interesting on this is Christine Bacon, *The Evolution of Immigration Detention on the UK: The Involvement of Private Prison Companies*, Oxford Refugee Studies Centre working paper 27, 2005.

Meanwhile, in Australia on 15th June 2005, five human rights organisations launched a complaint in the United Kingdom and Australia against GSL 'for complicity in serious human rights violations in Australian immigration detention centres'. The complaint – by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Rights and Accountability in Development (RAID), the Human Rights Council of Australia (HRCA), Children Out of Detention (ChilOut) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence – was taken to a meeting in Paris of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

*April 2006*



## UNITED KINGDOM

*The first two pieces describe the recent experience of detention by two women from Zimbabwe.*

### **WHAT I WENT THROUGH IN THE SEVEN MONTHS I SPENT IN YARL'S WOOD AND COLNBROOK**

I came to England for protection, but the torture and persecution I fled from in Zimbabwe I experienced it in England as it is an offence to claim asylum. We came to seek protection not money. The uncertainty and fear of deportation are extremely stressful. In Yarl's Wood life was not easy for me. It was survival of the fittest for the seven months I spent there. You are searched like nobody's business. You are called by room numbers or figures. It is called a detention centre but, frankly speaking, looking at the security network will show you that it is the same as Belmarsh Prison. You ask yourself what crime I've committed to be locked up in such a place. From reception to the wing there are thirteen doors, always locked.

The sound of doors slamming and the constant keys echoing around the wing; footsteps up and down the corridor keep you awake thinking they are coming for you, because you are moved without notice. Life without freedom is a high price to pay. Being kept without charge, not knowing how long the sentence is. It's a question with no answer for you don't know what they are planning to do to you. Every day you live in fear, not knowing how long you can survive it. As a detainee have I not got the right to express my view? In Yarl's Wood you are put in isolation and barred from attending meetings or you can be moved to another centre as you are seen as a threat to other detainees.

The health facilities were very poor. If you are lucky they will give you paracetamol, otherwise they will think you want attention or if you had a removal they will think you want them to cancel it so they will tell you to drink a lot of water. Only when you are at the point of death will they do something. The rooms were cleaned once a week and they were not properly cleaned. You will have to ask for the cleaning stuff so you can clean it on your own. We realised that the cleaners were going through our stuff instead of cleaning. Food standards were very poor. You would get stale food, being served rice and pie. Cutlery not being washed properly; we volunteered to help by washing the dishes which they refused – told us it was not a hotel. We were wasting the taxpayers' money.

If someone called they would be told you are on the phone with someone else when you were not. In the visitors' hall you are told how to sit. They will be monitoring you; this was ruining a lot of people's relationships. Some people were asking for privacy but were refused. Visitors were a very important issue. When I had a visitor, I had some confidence that things are going to be OK. When locked up some will tend to lose family and friends because we will be a burden to them. Or when you are called they are told you are not picking up your pager which ruins people's relationships and when things like this happen some commit suicide or they end up going back to their countries without fighting for their cases because they don't have anyone to turn to.

There is no privacy. Male officers come and enter your room without knocking, go through your underwear during room searches. There is no confidentiality on detainees' cases and health issues. Detainees who are seen as a threat are monitored. Not that they are on suicide watch but only expressing their points of view. No one listens to you, as you have no say. Being on hunger strike was the last option I had. I had tried everything and not succeeded. It was a matter of life or death; it was better to die of your own will than to be sent back to the Mugabe regime.

In Colnbrook I was locked up in a proper cell. If you want to take your shower you are scared because someone will be watching. There are cameras in your room. You don't know if there are perverts using the cameras for their own use. If you risk it and take your shower the room will flood and when you press the call button no one attends to you at all. You are always locked up, you can't go anywhere, it's difficult to receive and make calls because you have to wait in a queue. The stress of being locked up, having cameras everywhere and not being able to make and receive calls will show you that there is no difference to the Mugabe regime. In my country I was raped and tortured, now I'm being burned front and back.

Asylum seekers are mixed with criminals in the so called detention centres. Who will know the difference? Detainees are not treated the same; the Afro-Caribbeans are respected – the officers are scared of them. When being moved you are put in handcuffs, placed in cell vans, being filmed, searched everywhere like a terrorist/ murderer. When you are in a majority, yours is the test of tolerance but beware when you are in a minority, yours will be a test of courage. It was on 16th December 2004 when the true implications of wisdom came to my realisation, when I was robbed of my life. Got released from prison after seven months, told to report every month in return for staying away from prison. Every time I go for reporting I'm scared to death – maybe history will repeat itself. Who knows what is going to happen next?

*Patricia Mukandara*

## **ABOUT MYSELF**

I am a lady aged 25. I came from Zimbabwe in 2002 to seek asylum from being persecuted. Before I came to the UK I enjoyed my youth – by this I mean I was working and choosing different kinds of jobs because of my qualifications and I was a student at the University of Zimbabwe doing an arts degree which I did not finish because of being involved in political issues. I faced physical torture; I was beaten up on several occasions which led me to flee from my country of birth.

I arrived here in the United Kingdom and I sought asylum on the day I arrived. My passport and membership card of the opposition were taken from me. I went through the fingerprint and photo processes. After that I met with my only family I have between me and death. On the third day of my entry I received an envelope from the Home Office stating they had given me an original document of ID so I have to send it back to them and they gave me the one I was supposed to get. The ID was a paper of that time. The lawyers I had did what they did but did not help me

with the relevant kind of help I could have received. When I visited their offices all they could say to me was they will call me, which wasn't done as frequently as they promised. I went to court once and that was it. Little did I know that I was refused asylum because the solicitors did not inform me. They only wrote to me and said they could no longer do my case because they were moving offices and that was sometime in late 2003 or early 2004. I did not know what to do and I waited to hear from the Home Office. That was when I thought of going to college and doing something with my life which could benefit me. On the day I enrolled, the college phoned the Home Office to enquire if I was allowed to start college and they were told to go ahead and so I was enrolled.

Then on the 16th of December 2004 I was detained. I was told that I was a failed asylum seeker and was facing deportation. I was taken to police cells which was my first time ever to be arrested and put in police cells. It was a traumatic event of my life. I stayed there for three days and was not allowed to have a shower unaccompanied by a female police officer. If there was no female police officer then no bath. I slept on a hard mattress with one blanket and on the walls were written horrible things. Other prisoners were screaming the whole night. But to my surprise those who were caught drinking alcohol and fighting were released after they were sober, and as for me I suffered silently, for the police said they knew nothing but were only waiting for the Home Office to give them orders. That was a horrible experience – being locked up for being an asylum seeker fleeing persecution from our country. I thought I was to be released from there; little did I know that there was Part 2 coming.

From the police cells to the detention centre of Yarl's Wood in Bedford. I shall never forget how people are treated at that centre. Life wasn't easy there. When I was taken there together with other ladies I also had a 'I will be out of here soon' attitude to comfort myself with every horrible event which occurred. There was only one wing called Avocet at that time. I shared a room, toilet and shower with another inmate. A count was done four times a day: in the morning – whilst we were still sleeping and doors were banged as the 'Don't Care Officers' (DCOs) pleased; in the afternoon at dinner and at 11.00pm. The food served is what immigration said to be served. You cannot have more but you can have less. Mostly we ate what we did not like for the sake of the stomach. Group 4 staff would tell us, if we wanted to have either more food or even when we asked for washing powder, to go back to our countries or we should accept what we have because that was why we came to their country. And that we were wasting tax-payers' money. Their health care was/is just there for the sake of the name because we did not get the right treatments and were treated like animals. If I say animals that would make it better because animals are treated better in this country. Most of the time we were told to drink lots of water to cure stomach ache, throat or any kind of pain. If you go back that is when you'll be given paracetamol tablets and mostly we were told that we are attention seekers just going to the health care so that we can be allowed to stay in their country. So the best solution there was to sleep in our rooms rather than to be told off; and yet you felt the pain.

If you try to complain then Immigration would say that it's Group 4's fault and vice versa. Even when we wrote the complaint forms they were opened before they reached where they were supposed to go. Then we were threatened by *strikes*.

These are written warnings that take you from the Enhanced Level to the Standard one – so you were not allowed to buy some things from the shop or you will not be able to borrow video tapes and won't be paid the 71p a day. So even if you pass a complaint of dissatisfaction you will be told that if you keep bothering them (Group 4) you will be given three strikes at once. If you keep on complaining you were taken to the cells. We had no freedom of expression. Yarl's Wood is described as a detention centre but for me it's a prison (Belmarsh II). I went through hard times in that prison which included being listened to when I received phone calls, being watched at my movements, letters being opened before I see them, to the point of being assaulted by immigration escorts.

I was beaten up by two men and a woman in an attempt to remove me to Zimbabwe where I fled persecution. They were forcing me to get in the plane and I was telling them that I was afraid to die when I was returned. But because they wanted their commission money they had to push, punch and put my head between my knees just to force me to go to my death. By so doing I suffered some cuts from the handcuffs and pains in my back and neck which I still feel and this happened on the 21st April 2005. They describe all that as minimum force because they had to. I am so very surprised because at my own understanding no one is allowed to beat anyone and a parent cannot beat their own children and yet I was assaulted by three officers who, on top of that, knew the law of their country very well. But because I am an asylum seeker no one cared. The escorts told me that even if I reported the matter no one would listen to me anyway because I am a failed asylum seeker. But this did not stop me from suing them. I was not deported because the manageress of the Kenyan Airlines came and saw my plight as I was being beaten and refused to take me so I was taken back to detention.

Before my assault case we were on hunger strike because we wanted our plea for help to be heard. And by so doing myself and a colleague were said to be ringleaders. Why? Because we complained whenever necessary although nothing was done to change anything. We were also not allowed to attend detainee meetings because we used to say the truth about what was happening and some of the managers did not like that. We also wanted to see results after meetings but none came. That was why we were branded as ringleaders so they found their own way of separating us and they did. I was taken to the Dove wing and was not allowed to go back to Avocet wing. I asked why but was told it was not allowed to choose where one wanted to go and yet I saw with my own two eyes others doing it. Even that did not stop us because we were in solidarity and our stories were in newspapers, radio, television and the internet. This made life tough but through it all we survived.

With the help of BID (Bail for Immigration Detainees) we applied for bail hearings some of which were refused and some were accepted as I represented myself and got bail. In Yarl's Wood the phones cannot accept coins; they are blocked and you can only make a call using the white phone card. We also managed to contact such organisations as Anti-Deportation Campaign, which helped me so much as even when I was taken from Yarl's Wood to Heathrow police station they called there to find out about my whereabouts and if I was alright. At Yarl's Wood, if a relative calls to ask the whereabouts of their relative being detained they will be told that the

person either cannot come to the phone because she is having lunch or in a meeting, or is refusing to come to the phone which were all lies.

When I was released after seven months I also called there to find out how my colleagues who were still locked up were doing and was told the story, but I told them I was to hold until they found the girl because I knew they were lying. After holding for 10 minutes or more she came to the phone and when I asked her why she was refusing to come to the phone she told me she was only bleeped once and she came to the phone, but all the time I was holding for her they did nothing to bleep her for the phone call. And on another occasion I called to talk to different ladies who I know were admitted to Bedfordshire Hospital and I was told they had gone for visits. All I said to whoever answered the phone was 'really' and there was silence so I just said thank you and hung up the phone. So our friends who are locked up are treated like nobodies.

Only if one was in that situation, this is only when you could know what really happens behind the razor wires of Belmarsh II Yarl's Wood. Also many thanks to Megan and Chiara for every support, encouragement and visitations they did and are still doing. Asylum seekers are treated worse than convicted criminals. The Immigration itself does not explain the decisions in detail and it is so very frustrating. You will only know how the UK Immigration works when they detain you and you feel all the hatred they have for you. By just a mere look you will feel as if you are sinking into the ground. Barbed Wire Britain also is helping all they can and I was invited to a campaign to close down Campsfield which turned out very good because people there work hard. Thank you so very much. To all organisations I did not mention by name – you are not forgotten but all I can say is: thank you very much for everything you are doing to help the helpless and voiceless in the detention centres around the United Kingdom.

*Mafungasei Maikokera*

***On 19th January 2006, Bereket Yohannes, a 19-year-old Eritrean asylum seeker was found hanged in a shower block at Harmondsworth detention centre. Next day, 61 detainees in Harmondsworth signed a joint statement with ten demands concerning conditions at Harmondsworth. Some detainees went on hunger strike.***

## **STATEMENT OF 61 DETAINEES AT HARMONDSWORTH**

We the detainees of Harmondsworth, having considered the various ill treatment being meted to us, having come out with the following complaints that need to be addressed and abated immediately.

The following points could have led to the unwarranted death of one of our beloved friends.

1. It is absolutely ridiculous and obviously unjustifiable to keep immigrants against their wish, even those who have stated their intention to go back to their country

voluntarily. Asylum seekers' fate has already been decided even before they go to court and as a result are automatically refused asylum. We are all therefore left in dehumanising and depressing conditions for a better part of our lives. We strongly resist these demeaning actions being melted out to us and ask that we be released immediately.

2. Detainees' freedom of speech is totally denied us, as we are not given the opportunity to contribute our own views and opinions in such a way as to make positive impact on our conditions of living. In fact, our opinions are baseless and irrelevant as far as the management and staff of UKDS is concerned. We therefore call for a complete reversal.

3. Freedom of movement is totally ruled out and every outlet leading to various association areas like gymnasium, education and worship centres are permanently locked against easy access to the user of the facilities they are in. UKDS officers make us feel that we are an inconvenience and our timely movement is only at the disposal of the authority.

4. The most alarming problem facing the detainees is their susceptibility to a hazardous and unhealthy environment as every single window in all the rooms in the various wings are sealed. Communicable diseases are therefore likely to be transferred from one detainee to another. The rooms most times are always very hot and uncomfortable, although we don't however expect to have comfort in 'advance slavery'. We are not breathing normally and are usually very weak. We are gradually suffocating to death. What a degrading condition.

5 The available facilities, specifically the central air conditioning systems, are not functioning; they are only hanging on the ceilings like decorative frames. You can imagine a facility designed to save the windowless nature of the building not functioning for months and people (glorified neglected human beings) are locked in here. This is indisputably barbaric. This only brings to our memory the slavery era of our great ancestors.

6. The management are aware of how passionately religious Africans and their allies and similar countries' cultures are. They are therefore capitalising on this and using it as a stooge against us by the debarring or discouraging detainees from freely walking into their worship centres without booking 24 hours before the service. This to a large extent has affected interested worshippers and consequently tears on their emotions because this is about the only way they could have a form of relief spiritually to be able to overcome the torture and depressed state they are going through. Only a few days ago we prayed for a detainee in church who was anticipating suicide. This likely would have been the first suicide we would have experienced. What is the fate of those who find it difficult to keep with the restrain confronting them as a result of insensitivity, all in the name of procedures? We are therefore clamouring that people should be allowed to worship without any constraint.

7. Asylum seekers are even denied chances to exhaust their appeal rights. We are most times denied access to the high court, which is an independent body from the immigration tribunal. We ask that opportunity be given to us to exhaust our appeal.

8. The food being given to detainees would be rejected by some dogs in the United Kingdom. The food is predictably rice and potatoes, with some horrible sauce, day in day out. Most detainees are almost starving themselves to death as we are all tired of eating the same food every single day without any alternative to buy varieties of food, as is obtainable in other detention centres.

9. The way and manner officers disrespect detainees, and other responsible men around, is quite disgusting and very humiliating. You can imagine a situation where a fellow inmate was asked to get out of the dining room just some few seconds after taking his meal, is quite appalling. Officers are fond of threatening detainees with IEP (warning letters) for no just cause; most times we are being accosted and approached like children. We are asking this to stop with automatic effect.

10. The sanitary conditions are very poor, making the whole environment to smell and it could probably be attributed to poor ventilation, which makes the whole place stuffy. We are therefore seizing this opportunity to advise management of our plight and demand for immediate redress of all the stated complaints.

You will agree with us that people are held and detained for longer than necessary most of the time, for even 2 years and more. We advise that people that have to be removed should be given quick removal to their various countries, and those that are considered for stay should be released as soon as possible rather than being kept in the detention centres against their wish and knowing fully well it is against United Nations and human rights regulations.

Owing to the loss of our fellow detainee, every other detainee is currently living under perpetual fear and no body knows who is the next victim. We are therefore demanding that all detainees currently being held right now should as a matter of urgency be released.

Thank you

Signed by 61 Harmondsworth detainees

#### **FROM A DETAINEE IN HARMONDSWORTH**

***This piece has been taken from three letters written between November 2005 and February 2006***

Thank you for offering this opportunity to express the multi-complex torturing we have been experiencing under the care of detention companies in the UK, by the commandment of the immigration authorities.

I came to this country in December 2000 and asked for asylum at my port of entry. Early that year in the upper east of my country Ghana there was fighting over land between my tribe and another and my life was in danger. At first I lived in London. A year after my arrival my claim was refused.

The problem which made me flee my country is the same as what happened to me in the well respected city of Liverpool some time after I moved there in 2003. On 1st July 2005, a group of four strong white men attacked me while I was jogging in a park near my home in L6, punching me in the face, kicking me and shouting 'fucking black man'. If I had not been strong enough to defend myself and had fallen to the ground they would have killed me. Instead they ran away. Four weeks later the black man Anthony Walker was axed in the head in Liverpool.

I went to Liverpool Royal Hospital for treatment, then went to police to report. I did not feel safe because there were some things they tried to take out of my statement which I did not understand, I felt they were more racist than those attackers, yet they were the people recruited by the authorities for the safety of people regardless of colour, etc. A month later a letter arrived to say the police would come to talk to me, but it was immigration officers who arrived at my door early on August 24th and took me to a cell in St Anne's police station. After 13 hours I was taken to Campsfield House detention centre.

At Campsfield I soon made friends with the detainees who had been there before me, and they warned me to be careful with GSL staff because they are racially abusive. I took no notice of this until I was racially abused by an officer. I made a report to a member of the Independent Monitoring Board who forwarded it to the GSL managers. The next thing was all the staff started looking at me all the time like a criminal, even when I said hello to them they did not look at me let alone respond to me. So the way I was feeling was not good at all, I was frightened and terrified with the way things were happening, and I put in a request to see an [government] Immigration and Nationality Department officer.

The worst day in my life came the next day, 19th November ... all the officers coming one after the other to take a terrible look at me. I then thought something was going to happen to me that night, so I could not sleep all night. All I did was recite the holy Quran.

Two days later I had not seen an IND official, but I was called by an immigration officer to be told I was to be removed to Ghana on 25th November. I then had a call to see the IND contract manager. When I started narrating the story to her, instead of her listening to what I was saying to her, she started arguing by saying that officers could not have done that to me, that it was not true, she did not allow me to talk at all. I told her she was making my situation much worse than it was before; the best person for me to see was a doctor.

On 25th November, after three months in Campsfield I was taken to the airport, but I refused to board the aircraft to Ghana. The escorts nearly killed me, because I almost lost consciousness where they called an ambulance; I really suffered that day.

On 5th December my solicitor appealed for judicial review on the refusal to give me bail. The judge was convinced and granted me bail but later when he went through the file Immigration provided, he saw so many things such as that I had absconded that he withdrew the grant of bail. Most of what Immigration said in the file was not true.



I appeal to all of you. I do not want racists to ruin my life. I am still young. I have got lots of goals to achieve while I am in the UK. I cannot afford to miss that chance. Life is so precious to me and others who are on the same footstep as mine...

I would like to brief everyone how each detention centre carries out their bad treatment towards us as detainees. Some are worse than others. At Campsfield the treatment was terrible, but Harmondsworth is the worst of all; though I have not been to other detention centres those who had been to other places said so. This centre has three different torturing units, with people being treated badly in them; we have the segregation unit, the secure unit and the standard unit with different ways of torturing people physically and mentally.

I have seen a lot of detainees who wanted to go home voluntarily, but these private companies keep them in detention for no reason, moreover transporting them endlessly from one detention centre to another like goods unnecessarily, spending tax payers' money on unreasonable fuel burning.

The main problem about it all is the detention centres are full of unqualified staff, so the companies are being paid a huge amount of money by the government yet cannot provide a sufficient service to the vulnerable detainees. The reason I use the word vulnerable is, most of the detainees are being separated from their loved ones, their businesses and all they have, and are going to be sent to their countries empty handed. Moreover they have no clue what the future holds for them, yet these are the people being tortured under the care of the government, by means of adding an insult to an injury to us.

The worst centre is this Harmondsworth, the staff are abusive, so is the domestic staff, even a kitchen maid can do anything awful to a detainee. No one bothers. There are people here who have been brought from prison, and they say prison is much better than here, even though a prison is full of convicted criminals. Most of us suggested this was simply because the majority in prison are British, and British people cannot bear to torture their own children. But I sense that prison is well equipped with qualified staff while a detention centre isn't but employs people to torture innocent, decent and poor people for no reason, for most of us were working hard to better our lives.

I have witnessed several cases of torturing carried out by these ill-educated staff swearing and insulting older people twice their age, old enough to be their dads. My former room mate, an old man from Nigeria, was once so badly treated it made him cry like a baby: he had been to the medical centre and been kept there for an hour after being given his pill and had simply asked an officer to escort him back to his own unit – that was all he had done.

The education centre is where most of us get a chance to write to our solicitors, but the staff appear to be so inquisitive about our personal letters which by law they are not supposed to be. When I reported this to the senior manageress of the centre she said, yes they can read our personal letters provided we are under their care, and I said by law no one has the right to go through one's private things, and she said the law did not apply to us. Which makes me think that animals are better

treated than us. I would urge the authorities to rethink that we are just human beings as they are. We too deserve a bit of right some how.

Moreover, on 19th January 2006, when a fellow detainee in Harmondsworth committed suicide, there was a group of detainees who decided not to eat as a sort of demonstration of protest, because that guy terminated his life due to the bad treatment that has been handed to us, which he could not bear. After that, seven of those guys were accused of organising that demonstration. What they did was, they took them to the segregation unit for a week.

Verily this is the worst torturing centre in the world, so far as I know, meant for torturing innocent people for no reason.

from Harmondsworth Detention Centre, West Drayton, Middlesex

***For people from the Democratic Republic of Congo, up to the end of last year detention usually meant isolation from other Congolese. However in 2006 DR Congolese detained in Colnbrook and Harmondsworth have set up a network between the two centres; they all know who is detained at any one time, and as those detained in Colnbrook now have access to the outside world via the internet they are keeping the world informed of the conditions they face in both detention centres. In mid-March they had a protest hunger strike and put together a statement saying why they were on hunger strike. The statement was signed by all the Congolese in both detention centres.***

## **STATEMENT OF DRC DETAINEES, MARCH 2006**

**To Whom It May Concern:**

**Re: DRC detainees**

We, asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo, would like to express our utmost dissatisfaction about the abusive treatment we are victims of time and time again.

Escort officers' use of excessive force; serious beating while handcuffed is so rampant. Most of us have scars and some have sustained physical injuries from hands-cuffs to our hands during the beating.

The tolerance of such behaviour by the Home Office authorities is outrageously criminal to say the least.

In the light of latest facts underlined by the BBC World Service in relation to the situation prevailing in DRC, we call on the Home Secretary to cease all deportation to DRC and therefore ensure the commitment of the UK to the Geneva Convention. The evidence confirms that returned Congolese asylum seekers to DRC are at high risk of arbitrary arrest, harsh interrogation, abduction and disappearance, imprisonment, systematic torture and possibly extra-judicial execution, even the

death penalty.

DRC government has a history of targeting asylum seekers deported from Europe.

The UK authorities should not turn a blind eye to these pandemic ill-treatments for the mere reason of public or political cosmetics. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, it ought to be UK's prerogative to see to it that not only should there be no deportation to DRC in the current state of affairs from UK but there should not be any deportation from any other country for that matter. Human Rights ought to be upheld at all cost.

We are calling on the senses of responsibility and humanity from Home Office decision-makers to stop these scandalous immigration practices.

There is evident, palpable, profound and glaring unfairness in the way our asylum cases have been dealt with. Our removal from UK is morally indefensible and would simply reduce the Home Office authorities to mere persecutors and killers.

Home Office authorities ought to realise that these are matters of life and death.

We are seriously concerned about Home Office and in particular the prison authority in regards to the current treatment of detainees who voiced their concerns to management after meeting to discuss the circumstances surrounding the death of Bereket Yohannes and whom in a 'Peaceful Protest' issued a public statement.

These detainees have been isolated for 'indiscipline', some of them have been moved to Colnbrook Short Term Holding Centre and two to Dungavel immigration Removal Centre.

We are unlawfully detained and our applications refused for wrong and unfair reasons. The Home Office's method of assessing credibility is unsafe and unsustainable.

Our asylum application should be assessed in relation to the evidence available, not according to set up target.

We have very strong cases and it is against the law and detention policy for the Home Office to continue holding for longer period of time.

We are not failed asylum seekers, our asylum claims have basis because they are established on facts. The Home Office recognises that the DRC government is an oppressive, brutal and tyrannical regime and its human right record is shocking and extremely bad.

Our treatment in UK detention centres is a mockery of Human Right, treated worse than dogs.

This is xenophobia, racism and prejudices in their more subtle and extreme forms.

Please stop deportation to the DRC.

Yours sincerely,

Congolese (DRC) in the Detention

***Pastor Daly is a leading member of the African Scottish Community in Glasgow. People were absolutely shocked and angry to hear of the arrest of him and his family. His contribution to life in the city is enormous and people are determined the family will not be deported. In the course of his first detention there were huge demonstrations outside the Home Office, outside Dungavel, and outside the Scottish Parliament which all contributed to his release. On the occasion of his second arrest he was released within four working days as a result of the swift legal moves and the people's anger which led to the largest ever demonstration outside a bail hearing, and support by Scottish MPs and other leading members of the community***

### **I WAS NOT BORN 'ASYLUM SEEKER'**

I am Reverend M.N. Daly, an Angolan national seeking asylum in the United Kingdom, in Glasgow.

I regret being an asylum seeker, as I was not born as asylum seeker. My family and me have been living in this country for five and a half years. We did not come here because of the good life in Europe, I had a better life in my country than I have here, but we came here because we needed to survive and to run away from death.

When my family and I arrived in the UK we thought that we came to a country where there is democracy and the laws are respected, a country where justice is fair (works), because in my country democracy and the laws are not respected. But today we have realised that the laws in the UK are not respected.

The 10th of December 2004, I was arrested in the Home Office and they sent me to Dungavel where I spent days after days of humiliation. My first observation was, that whenever there was a demonstration outside Dungavel the officers would take me and put me in another cell where I was supervised by five officers; this cell was like a security cell. When the demo was finished I asked the manager, 'Why did you put me in the other cell when there was a demonstration outside, and is it legal for them to do a demonstration for me?' And the manager replied, 'I did that because your family and friends were doing a demo for you and because I am the manager and I can do whatever I want.' I stayed quiet and I began to cry. That was another day of humiliation.

On the 22nd December 2004, I was sleeping in my room when an officer woke me up and told me the manager wants to see me. When I went to see the manager I saw seven security guards there, and I asked them – what is the problem? They started to provoke me to find a reason to beat me. As I realised that they were trying to provoke me, I didn't answer them whenever they asked me a question. They lied to me and told me that the police had arrested my wife and children which was not true. They did all this to get me angry so I can start something so they can beat me,

and there were seven security guards there. I only had a T-shirt and a track suit on and they told me that they are taking me to London Airport, and I will be deported there. I asked the officer if I can change before we go because it was cold. They said 'no'. I asked the manager why I can't change and he replied 'I'm the manager and I can do whatever I want; I am the one who gives the orders.' In the same moment 10 big strong men came in and put me to the van. I also asked these men if I could go back to my room and change – the men also refused. I begged them if I could at least put a jumper on because it was cold and I was shaking. They refused once more and acted like they didn't care whether I was cold or not. We went to the van and headed down to London. We stopped at the motorway for someone from the Home Office, and when the person arrived we continued the journey. There was an accident on the M74 so they started to look for another road that went to Birmingham – the driver started to drive fast as the wind at 80mph. I was very cold and afraid I was going to die because of the cold. In the van I begged the guards to give me clothes or something to put on because I couldn't handle the coldness any longer – I was shaking with cold. Again they refused. We left Glasgow at 7:00am and we arrived in Manchester at 18:00pm. When I arrived in Manchester I asked for clothes and the officers there also refused. I was taken to Birmingham prison where I slept until 7:45am. In that same morning they took me to Tyson House in London. The way they took me from Glasgow to London it was like they were taking a criminal. When I arrived at Tyson House I got sick because of the cold I was feeling during the journey.

After 37 days the Home Office arrested my wife and children – they were told they were going to visit me so my family did not know that they were going to Dungavel detention centre.

After 40 days in detention, I was finally released because my lawyer took my case to 'Judicial Review'. We paid £4,000 bail for this first stage of our suffering.

We were detained again at the end of 2005. We went to sign on the 3rd of December 2005 when the Home Office arrested my family and me illegally and took us to Yarl's Wood detention centre. We were waiting for the Judicial Review set for the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2006. On our way to Yarl's Wood one of my daughters wanted to go to the bathroom, and the guards refused. He said she should just do it in the van. That is inhumanity and they treated my family and me like criminals – all this because we are seeking asylum.

When I make the analysis of certain facts, I am just confused. I do not understand how in a country, fox hunting is prohibited because the way the hunters proceed to kill animals is atrocious. And the same society condemns the human beings that are created in God's image, full of intelligence, capable of thought, able to work and contribute to the development of the country. They cannot stand to see the sufferings of animals but they easily accept and condone the suffering of human beings.

The same society gives the green light to throw innocent people into prison, which they call a 'Detention Centre'. Men and women are beaten, mistreated in prison cells, dragged to the airport in order to be removed, handcuffed like animals,

sometimes with their children. This is called removal/deportation which simply means **'Go and Die, you do not have the right to live'**.

The fact is that we do not flee our countries because of poverty but mainly because of conflicts, persecutions and other human rights abuses. No African country is rich because none is basically independent. We certainly come from countries where natural resources such as gold, diamond, oil, copper, timber, and even fresh water from the Congo River etc belong to the Western Countries that divided Africa like a cake during the Berlin Conference of 1884 and 1885.

Now we are used to the noise of weapons manufacture in the Western Countries. The trades in war weapons, and the backing of dictatorships in Africa by the West, are the fundamental causes of refugee movements.

We live in fear not knowing what will happen tomorrow. I have seen some authorities cherishing their dogs while they send three-month old babies and their parents to prison, just because these poor asylum seekers wanted to save their lives. Nowadays we live in a society where seeking to save one's life has become a crime sanctioned by imprisoning in that place the Government calls 'Detention Centre'.

Another concern is that those who were defending human rights yesterday, today are the very ones who are throwing us in prison and are strongly against defenceless people. Let your conscience be the judge for this atrocity.

We are not asking you to love us like your children but we are simply asking you to give us at least half the care you give your dogs.

Fellow Africans, we have apparently committed a crime for seeking asylum in this country. However, there is someone who has helped us to this 'crime'. His name is JEHOVAH, the creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty God who is our portion in the land of the living. He is our strength and the Lord Jesus is our lawyer. He will never forsake us.

Let us resist, for the victory is certain. Long live Africa!! 'A luta continua, a Victoria e certa!!' (The struggle continues, the victory is certain).

***A recent detainee contributed this short piece.***

## **THERE IS A LOT TO SAY**

I experienced detention for a few months in an immigration removal centre, and there is a lot to say about my experience as regards treatment received and the feelings of not knowing what is to come next. However, my opinion is that, to dwell on those very experiences is the first downfall an individual should not allow oneself to swim into.

Although the experience of detention still haunts me despite the fact that it is now many months after I was released, my focus is pinned on how best I can make life

easier for those that still remain behind those high and barbed wired walls. I do not want them to feel distressed due to uncertainty like I did. Additionally, on taking part in the campaign process of asking the government to seriously consider the post detention mental health position of those that are detained and seriously decide closing down the detention centres. One of those campaigns is through Barbed Wire Britain who are putting out this literature, *Voices From Detention*.

I do suppose that the immediate and first challenge as regards support for those still in detention is to create awareness as to how best they can secure release. That awareness includes familiarising detainees with their basic rights. The foremost of these is the right to apply for bail to secure release. Additionally, the issue of emotional support plays a very pivotal role in making them cope with the situation of being inside. That is partly achieved by constant reassurance through regular telephone calls, personal visits and conventional letters stating that things will be alright. In the process of that reassuring, it must however be borne in mind not to promise 'heaven and earth' to anyone who is anxious to secure freedom as this may have detrimental consequences should the release be delayed. One of the primary reasons is the fact that we do not know exactly what the laws relating to the detainees' situation are going to bear tomorrow. On the second part, prevailing political policy on the issue of immigration may sway from one side to another without prior notice, rendering the victims of detention to further distress.

My views here are based on how I felt while in detention, since I did not have anyone who visited me, called me, or assured me that things will be alright. The assurance that I got was from some inmates who shared their experiences in conversation and maintained a positive attitude towards the situation like I did.

## AUSTRALIA

***Following the introduction below, three accounts give a small taste of what is happening now in Australia. They are followed by an account of a family who spent three years in detention, under the previous regime, in a detention centre which is now closed***

### *Protests work*

Following years of protests, and a series of spectacular scandals, the Australian government moved to reform its system of mandatory detention last year (2005). Many people who had been locked up since their arrival in Australia between 1998 and 2001 have been released. The Ombudsman was put to work investigating over 200 cases of 'wrongful' detention; that is, detention and even deportation of Australian citizens and others with valid visas.

### *Is it any better?*

Many of the 'reforms', however, are almost purely cosmetic. Children and their families have been released from detention centres, but remain under detention and without rights in suburban houses. Many of those released have been given 'return pending' bridging visas which offer no security to rebuild shattered lives.

### *Extraordinary powers remain*

Even worse, the core of the system remains in place. Department of Immigration officials still have the power to lock up human beings indefinitely, without charge or trial, if they are suspected of being an 'unlawful non-citizen'. This extraordinary power, combined with the government's clever and vicious use of the politics of race and immigration, has produced a dangerous and sometimes deadly culture of abuse, deceit and neglect in the Department of Immigration and its contractors.

### *Keeping up the pressure*

This Easter, people will gather at Villawood, Australia's largest detention centre, in the suburbs of Sydney. We will be there in solidarity with those inside, including more than a hundred asylum seekers from China. We will be there because we know that if one group of people are stripped of their rights and detained without trial, it makes it all the easier for governments to do the same to the rest of us.

We will be protesting to tell the world that there is still a lot of 'unfinished business' in the struggle for human dignity on Australia's borders, as the stories that follow show.

*Jerome Small, Melbourne  
March 2006*

## **MOHAMMED REZA**

My father worked for the communist party in Afghanistan. When the communist government fell Mujahedin came in the city. On the first day a Toyota came in front of my house, stopped, and armed men came in my house and hit my father with their guns in a way that he was not able to talk, all of his face was full of blood. They shackled his hands behind his back then they loot our house and throw my father in



the Toyota. After two days we could find my father's body in the desert. After that we could not live peacefully. Every day people were insulting and accusing us. They were calling us the children of the pagan. I was threatened with death and beaten several times and stabbed with a knife below my stomach with the purpose of killing me.

This brought about and compelled me to leave my homeland and family and seek for shelter. I don't have any other way. I cannot return home because I will face death persecution. I am Hazara Shi'ite and live in Helmand where Pashtun dominate. The party and person who persecute me are the Pashtun and Sunni sect who are strong and rule the province.

#### *How did we go to Australia?*

We Afghan migrants are living in Mataram, Lombok, Indonesia around five years. During this time we had traveled two to three times to Australia but could not get there because the boats were crowded, and break down. This nearly cause death for passengers but accidentally we remained alive. Each time we come back to Indonesia with psychological disappointment and physical illness. Most of us have experienced from one to three times such deadly sea trips to reach to the land of people who claim themselves the main human rights supporters in the world (we mean Australia)

On the last trip on 3rd October 2001 we were 240 migrants departed for the purpose of seeking asylum in Australia. On the nine days trip we lost one baby because of hot weather and having no food and water. And another baby was born in Australian water near Ashmore Reef.

It was 2 o'clock in the morning on 12th October 2001. Due to extreme happiness the tears were coming from the eyes of all passengers because all of us believed that we finally reached Australia alive. The Navy forces stopped us at nine o'clock the same day. We thought it was the end of all calamities of our trip and we forgot all the past problems which we had during many times travel on the ocean.

We believed that now it is the time to explain for the world the fright and terrorism of Taliban militia and sorrowful condition of the oppression of the Afghan nation, especially for most of the passengers who are from Hazara tribe who had been the victims of racial and religious discrimination and fanatic policies of all governments in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, our arrival at Ashmore Reef was the beginning of another unexpected tragedy in our life. This is a sad story of human suffering. The Navy forces of Australia kept us in the small and smelly boat on the ocean beside Ashmore Reef under the unbearable hot sunshine for eight days. The passengers had infected skin disease due to much perspiration and dirt in the boat. After eight days the Navy people came in our boat and said 'We are taking you to the refugee camp' but they deceived us. They separated the families from singles and transferred families to their Navy ship. Then they asked all the singles to come down inside the boat. We requested them it is not possible for 160 persons to come together in a place, which is enough only for 40 persons. They said only for five minutes we want to tell something to you. So all the 160 passengers came down inside the boat, some sat on each other, some were standing.

They kept us down by force for two days where the people cannot breathe, eat or sleep because there was not enough oxygen and a there was much smoke of engine. Many people fainted. Each who fainted was taken to upside of the boat like a dead body then Navy people poured water on his face or injected him to become conscious and after he was conscious threw him down in the same tight and smelly place.

After two days in early morning the officer shouted: 'You are returned back and now you are in Indonesian water.' This sentence was like thunder which hit the passengers' minds. We shocked and asked them 'If you did not accept us why did you not submit us to UN, and why have you deceived us and why – and why?' But there was no ear to hear! The Navy people instead of logical reason replied to us with electrical sticks which they had with them. Then they take the families back to our small boat by force. Because no one was ready to come out of the Navy ship the Navy people were bringing the children in our boat, and beating the men and women so badly if they did not want to come out of Navy ship. By observing this scene some of the Navy people were weeping, one even hit his head to the wall of the boat. Then they broke the engine of the boat, took the oil and generator so we cannot go back to Australia and went by speed boat to the Navy ship which had brought the families, and sailed away.

We remained on the ocean with broken engine and no oil and generator to evacuate the water from our boat. If after some hours the fishermen of Indonesia did not come to save us 240 passengers would likely be drowning in the ocean. Police took us to Kupang Island where we lived for 40 days in dirty and cramped barrack, with not sufficient water to take a bath or wash our faces. After that we were taken to an Island named Lombok. It has been four years we are staying in the Lombok Afghan refugee camp.

It has been four years that we live in the world of ambiguity. We cannot go back to our country because of the problems of racial, political and religious discrimination, which we had and still we have.

The refugee assessment process by the UNHCR in Indonesia was full of errors and unfairness.

Afghanistan's condition is dark. No one can predict and be hopeful of its future. The UN knows it is too dangerous for us to go back and has given us Temporary Protection in Indonesia. When we ask for how much longer must we stay, they respond that they are waiting for change in unstable condition of Afghanistan then the destiny of everyone would be clear.

We Afghan asylum seekers have already experienced that in 27 years of civil war and massacres the condition in Afghanistan became worse and worse. Now according to UN we must waste our life here and wait many years again to know what will happen in Afghanistan. In this case we will suffer from life imprisonment unendingly.

#### *Our present condition in Indonesia*

In the camp in the day, some spend time with their lessons of English language and computer programs, and some has no activity. I am teaching two English classes six

days a week. I have the same timetable for every day. I am suffering in such suffocating situation and being stateless with unknown future, that these issues are hurting me very much. We had attempted to find a shelter to save our life and make a safe life and better future, especially for our children, but here in Lombok we Afghan refugees are suffering from an intolerable and unimaginable condition. We lost our hope, our family, friends, relatives and our own life. We Afghan refugees living in Lombok, kindly request from all the wise men of the world to comprehend our condition and to help us. We request Australian Immigration to be responsible for the Lombok refugees who were returned from Australian water, and to treat us in the same way as the Nauru refugees, that have been interviewed by Australian Immigration.

We are Australia's responsibility. We came to Australia and asked for asylum and Australia knows this because it pays International Organisation for Migration to provide us with food and shelter. Many asylum seekers in Lombok are on the threshold of erosion physically and psychologically because of disappointments and endless obscurity in our life. We do not know how long we will remain here and this causes tension in every individual's mind.

We hope that humanitarian communities pay attention to our problems and do not let us to be kept in isolation and be forgotten. It is a brief story about our terrible travel to Australia for seeking asylum in your country. We wish that no other humans have to face this kind of catastrophe.

Thank you for your kindness in listening to our story.

Best regards,

Mohammed Reza

Afghan asylum seeker, Mataram, Lombok, Indonesia

March 2006

## **MOH's STORY**

*Moh's terrible life had put a wise old head on his shoulders. His 16-year-old mother gave birth to him in a cave while Russian bombs fell on their home. At age 22 during the Taliban regime Moh fled Afghanistan, not knowing where he was going; just out of Afghanistan. His mother cried when he left.*

*In August 2001, somewhere around Indonesia, Moh and 437 others got into a boat designed to take about 20 people, and near Australian-occupied Christmas Island the boat began to fall apart. Fortunately, because of the humanitarian instincts of Captain Arne Rinnan and the crew of the Norwegian merchant vessel Tampa, 438 people did not perish at sea on this occasion.*

*However, risking their lives like that was apparently not enough bona fides to satisfy the racist Australian government, which went to extraordinary lengths to prevent Captain Rinnan bringing his cargo of human flotsam to Australian territory.*

*The awful detail of this episode can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MV\\_Tampa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MV_Tampa)*

*But what happened to the refugees is not so easy to track down. Those accepted by New Zealand were the lucky ones; they were welcomed into the NZ community as refugees and allowed to rebuild their lives.*

*And the rest were made to suffer the slow torture of systemic abuse and neglect, with the obvious intention of making them give up and go home. Moh was one of around 400 who went to the tiny Pacific island of Nauru, where they were used as pawns in the corrupt power play between the Australian and Nauruan governments. On Nauru, they were being deliberately kept away from lawyers, media and the Australian people. But the compassionate instincts of the majority of Australians soon found a way to get in touch with them, and Moh thus made several close friendships, which continue today. Excerpts from some of his letters appear below.*

By water supply I mean we do not have enough water for going to toilet, taking bath and washing our clothes. For example, in one corner of the camp there is one water store in which most only one water tank is delivered every day, and here are almost five hundred people consuming water from the same tank.

We have no power yet. On days it is very hot and nights lots of mosquitoes, no repellent and spray.

A Norwegian psychiatrist lady working here is very busy. I have no knowledge of psychiatry, but I know restlessness, sleeplessness, heavy anxiety, hopelessness, keeping isolated from public, and uncontrolled behaviours are all obvious mental problems requiring immediate treatment.

An interesting story is that when Mr Philip Ruddock came here [then Australian minister for immigration] our water stores were all full. And we tried to utilise our best. Most of us take bath when it rains heavily. However, the water is spent very soon. And in the rest of day and night, our toilets are awfully smelling, and thousands of flies and mosquitoes are in each toilet.

Mr Ruddock held a short meeting with asylum seeker representatives to answer their questions. He was asked, 'Why have you brought us here?' He answered, 'Because you came from window not from the front door. And also you did not call us before you came.'

I asked, 'Front door is almost closed. From 500 refugees recognised by UNHCR Jakarta only 20 of them were resettled in other countries. Why Tampa refugees were treated differently?'

*But on the last round of UNHCR interviews, because of tribal conflict Moh could see he was not going to be accepted. At the same time he received a communication from his father in Afghanistan begging him not to waste his life in Nauru. So, to the great sadness of his friends in Australia who he had not met yet, Moh gave up and went back to Afghanistan where he continues to lead a very precarious life, still trying to get out one way or the other, but thankfully still alive.*

*The last time we spoke I tried to lighten the conversation by asking this very young man if he had a girlfriend yet. He told me, 'You saw that film [Landmines – A Love Story, by Dennis O'Rourke]. You know what it's like here. You cannot just talk to a girl....' and his voice trailed away in sadness. To drive away his stress he tries to go for a run every day, but he has to be very careful where he runs because, like the film shows, the place is littered with land mines.*

*Grace Gorman, Melbourne  
March 2006*

## **MASUED'S STORY**

*Masued is 35 years old, from Bangladesh. He is a gentle, intelligent and educated man, and is suffering mentally and physically as he experiences inhuman and callous treatment, this time at the hands of the Australian government who have detained him for nearly six years in immigration detention centres. He arrived in Australia in July 2000 and was initially held in Port Hedland, north Western Australia. In 2004 he was transferred to Baxter Immigration detention centre in Port Augusta, South Australia.*

*Masued came to Australia seeking political asylum because of his involvement in the political group, JATIO, a party against the regime now in control of the Bangladesh government. The party was strongly outspoken against human rights abuses and injustices of the government. Fellow JATIO members have disappeared and others have been imprisoned or are believed dead. Masued and other fellow activists fled the country and came to Australia to seek political asylum. However, all applications for asylum were refused through the onshore immigration process; including appeals to the Refugee Review Tribunal, Federal Court of Australia and the full Federal Court (2000-03).*

*It is apparent the Department of Immigration failed to properly address the full facts of Masued's case, and their control of the court process influenced the negative outcomes for Masued. After his case was dismissed by the Federal Court Masued wrote to the minister in December 2003, asking for her intervention under section 417 of the Migration Act, requesting his case be reviewed on a humanitarian basis. For one year he did not receive any response to his letter. Finally a response came; he was refused any appeals and the Department attempted to deport him. Out of fear and desperation, Masued attempted suicide. He was hospitalized and then incarcerated in Perth detention centre where he remains today under constant threat of deportation. If forced to return to his country, Masued faces certain persecution and imprisonment. JATIO is considered an illegal organization by the Bangladesh government and Masued's past involvement renders him an enemy of the regime now in power.*

*Ardeshir Gholipour, Canberra  
February 2006*

**Faezeh, Feaz and Ansar**

*Excerpted from 'Love and Suffering: a former detainee's story about growing up in detention', Amnesty Newsletter, February 2004.*

After three years in Port Hedland detention centre in north-west Western Australia, and four months in Villawood detention centre in Sydney, my family and I were released and granted permanent visas three days before Christmas. This is our story.

I left Iran because of some religious problems and some family problems and.... arrived in Australia when I was 19 years old. Since August 2000, I lived in detention centres with my mother, sister Fairmah (17), and my brothers Feaz (14) and Ansar (9). My brothers are intellectually disabled. They are very loving and affectionate but can be hard to look after sometimes.

Seventy-three of us, the people who arrived on the same boat, were kept in isolation for seven months. There were fifteen children living in the same compound. We were allowed outside about half an hour in the morning and half an hour in the afternoon. There wasn't much for the children to do, no toys or anything to play with.

My brothers were prescribed some sedatives to try to calm them down. For Feaz, the older one, they increased the dose until all he did was sleep all the time. When they ran out of those tablets they gave them some other very strong tablets and soon my brothers got sick. Feaz was dizzy all the time, he collapsed and vomited but the medical officers said it was the flu so nothing was really done until August last year when a doctor recommended we move to Villawood because the boys needed to go to hospital. My mother and us kids moved to Villawood and my brothers went to the children's hospital where they said the tablets had caused liver problems. My brothers are still having tests to see if there is any long-term damage.

Three days before Christmas last year, the officers came and told us to get packed. We didn't know what was going to happen. We were taken to another part of the detention centre and at 5pm we were given a letter from Minister Vanstone that said we were granted permanent visas and we were immediately released. We had to leave straight away and were not allowed to go back to say goodbye to the others. When I get enough identification papers, I will be allowed to go back to visit.'

## FROM THE FIRST EDITION

***The last three pieces are reprinted from the first edition of Voices From Detention and come from people detained in the UK before 2002.***

***The first account is from someone who was forced to flee from Nigeria. He is certain that if he returned his life would be in extreme danger. If he were to succeed in his request for asylum, he would enrich the UK with his many working skills. All he is asking for is a chance to work and get on with his life, while coming to terms with the trauma he has experienced. This trauma has been intensified by experience in detention.***

### **REMOVAL TO CAMPSFIELD – TRYING TO GET BAIL**

I come from Nigeria. I have spent many months in Nigeria being persecuted and afraid for my life, after my livelihood was destroyed. I decided to leave Nigeria to save my life. I arrived in the UK in 2001 and in 2002 I am still been locked up in prison. What a life!

I am an asylum seeker detainee at Campsfield House; I was arrested at the airport. I claimed asylum on arrival but was detained at the airport from 9.15am until 1.30am in the morning of the following day. We arrived at Oakington in the very early morning. There at Oakington I spent eight days. It was there I had my asylum interview. Three days later I had the negative decision. I was immediately transferred to Campsfield House in Oxford. Since then I have been living my life in prison.

Since my detention, I have made several attempts to secure bail, but it was all refused. My first bail application was ten weeks after I was locked up in Campsfield. The adjudicator granted me bail on principle and instructed my sureties to go and lodge the sum of £1,500 into the solicitor's account and reappear with a fresh bail application one week later. My sureties did their best by raising the money and had all the bail requirements.

Unfortunately, when we reappeared as instructed at the same Birmingham Court, we met a different adjudicator who after cross examining my sureties, refused me bail because she said the amount lodged was too small as to guarantee my bail. She raised the money to £5,000, which demoralised my first surety and she backed out. Hence, I could not afford the £5,000 surety money. I decided to consult Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) who applied bail for me a month later at York House London. At York House I went with two European citizens as my sureties with the sum of £1,200 including a Catholic reverend father who came and refereed for me. After the bail hearing, the adjudicator refused to grant me bail based on my nationality because I am a Nigerian. He wanted more money from my sureties. After another month, the same (BID) went back to court in York House for another bail hearing. That was the day we were given the highest humiliation in my life. In the presence of the three sureties that went to court with me and the £1,500 as surety money, the adjudicator did not allow Mr Tim Baster, who was my legal representative, time even to open up his case file before he dismissed my case and said that bail was refused. We were all amazed. What a miscarriage of justice!?

### *Life in Campsfield House*

In Campsfield House, life has not been very easy. There are three sections in the centre, namely the blue, pink, and yellow blocks. There are also separate sections for administration and for the Immigration Officers whose duty is to carry out our removal orders.

Breakfast is from 7.30–9.30am, lunch from 12 noon to 1.30pm and dinner from 5 to 6.30pm. The food they serve is what the authority approved for the day. It is not what you might like to eat that particular day. Sometimes, they serve detainees rice without stew and if you complain, Group 4 will tell you, 'that is why you left your country. If you don't like the treatment why not sign and go back to your country?' The food contributes 80% of the poor health condition of the detainees. Some always vomit after food. We are not allowed to take any food to our room. Even if you are sick and you cannot walk down to the canteen you cannot do this. If you request such a privilege, Group 4 will tell you that you are in a detention centre, where you have no rights, and no freedom.

### *Facilities*

There is one library with two computers for typing only and four computer ball games. The library opens 9am–12.30pm, and re-opens 1.30pm–11.30pm daily. We have three television rooms which is highly restricted from broadcasting news. Only TV5 is allowed which gives news in brief. The other TVs remain permanently on sports, and MTV for music. There is one table tennis court, a room for physical health training, and a little pitch for football, which doesn't operate every day. There's also a hall for volleyball and cricket.

### *Sanitation*

There are about five cleaning staff for the whole centre. They are here to be presented to visitors. How they clean the surroundings, ranging from the kitchen to the toilets is better seen than imagined. They only clean the entrance and passages. The toilets and bathrooms are left to the detriment of the detainees. Hence Group 4 and visiting staff have their own separate facilities. Most of the detainees contract diseases through the toilets because they are being used by every detainee, and no disinfectant is used in washing and cleaning them. Sometimes the passage stinks. You can always perceive the odour while passing through.

### *Medical*

There is no long-term medical treatment as far as Campsfield House is concerned. But there is a health unit – which cannot be called an ordinary clinic because no useful consultation occurs there. Every ill-health matter is treated with stress tablets that knock you down. I was given a tablet that forced me to sleep for two days without ceasing. Weekends, there is no doctor available. Group 4 handles any emergency during the weekend. Detainees are not allowed to sleep in the hospital no matter how serious the problem is, the paramedics must return you back before day break.

Detainees with diseases like epilepsy, tuberculosis, asthma, chicken pox are mixed up with other healthy detainees. If you complain, the nurses will tell you it's immigration's fault, and immigration will tell you it is Group 4. Group 4 will refer you



to the medical unit. At the end of the day nobody says they are responsible for detainees' health. There is one test case now – of chicken pox at Campsfield House. During the outbreak of this disease, the Chinese doctor who was on relief duty recommended the immediate release of the affected detainees and immigration accepted it. Unfortunately the doctor in charge of the health clinic resumed duty. He had been on leave. He cancelled the release of the rest of the affected detainees. Now all of us are sleeping in the same building making use of the same toilet and bathrooms that lead to further spreading of the disease.

In summary in Campsfield House detainees are not regarded to be human beings. It is only God that saves life here. Otherwise, there is gross negligence of the lives of detainees. Human Rights are being highly abused. Fighting in the centre, fire alarm, fainting of a detainee, missing property, which should all be matters for the civil police are all being handled by Group 4. A detainee has no right to call the police even if there are civil disturbances or riots in the centre. Important visitors are not allowed to see and talk with the detainees. There was a day a Minister from the Home Office came. He was not allowed to see the detainees. He only had a chat with the manager of the centre and Group 4 officials and he left.

It is called a detention centre but it is a complete prison, mere looking at the security net work shows you this. You will not be told that it is a prison yard, but it is. After the barbed wire, there is another high metal wall that is guarded all round with razor wire on top, to fortify the security even further. Last month in an attempt to escape four Kosovan boys broke their spines because they jumped from the roof to the ground. Several suicide attempts have been made, and many individual hunger strikes. A Russian went on hunger strike for 22 days and yet the doctor at Campsfield House medical unit recommended that he is still fit for detention.

A psychiatric patient (detainee) confirmed that he is suffering from panic attacks was deported with the sickness back to Zimbabwe. Confirmed and certified by three different doctors, yet immigration deported him with the sickness, Group 4 kept him in an isolation room before he was removed – to stop him from committing suicide. Campsfield House is hell fire on Earth

***This following account describes arrival in the UK, experiences of the immigration service and detention in Campsfield. It comes from someone who, after two years of being subjected to immigration bail restrictions, finally won his case on appeal. He has been recognised as a refugee under the 1951 Geneva Convention. Since his arrival in the UK he has helped numerous other asylum seekers including detainees.***

I arrived in the UK in March 2000 at Terminal 2 at Heathrow, having a two-year multiple-entry visa. I went to the check-in desk and I said: 'I can't go back to my country and I'm asking for political asylum' and this guy looked at me and said: 'It's not possible, you're joking. You came here tens of times, and what happens?' And I said, 'No, I'm not joking. I'm really in trouble' So he said: 'OK. Just wait' I had to wait for about three hours and I submitted, from the very beginning, all my documents, all my correspondence with Amnesty International, my personal ID documents,

photocopies of my family's documents and things like this. I was taken to a small room in Terminal 2, and interviewed later that evening, about six o'clock – that was about six, seven hours after I came. The interview was not following the procedures that they are supposed to use for a proper asylum interview. I have made a complaint about these two days later. So, what they wanted to do, they wanted to extract some information, which is not relevant for the case. The immigration officer is actually instructed to conduct the case, to have full control of the case, and to make the case weaker. Because, you see, what happens with asylum policy, the law is made in order to restrict the right to asylum.

After the interview the Chief Immigration Officer took the decision to detain me. I knew about these things because there was quite a big possibility to be detained. I was taken to Campsfield House that evening about eleven o'clock at night. I was taken with a van and of course I was pretty shocked because it was the first time I had to be detained over all my life. In such case the first thing I was trying to do was to gather some information so I asked the people from Group 4 on arrival – basic things like how long I'm supposed to stay there and what happens with my case and solicitors and stuff like this. They were not very helpful and they responded in very general terms. One of my questions was, I asked them to tell me, what percentage of people got sent back to their country of origin once they were detained and all of the guys said about 40%, but now after a few years I think there is more than that. Once in Campsfield, I was forced to stay there for 32 days until I got bail.

Life in Campsfield was very interesting because you expect some things would go a different way in a country like the UK which is supposed to respect human rights including the asylum seeker's human rights. So, I got to be introduced, got the induction. Induction is a kind of process that tries to scare you and to make you very fearful, what you do and how you behave and how you act and everything. My first concern was that the access to information was totally restricted; that was the big problem. I have learned that detention centres are actually for people to be detained and then removed to their country of origin, so if you have the bad luck to be detained you have very little chance of getting a good asylum process all the way. Your asylum claim tends to be extremely minimised because you have this handicap from the very beginning. They say your case is weak and they expect you will be losing and they keep you there until you finish all your rights of appeal and then you get removed. I have met a lot of people from different countries, some staying there for maybe one year, some of them for maybe a couple of weeks until they get out. Mostly this depends on the nationality and the legal representation. The big problem consists in legal representation and the fact that you don't have access to the information. You don't have any information related to the asylum process so you know nothing about the asylum claim and how they proceed with a case and everything. There is only one book *Immigration, Nationality and Refugee Law Handbook* by Mick Chatwin but that is kept under the desk and you must ask for it otherwise you will not get it. First of all they have no listed solicitors; they have only the Refugee Legal Centre and the Immigration Advisory Service – some small posters – and everyone knows what sort of service they provide. Most of the people that were stuck in detention were there because of a poor legal representation and indeed sometimes you are better off without a solicitor, rather than having an incompetent legal representative. Some of them were detained because of a dodgy legal representation or because of their nationalities (the so-called countries free of

persecution). You have a certified case, which tends to be two or three months long and then you get removed.

After I got detained the next move was to get a solicitor. It took me about three or four days until I got a solicitor. What happened is that I went to the library and I got Mick Chatwin's book and I could see the name of the Campaign to Close Down Campsfield and I rang the two numbers listed and I had the chance to speak to Teresa Hayter. I told her about what happened and everything about me and she said, 'OK, I'll help you with a solicitor.' and she introduced me to Elizabeth Millar – one of the best private solicitors from London who actually bailed me in April 2002. The funny thing is that I have made a complaint two days after I arrived at Campsfield because I felt I was not properly assessed in my interview and the immigration officer abused the system. So what happens is that they responded to this complaint after about 25 days or so but they excluded the relevant information that I was referring to, especially about things not working properly.

Back to Campsfield, everyone was very nervous and every minute was very hard to get on; you are wasting your life there doing nothing and just waiting, waiting for some good news from a solicitor or some decision from immigration. There was a very boring schedule, apart from having the six regular everyday dishes and rotating them, very poor quality food. The soap was unimaginable to use it; I think nobody would buy this in a shop and the toothpaste had the date expired for two years – I have a sample with me now. The library was having a few thousand books and some foreign language books but not all the languages, obviously. You could read newspapers every day; the major daily newspapers from UK, plus newspapers for other nationalities like Albanians and some Arab press. Also they had some French language newspapers. Not too many recreational facilities – you had a gym where you could play some volleyball or handball or even football. They also have quite a nice space for exercise equipment and people were doing this lifting and keeping fit and everything. Every week they put some movies on – videos – and I remember that they used to put a video on a Saturday when the demonstration done by Campaign to Close Campsfield was outside taking place, just in order to distract the attention of the people.

The health facilities were very poor. The doctor was coming, I think, on a twice a week basis and you had to put yourself on a list and you had to first see the nurse and then if she considered that your case was pretty difficult she would refer you to the doctor. I have assisted some people with translation and I have to go to the doctor with them and I was really not very well impressed about the service that they provide and the only thing was they were just taking your blood pressure and giving you some paracetamol. Paracetamol was the most common medication for any disease. I know that people were waiting for some operation.

Talking about Group 4, I remember that I was asked to do a translation for an induction for a new guy and he asked me specifically to translate to this new detainee. This guy said, 'If you give us shit we will give you back more shit'. So he asked me specifically to translate this. I think they have a policy of people being subjected to a high dose of fear and not to do any foolish things. I have been once to the information desk and asked for the UNHCR telephone number and I was very surprised to receive a response that they don't have this but this guy was pretty

helpful and said, 'Look, try the enquiries on the phone and they'll give it to you.' So I just rang when I could UNHCR because they are quite concerned of what happens in detention and they still give me a ring from time to time to ask me how I'm going with my case and everything. I managed to contact also the Terminal 2 at Heathrow, Immigration Service and they were not very helpful in discussing with me because I made a complaint and I think they were instructed not to say too many things.

I can say something about a European who had to be removed to Germany because he was a third country case. So this guy had the notice of removal, but he tried to mutilate himself so he actually cut himself on the belly and the arms and on the chest with a razor blade. They took him to the hospital and after a few days he was back. He was with guards in a special room, supervised and they actually managed to remove him later that week. He was very much afraid that after being sent to Germany he would be sent back, but the good thing is that he gave us a ring when he reached Germany, and in Germany they don't detain you so he was left quite OK to live, with social services and everything, so he was quite happy.

Visitors were a very important issue. When you had a visitor, I mean, from a morale point of view it was very positive. You had some confidence that someone is interested in your case and that things are going to be OK. I managed to have a visitor, sent by Asylum Welcome, who was also my surety, who agreed to stand surety for £2,000. After two years she was discharged of this so she is very happy that she could help, and also I'm very happy that I got help in this respect. There were some people that did not have visitors. I cannot say how they felt about it but I think they felt very miserable that nobody is interested in them, just a phone call or something. I think detention was probably what motivated me to do what I am doing at the moment, being involved in cases of asylum seekers being detained, doing bail things, assisting them with advice as a registered caseworker on immigration and asylum matters.

Detention was probably my second important experience after living under a communist regime for almost 30 years, that in the end proved to be beneficial and self-motivating.

***A speech given by a former detainee to the Conference to Defend Asylum Seekers, held at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, March 23rd 2002***

Many years ago when I was growing up my mother said to me: My son, when you are in the majority, yours is the test of tolerance – but beware, when you are in the minority yours will be a test of courage. It's only when I had given up on growing any further that the true implications of that wisdom came to my realisation.

I came to this country a few years ago still a teenager. My true testimony to you brothers and sisters is that I never set out to deceive, steal from the economy and I certainly never attempted to exploit the hospitality presented to me, never. Yet, like any other asylum seeker, I have found that to be the stigma attached to me. It is painful that I have become the subject of politicians' competition on who can hit me harder, who can teach me the most unforgettable lesson.

My friends this time two years ago I was in prison having committed no crime, just being an asylum seeker. I had spent a day in a police cell in Salford following an

early morning raid by the police and immigration squad at my house. During the five days I was locked up at Manchester Airport I found that they were to take me to a place where they took people like me: Illegal Immigrants.

It was all gloomy as I was shackled under guard into a Wackenhut security van heading to Harmondsworth detention centre just outside Heathrow. I was merely on transit there as the next day I was put into another security van to HMP Haslar. There I was greeted with tall walls, big gates and forceful prison guards. They ordered me to strip naked and did a complete body search on me. Then they gave me a prison toothbrush, a prison wash kit, prison boots and prison uniforms. They took photos of me, gave me a prison identity card and that was the way it was going to be – that was the place where they locked up people like me, as I was told two days earlier.

I believe the thinking of the authorities in detaining us asylum seekers is that:

- we become isolated from those who support us
- become hopeless
- assassinate our personalities
- teach us a lesson in a way that the fear of being detained acts as a deterrent to others in need of protection through the asylum system. The fact that I felt so humiliated during my detention and even after is not just a consequence but the primary aim of the policy.

Detention was for me the lowest point of my life. Those were the most difficult days of my life. The hardest thing about that existence is the repetitive cycle:

I woke up every morning behind the same bars, surrounded by the same tall walls that greeted me on my arrival there, ate the same food, and ended being locked up at the same time by the same indifferent prison guards. Everyday my stomach used to churn as fellow detainees were being removed and sent back, in most cases at a very short or no notice at all.

During my time in Haslar I witnessed a lot of fellow asylum seekers going clinically insane. In a confinement like that I can assure you that, like many other fellow asylum seekers, I found it easier to contemplate suicide than not to. And I did contemplate suicide, and I think I probably would have gone ahead with it if I hadn't lost my sister two months earlier. A few others went ahead with attempting it.

The day I arrived at Harmondsworth I was told that a detainee had committed suicide and was found hanging from the roof the day before. In Haslar an Egyptian asylum seeker attempted to take his own life after his asylum case was rejected. In both of these cases, and a lot others there was no inquiry, the detainees who had injured themselves were simply taken away with fellow detainees told nothing about their wellbeing or whereabouts.

Any sort of uprising against the system would be punished by sending the people responsible to harsher mainstream prisons.

I am trying to explain things that happened to me or around me in my detention days – but these are tales of two years ago experienced by one asylum seeker.

It is shocking that the approach of the government towards us asylum seekers has become more heavy-handed. The latest government White Paper on asylum and Immigration contains detention as the central policy. There will be more and more

asylum seekers condemned into detention centres. There has also been an introduction of reporting centres run by the Enforcement Officers with security provided by likes of the notorious Wackenhut, for example Dallas Court in Salford Quays where asylum seekers within 25 mile radius of Salford are required to report to at a specific time and date. I have no doubt that centres like these have been created as a facility for imminent detention and removal of asylum seekers. I am aware that there are plans to build a new such site at Great Dunmow near Stansted Airport with a holding capacity of 500 detainees.

I am also informed of the situation at Dungavel Asylum Prison in Scotland where one particular example highlights the monstrous attitude of the detention regime: A Roma family with two children under 5 years old – one child with badly deformed feet and the second is a double amputee. The parents have also been put in suicide watch. In the same prison a young man from Nigeria has been imprisoned, he is also on suicide watch and in isolation from other inmates.

Not so long ago disaster struck at Yarl's Wood. That was a tragic event but one that highlights the immoral dimension of detention as a policy. I want to particularly examine the reaction coming from those who hate us asylum seekers – a local MP, a Conservative, did his best to cause hysteria in the local community by telling residents to exercise caution as missing detainees were dangerous and capable of crime. The authorities ruled outright that the missing detainees had escaped without any investigation carried and while there was still a possibility that some may have died in the fire. But that is the sort of outlook we have been presented with as asylum seekers – with the authorities obsessed with appeasing the right wing and racist brigade by viewing and treating us with contempt and suspicion.

When I was released from prison after two and a half months there I was required to report at a police station every Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 7 and 8pm. That was for a year. I am still reporting every Monday. In return for staying away from the cage I have so far made at least 200 visits to that shop – it looks like I still have a long way to go as they have no plans for internet shopping yet. Upon my release I was put on the voucher scheme receiving £28 a week in food vouchers with no cash at all. I was not allowed to work which I found rather ironical as I was allowed to work in prison – but there was a catch: I was cheap labour and they could pay me a maximum of £10 a week. Apart from the support I had from outside, the one thing that inspired me to get through the turmoil of those days in prison was the anger and hate I had towards the system around me. There was still a thing or two I could pick to rebel against – I refused to be cheap labour and so I never took employment in prison.

Friends and comrades I am very sure that if the authorities have their way they would lock up all asylum seekers in asylum prisons and detention centres. We have been called liars, scroungers, illegal immigrants etc. Severe consequences have followed as a result of those accusations. Some asylum seekers have survived the consequences, some have not – but a lot, like myself, continue to suffer through them. My mother's wisdom rings true – it is a test of our courage.

My conscience is very clear, friends and comrades:

- The biggest scroungers this world has ever seen are the agents of colonialism and imperialism who were sent by the British Empire, they used force and deception to occupy and exploit our beautiful lands.
- Not I. Not my brother Bayo. Not my friend there – the illegal immigrants were those men and women sent to our lands by the British Empire who used trickery and assumed legitimacy to occupy and exploit our beautiful lands.

We asylum seekers cry for the imprisonment we are being subjected to. So friends and comrades I am inviting you to join us in, not necessarily crying with us, but helping us through our crying by opposing detention as a policy. I am inviting you to discuss ways in which we can oppose this hideous policy with a collective initiative.

## **USEFUL RESOURCES**

### **Publications**

A web link for all addresses that a detainee can ever need which is regularly updated is: <http://www.aviddetention.org.uk/addresses.htm>

The primary legislation which is the basis upon which most of the mentioned documents and books are based is the *Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 200*. In addition, *Statutory Instrument 2001 No. 238 (Detention Centre Rules 2001)* mentions 'The Compact', which is a document that every detainee should be issued with upon being received at the detention centre.

Amnesty (2005) *Seeking Asylum Is Not a Crime: Detention of People Who Have Sought Asylum*

Asylum Aid and Bail for Immigration Detainees (2004) *They Took Me Away: Women's Experience of Immigration Detention in the UK*

Christine Bacon (2005) *The Evolution of Immigration Detention on the UK: The Involvement of Private Prison Companies*, Oxford, Refugee Studies Centre, working paper 27

Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) (2004) *Preparing Applications for Release and Representing yourself in Bail Applications*, notebooks on bail 1 and 2

BID, *The Protection of Liberty*, periodical bulletin for immigration detainees

BID, *Special Bulletins*, country-specific and very useful in providing appropriate, official and up-to-date evidence

Emily Burnham *Challenging Immigration Detention: A Best Practice Guide* Immigration Law Practitioners' Association and Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID)

European United Left/Nordic Green Left (2006) *Lampedusa and Melilla: Southern Frontier of Fortress Europe* ([www.guengl.eu](http://www.guengl.eu))

Mina Fazel and Derrick Silove (2006) 'Detention of Refugees', *British Medical Journal* (332:251-252, 4 February)

Law Society of England and Wales, Law Society of Scotland, Legal Services Commission (LSC), Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC), and Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA), *Legal Advice for People Who Are Detained by the Immigration Service*; particularly useful, just 14pp in simple English and other languages

Legal Action for Women (2005) *A Self-help Guide Against Detention and Deportation*



Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (2004) *Harm On Removal: Excessive Force Against Failed Asylum Seekers*

Medical Justice Network (2006) *Know Your Medical Rights: An Advice Leaflet for People in UK Immigration and Detention Removal Centres*

National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns (2004) *Guide: How to Set Up a Public Anti Deportation Campaign*

## **UK and European contacts**

*If you want to know more about immigration detention and action against it, here are some organisations you can contact.*

Barbed Wire Britain – [www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk](http://www.barbedwirebritain.org.uk)  
Network to End Refugee and Migrant Detention  
C/o 17c, West End, Witney, Oxon OX28 1NQ

BID – [www.biduk.org](http://www.biduk.org)  
Bail for Immigration Detainees – London office tel: 020 7247 3590

Amnesty International – [www.amnesty.org.uk](http://www.amnesty.org.uk)  
UK section of international human rights membership organisation

AVID – [www.aviddetention.org.uk](http://www.aviddetention.org.uk)  
Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees – Box 7, Oxted, RG8 0YT

Asylum Aid – [www.asylumaid.org.uk](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk)  
Charity providing free legal advice and representation to refugees and asylum seekers.  
28 Commercial Rd, London E1 6LS

Campaign to Close Campsfield – [www.closecampsfield.org.uk](http://www.closecampsfield.org.uk)  
01865 558145 / 01865 726804 / 01993 703994

Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees – [www.gctwr.org.uk](http://www.gctwr.org.uk)  
c/o Fire Brigade Union, 52 St Enoch's Square, Glasgow G1, 07870 286 632

JCWI – [www.jcwi.org.uk](http://www.jcwi.org.uk)  
Joint Campaign for the Welfare of Immigrants

Legal Action for Women – [law@crossroadswomen.net](mailto:law@crossroadswomen.net)  
230A Kentish Town Road, London NW5 2AB, Tel: 020-7482 2496

London Against Detention – [lad@riseup.net](mailto:lad@riseup.net)

Medical Foundation – [www.torturecare.org.uk](http://www.torturecare.org.uk)  
Caring for victims of torture – 96-98 Grafton Rd, Kentish Town, London NW5 3EJ

Medical Justice Network – [info@medicaljustice.org.uk](mailto:info@medicaljustice.org.uk)  
Advice and support for people in detention in the UK

Migreurop – [www.migreurop.org](http://www.migreurop.org)  
Network to share knowledge about the spread of detention for undocumented foreigners in Europe

No Fortress Europe – [www.no-fortress-europe.org](http://www.no-fortress-europe.org)  
Campaign to close holding centres for migrants in the EU and neighbour countries, launched by European United Left/Nordic Green Left Group in European Parliament

Refugee Council – [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)  
3 Bondway, London SW8 1SJ Tel: 020 7820 3000

Refugee Legal Centre – [www.refugee-legal-centre.org.uk](http://www.refugee-legal-centre.org.uk)  
Independent, not-for-profit, legal advice centre for refugees and asylum seekers  
153-7 Commercial Rd, London E1 2DA Tel: 020 7780 3200

NCADC – [www.ncadc.org.uk](http://www.ncadc.org.uk)  
National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns

No Lager – [www.nolager.org](http://www.nolager.org)  
Information about anti-detention campaigns and the EU detention regime for refugees and migrants

PICUM (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants) –  
[www.picum.org](http://www.picum.org)  
Support for people who provide assistance to undocumented migrants in Europe

Prison Reform Trust – [prt@prisonreform.org.uk](mailto:prt@prisonreform.org.uk)

Stop Arbitrary Detention at Yarl's Wood – [sady\\_campaign@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:sady_campaign@yahoo.co.uk)