

This is the evidence submission to the Inquiry into Immigration Detention of a former detainee from the Middle East who is in his forties, and who was detained for 20 months. (Extracted from a tape-recorded interview and approved by the former detainee).

Experience of living in detention – context and duration

1. I was detained because I was working to support only myself – I was working as I was not in any type of support – working to support to myself to survive.
2. Detained for 20 months at 3 detention centres: Harmondsworth for a week, Lindholme for 6 months and Morton Hall for the remainder.

The conditions in immigration detention – including access to services

Lindholme:

3. Lindholme was the worst detention centre – but there are no good detention centres. Lindholme was a very dirty place, no internet, no shop, horrible. Even the clothing ... they submitted some clothing for us, it was very dirty, nasty – even the underwear, can you imagine, they gave us second-hand, used underwear.
4. I didn't feel safe in any detention centre because there were a lot of people around. There are guards and the guards are like prison guards.
5. When I was detained I was shocked and went into deep depression. The first 2 months for me was like hell. I was not eating, I was not sleeping, I got nightmares about detention and about sending me back... I got very bad nightmares. I lost my appetite and I lost weight. I was not eating - just coffee, tea and smoking, coffee, tea and smoking. I lost my appetite to live. I lost my appetite for life because I thought I was going to be sent back – I was powerless I could do nothing.
6. I lost all type of feelings, no feelings at all – unfortunately I didn't get the right care. I spoke with the Nurse but I didn't get enough attention ... they gave me some paracetamol, something like that.
7. In Lindholme I got a kind of disease in my eye.
8. The food was horrible.

Use of force - assault:

9. One of the things I want to say – while I was at Lindholme I was invited to attend an interview in Liverpool. They wanted to take my fingerprints to put them in a document related to my country's embassy. I didn't want to give my fingerprint to my country but because of that, guess what, I've been beaten!

10. I was beaten up in Liverpool in the Home Office. They took my fingerprints by force and I remember when they beat me up, they put me on a table and they pressed on my back until I lost my breath. I was shouting 'I can't breathe, I can't breathe ...' then one of them realised I was saying this and he left me. He took his hand off me and I could breathe.
11. This incident left me down and left me in a very depressed condition for a long time and I can't forget it 'til now. The way they treated me reminded me of the way I was treated in my country. I was tortured; I am a victim of torture. I have a medical report to prove it here from England.

Morton Hall

12. I was moved to Morton Hall because they closed Lindholme. It was a bit better, but still a detention centre, still frightening.
13. When I moved to Morton Hall I saw a doctor and I told him and this is when I discovered I had depression. He gave me anti-depressant pills and I am still on them until now. They calm me down but they are not helping, they are not curing - they are just keeping me calm, not changing anything.

Appropriate mechanisms to deal with any mental, physical or emotional issues you may have experienced

14. The medical care in detention is not like outside – its worse. I had a problem with my teeth – I went to the dentist three times, they couldn't sort my problem. When I went out that problem was sorted straight away – facilities inside are short – too short.
15. There should be access to the Police in detention centres. I tried to make a complaint about the assault at the Home Office when they took my fingerprints by force. When I spoke to the Police, each was referring me to the others - I couldn't reach any result. Access to the Police from detention centre was hard but even when I spoke to the Police they transferred me I was confused what to do, so I gave up. Especially this incident when it happened, it changed me permanently. I spoke with the Police in Morton Hall – the Police came and they said I have to speak with the police in Merseyside and when I spoke to Liverpool they said where are you living, and they said no, you have to get back to the Police in Lincoln.
16. I told my solicitor about the assault. He said it's very hard to trace it. I had proof - I had a paper saying I had attended the interview with Enforcement but nobody helped. My solicitor said that the money they get paid for me, on legal aid, is limited. In such a case you have to pay for it –but I have no money.
17. There is no mechanism to complain when you have a problem you don't know where to go, who you should speak to and nobody tells you.

18. There is access to legal support and solicitors, but I think that the legal advisors who work inside detention centre are not doing enough with people's cases. They don't listen enough – I think some of them are working with the Home Office – I couldn't trust them at all. They are not doing enough.

Victim of torture:

19. I was asked about torture when I was detained, and I told them but I was still detained. I have evidence – a medical report from Medical Justice. The doctor said 'Yes I believe this guy has been ill treated and tortured in his country.'

Longer-term impacts of detention

20. When I've been released – I had been inside for 20 months, since I have been released until now, I am not the same person, psychological, mental and physical. I am harmed physically ... I am not the same guy – before I was much better than me now.

21. The first 2 months I found it very hard to integrate into the community again – in the beginning. When I was walking in the street I felt like everyone was pointing at me by his finger saying 'look that guy was in detention'. I know in my mind it's not true but – can you imagine I felt like I am guilty! I am not guilty - I have done nothing! It feels like I am the guilty one – I have done nothing. I still feel like that.

22. Detention centre cost me a relationship ... my girlfriend. When I was detained she was shocked, she didn't know why I was detained. She thought I have done something wrong. I spoke with her to try to tell her – it's an immigration matter, I have done nothing wrong. She didn't believe me or she was not convinced, and I was away from her for a long time. She said 'I can't wait for you for an unknown time. I don't know what you have done.' I said I swear to you, I have done nothing wrong, it's just a matter of immigration. She said our relationship is finished because of that. She couldn't wait – what can I do? I have lost a relationship.

Life after detention:

23. I am not confident like before. Now I'm not allowed to work and I am reporting regularly. Believe me, every time when I go I know they can detain me anytime – they can detain me forever ... so I will be in the same circle. If this happens again I don't know ... I've thought of finishing my life, to end this suffering. The only thing that stops me is my faith. I am not allowed to commit suicide. I have thought about it many times even now when I am released.

24. I am in desperate situation, I am not allowed to work, I am not in any kind of support. I am homeless, I have no house, I live in a night shelter

– at my age. I am not young enough to suffer and walk in the street 12 hours a day. Go out 8 o'clock and come back 8 o'clock.

25. When I am speaking to myself – I think 'who will take that rubbish, who is that guy, someone who is walking the street everyday 12 hours to pass the day to sleep in the night shelter.' I don't want it to be like that. I don't want any support from the government I just want one thing the right to work until I sort my case. I am not after any support, just give me the right to work support myself and I will be useful for myself and the local community.

26. I am isolated, I am not in contact because that detention centre destroyed my life, destroyed my life. I feel like I am less than the others. My rights - my civil rights, my human rights - have been taken from me. I feel vulnerable, I am not equal to the others. The others are higher than me! I don't want to make a contact when I am in a lower situation...

27. Physically I can't say how, but I am changed, I am not the same guy.

Any other information about detention that you would like to share

28. The Home Office tried twice with my Embassy to get a travel document, but my country refused my return twice. If my country refused me return why do they keep me in detention?

29. The point, the really harmful point is that when you are in detention you never know when or if you are going to be released. In prison they have a release date, in detention centre you are just waiting for the unknown, if you are going to be released or not, if yes – when? It's unknown. This is what frustrated me.

30. Actually inside detention centre I felt powerless and vulnerable, very, very vulnerable. I say to myself 'You are not a vulnerable, powerless person you are very intelligent and you speak good English' but I felt like that. Imagine in detention there are a lot of people who don't speak English – imagine what they are suffering inside. They don't know what's going on around them. They don't know why they are detained, how long for, they don't know nothing about their rights or how to get their rights. Even though I am speaking English to a certain level and I can read and write English I found it very difficult. To carry on or even to follow up my case, every time the Home Office do something, like removal directions, they do it on the weekends. They do it Friday evening before they close the door ...so you only have the weekend to deal with the problem... your solicitor is off, everyone is off, if you need to fill in a form or send it to a Court. A lot of people are deported because of this trick."