

## **Manchester Testimony 6**

I am a refused asylum seeker living in Manchester. I don't want to say my name, but I do want to tell you what happened to me in detention. I don't have leave to remain in the UK and I've been waiting 12 years. I tried to make a fresh claim twice, but the Government changed the rules after 2007 (I came in 2003).

### **1) Your experiences of living in immigration detention, including the context and duration of your stay**

I was detained in September 2009 and was in detention for 6 months. The reason I was detained was because I didn't go to sign for around six months or a year. I was young and I didn't realise how important the rules were. I thought 'You don't give me any support or housing, so why should I go to sign?' They sent me a letter one week before I was detained. I didn't have a solicitor.

The police stopped me at a protest and asked my name and ID and detained me. They took me to a cell in Salford police station. It was like being in prison. I was taken to Pennine House for 2 days, then I was taken in a G4S van to Colnbrook.

They took me to a horrible, dark, short-term area. It's really like a prison... no windows or air. They took me to a long-term unit after 2 days and I stayed there for 6 months.

### **2) The conditions in immigration detention, including your ability to access services such as legal advice, healthcare, pastoral support;**

When they take your freedom, how nice can it be? They close the doors to your room from 9pm – 7am. They can put anyone in your room, even criminals. You're an asylum seeker, you aren't guilty of any crime. I shared with a man from Mexico who killed his wife.

Sometimes the food was poor and we were treated bad. I went on hunger strike about the quality of the food and treatment from workers.

### **3) Whether there were appropriate mechanisms to deal with any mental, physical or emotional issues you may have experienced prior to or during your time in detention;**

They don't care about mental problems. Maybe they care about other medical issues... I don't know, I didn't have these.

One guy at the detention centre had heart problems and shouldn't have been there at all. He had a heart attack and they took him to hospital, but not until it got really bad.

I was sharing with one guy from Burkina Faso. He had a panic attack, crisis. I pushed the alarm to call staff – they didn't come for 40 minutes.

### **4) Any longer-term impacts of detention on you, your family and/or your wider community;**

Detention Centres are a prison. They put you in darkness and put you in a very stressful state of mind. But sometimes something changes inside you and you come out stronger. You need lots of books to take your mind away from being in prison. If you find that light inside you come out stronger. But you feel changed. You look at the world with different eyes.

### **5) How far does the current detention system support the needs of vulnerable detainees, including pregnant women, detainees with a disability and young adults?**

I don't think there will ever be a fair and humanist system while detention remains. I've lived through different governments and both times I've witnessed people detained with critical health problems. If someone's detained with a heart problem, what's going to happen to him?

**7) There is currently no time limit on immigration detention – in your view what are the impacts (if any) of this?**

Indefinite detention is just like never knowing when you're going to get leave to remain.

To see the time pass and you can't move on is very stressful and worrying. You didn't do any crime. You didn't do anything bad. You want to be happy. To be free.

I saw people there for 2 years. Even me – there for 6 months – was too much.

**8) What are the wider consequences of the current immigration detention system, including any financial and/or social implications?**

When you're in prison you're outside of the world. You have your own philosophy to cope in there.

Your brain may become too far detached. You spend too much time thinking alone. You can't spend your energy like that – you might go too deep down, too far. It might change your character. It's very hard to adjust when you come out.

**9) How effective are the current UK alternatives to detention (e.g. bail, reporting requirements)? Are viable alternatives to immigration detention in operation in other countries?**

Detention is wrong. So is tagging and signing. Wrong all over.

There are diplomatic ways the government could try. They could talk to asylum seekers, talk to your government and look at all the pieces of the picture and find ways to make international security. You could talk to asylum seekers here to find alternatives to detention. Otherwise you're just playing with people's lives.