



## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF DETENTION

1. René Cassin is a London-based human rights non-governmental organisation that works to promote and protect universal human rights, drawing on Jewish experience and values. Jewish people have been forced to seek refuge from persecution throughout their history, and as such we feel uniquely compelled and qualified to speak out on the issue of Asylum and Detention. Below is a testimony of an individual who has been through detention.

2. P.K came to René Cassin at the asylum seeker's drop-in centre of the New North London Synagogue as he was willing to share his story about detention. **He wants to remain anonymous as his asylum case is currently under examination** by a local court but he is willing to give oral evidence to the panel if possible. We met him twice, in August and September to hear his testimony on his experience of detention.

**ARE YOU OVER 18:** YES

**DATES IN DETENTION:** July 2010 for three years.

**WHERE YOU UNDER 18 AT ANY POINT DURING THE TIME YOU WERE DETAINED:**  
NO

**NAME OF DETENTION FACILITY:**

1. Gatwick (Brook House and Tinsley House), Lanarkshire (Dungavel House), Dover (Kent), Colnbrook-Heathrow (Middlesex)..... etc.

2. I was detained around July 2010 and I have spent three years in total between the above detention centres and other detention centres but I can't remember precisely where and when I have been detained. I was moved in between these centres without even knowing the reasons why I was moved but all I can say is that: one day, the officers at the centre just picked me up from the cell, put me in a van and sent me to another centre, without letting me know ahead of time, no one ever gave me information as to where they were taking me to or what was going to happen.

3. One thing I can remember very well is that I was just taken from Heathrow (Harmondsweath) to Scotland without the officers telling me why and where they were taking me to. In fact I only got to know that I was in Scotland when I was brought out of the van into the building. This day, I cried so much and said to myself that even an animal would not be moved like this, I was just carried like an object in the back of a van, from one place to another because I am a detainee and have no right or reason to know where I am taken to and for how long I will be moved.

4. During the three years I spent in detention, I was sometimes moved to a detention centre just for three days or a week or two. Sometimes I was taken to another detention centre for a month and sometimes for several months. This is why I can't remember exactly where and when I have been detained.

**What were your experiences of living in immigration detention, including the context and duration of your stay?**

5. I am from Ghana, my father is a Muslim and my mother was a Christian. After my Mother died when I was a child, my father fought with her family with the mind of looking after me but instead he sold me when I was still a kid to a rich man in Ghana who owns a lot of plantations. I grew up only to know that I was a slave in that plantation, I was working several hours a day, seven days a week and throughout the year, I was locked up at night and I suffered a lot by way of being tortured over the years. I tried to escape the first time when I was 15, but the attempt failed. When I was around 20-21 years old, I planned to escape again and this time, someone from the plantation offered to help me.

6. I didn't know that in fact I will be trafficked to England. I arrived in 2003; I didn't know where I was taken to until I arrived here in England (though I was told that I will be taking where the white people are). Upon arrival I had to work for a group of men in a warehouse, they didn't pay me nor did I have anything else from them. Also, I was locked up there with other people.

7. After five years of forced work in England, I managed to escape in 2008. Once out, the first thing I did was to get help, even if at the same time, I was afraid to report to the authorities. But as I thought it was the right thing to do, I went to authorities. However, I was straight away told that they will take me back to my country of origin.

8. Once put in detention, I explained from the beginning my past to the immigration officers. I thought, as they were aware that I have been tortured in the past as a slave in Ghana and that I was trafficked into England against

my will, they will release me. But they ended up locking me and as a result I spent three years in detention again.

**What were the conditions in immigration detention like, including your ability to access services such as legal advice, healthcare, pastoral support?**

9. The conditions in detention centres are so awful and really really bad. It is so terrible that I would not wish even to my enemy to be detained. All your rights are so restricted, the food is so bad and the officers there are not friendly at all but they are very wicked. In detention centre, you don't have the control of your life and you are just like in prison.

10. There is no real access to legal advice. Most of the solicitors there will come and see you only to tell you that you must go back to your country. The solicitors don't work in your interest, they work against you instead, without even giving you good advice as to what you should do and what you shouldn't do. They are not here to help you in anyway.

11. Access to health care services is very limited because of the bureaucracy in the detention system. If you have a problem, like pain or anything you can't see a doctor or a nurse just by asking. You have to request, fill a whole lot of forms and then wait until you are called. Some of the detention centres are a little bit more flexible, which means that you have to wait a little bit less and might be able to see a doctor but Harmondsworth and Dover are the worst: there you can't really have access to any healthcare services.

12. Also, the doctors in detention centres are only working according to the immigration standards and not according to the standards of their profession, they don't care about people and their problem. Whatever your problem is, they will just give you, sometimes, paracetamol.

13. Meanwhile, the Priests were coming to the detention centres every Sunday. They are the people who helped me to go through all this difficult time.

**Were there any longer-term impacts of detention on you, your family and/or your wider community?**

14. The long term impacts can't be measured. All I can say is that these three years of detention still have an impact on my life physically, psychologically and economically. After the detention, I didn't know where to start my life, I have been locked up for so long, when I escaped the forced work, all I wanted was to be a Christian, study and have life here for myself. But they locked me again when I did nothing wrong, they saw all the scars all over my body showing the tortures I have been subjected to in Ghana and in the warehouse in England but they didn't care.

15. The greatest traumas are psychological and economical. I was detained like in prison when I did nothing wrong, I was only a victim of human trafficking and that has created a deep psychological trauma in my life, I still go every week for counselling sessions to help with my life.

16. Economically, I don't receive any money from the immigration system and that has made my life so difficult. I don't know when my asylum case will be decided, maybe in the next few months, but apparently it can also take years... Sometimes, I don't even have money to go to see my lawyers or to go to my GP appointments, as none of them reimburse travel expenses.

17. Nobody can come out from detention and says he or she is alright because nobody wants to be locked up for no reason and because there you cannot decide for yourself and your life. Also, your rights are too restricted.

**Is there any other information about detention that you would like to share?**

18. The guards in detention centres are not friendly and sometimes they even beat you up, I witnessed that for myself.

19. The Detained Fast Track System is just made to create, confuse and enable to refuse more people's applications, even if they are vulnerable.