

# **Inquiry into the use of Immigration Detention**

## **Introduction**

1. I would like to keep this testimony anonymous, as I am still waiting for my case to be decided.
2. I come from DRC. I was tortured in my country in 2010, and claimed asylum in the UK in 2010. I am currently being supported by Medical Justice and Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture (now Freedom from Torture).

## **My experience of immigration detention**

3. I was detained twice when it was unlawful to do so, in 2011 and 2013. In 2011, while my case was pending, I was detained for nearly two months in Brooke House Removal Centre in Brighton. In 2013, while my case was pending in the European Court, I was detained for 11 days in Dover Immigration Removal Centre. I know it is illegal to detain me when a case is pending. At the moment, as I am waiting for my asylum claim to be decided I haven't pursued a case against the Home Office for detaining me when they shouldn't have.
4. I was also detained in Campsfield Detention Centre in Oxford for two and a half months in 2011, because my solicitor at the time had made a mistake with the application. When I was there, I found a new solicitor who referred me to Medical Justice who came to assess me. They recognised that I had been tortured and so I was released.
5. I was transferred to Barry House, an immigration hostel. When the nurse saw my file, she referred me to Medical Foundation (now Freedom from Torture). Since then I have been receiving treatment every week.

## **Conditions inside Immigration Detention**

6. When I was in Campsfield, the treatment from my point of view was good. We weren't locked up. At 5am in the morning, the corridors were open and we could go to pray or go to chapel. We could meet other people in the corridor and speak with them. The corridors were closed around 10pm. The rooms had windows, which you could open the window and could get fresh air in the room.

7. In Brooke House and Dover it felt like prison. The room had no window. There were two people per room in Brooke House. The toilet was inside the room, with no window it was not pleasant. They lock you in from 12pm, let you out for one hour, then lock you in again. From 8pm you are locked in until the morning.
8. If something like a fire happened it would be so dangerous – many people could die.
9. In Brooke House there was only one clipper for all the hundreds of inmates – we all had to use and it could have spread diseases. In Brooke House we could only get two pieces of bread in the morning. In Campsfield we could eat what we liked.
10. When I reached Dover, they gave me back up clothes to wear. I could tell that lots of people had worn it. I refused to wear those clothes because the smell was so bad when you open the bag.
11. When you went to Campsfield you felt like you had freedom. In the other places, after just two hours they would lock you inside again – it felt like a prison. I was an asylum seeker, I wasn't a criminal, but I felt like I was being treated like a criminal. I asked for this country's protection
12. Some people worked. You make work for £1 per hour, but if you worked like that outside it would be illegal. I understand that they want people to do something but it's not okay.
13. When you had a problem there were services there. At the detention centre in Dover they knew my situation, the GP knew about my torture and asked me about it. He said he was going to get back to me, but didn't get back as they released me before that happened. Normally I speak with someone from Medical Foundation every day, I was able to speak to people like The Forum or from Medical Foundation. I used to go to the chapel or to the library to try and find somewhere.

### **The impact of immigration detention**

14. Sometimes, when I remember the torture from my country, and I think about detention and the risk that I may go back there – well, you don't feel well. You feel the trauma again. Every time I went to detention I didn't feel well, I felt like I would lose my life if I got sent back home and I was so ill. So every time I went to detention or remember detention, I don't feel well. It depends on everyone's situation. In my country I used to work. After I established my business, I had a problem with the authorities, and because of that I lost my

mum. When I was arrested and taken to detention that kept on coming back to my mind.

15. When you go to detention you don't know how long you will be there – you meet people who have been there two years, five years, six years. You don't feel well when you don't know what will happen to you or how long you will be there. We are human beings as well – there needs to be a time limit. Being in detention for that time when you know they don't have the right to put you there – it makes you feel very bad.

### **Recommendations on Immigration Detention**

16. The problem I see is that in England they have a lot of detention centres. They need to put those people who are criminals in some places, but not with people who have done nothing wrong. When you go to detention you meet people who have robbed, stolen or hurt people. You are stuck in prison with people who are criminals, you end up spending time with criminals. If your roommate is a criminal, you feel like you can't share things with him. If everyone in detention was seeking asylum, you would be able to talk to each other. It can become a problem – a criminal can teach you bad things. It's not good to put people who have done nothing wrong in together with criminals: when people leave there's a chance they become criminals.
17. The treatment for people seeking asylum must be different than for people who are criminals. It should not be the same. When you are an asylum seeker, and you are just asking for protection, they need to assess whether you will be a problem for the country or for them. If I'm just asking for protection, then why should I be in detention? I should be somewhere where I'm treated like a human being. If you want to treat a criminal like that then fine, but if someone is asking for protection it is not good.
18. I am not sure about alternatives. Reporting for me has not been a bad thing, although I've been reporting every month for four years. It is such a stress every month. I've never absconded once so I don't understand why I have to report every month still. The whole process of going to the Reporting Centre, having to be searched and remove your belt and so on, it's a stressful process.