

**Name : P from Africa, as told to Nic Eadie, Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group**

**Email : [nic@gdwg.org.uk](mailto:nic@gdwg.org.uk)**

**Address : GDWG, The Orchard, Gleneagles Court, Brighton Road, Crawley, RH10 6AD**

**Telephone : 01293 657070**

***P asked not to have his name made public.***

***He would be prepared to give oral evidence if his name were not made public.***

### Executive summary

- My detention in the UK caused me a huge amount of harm. I was locked up for over three years in total, on two separate occasions. I am a trafficking victim and I should never have been there in the first place, but I feel I was never believed and I was never given the care that I needed.
- My detention has affected me psychologically, physically, socially and economically. It is always with me, and has made it so hard for me to adjust to life in the community. I still see myself as locked up, even though I am now free. I have to see a counsellor every two weeks now to help me cope with the damage detention has done to me.
- There are so many problems with detention. Nobody should be harmed the way that I have been.

### My experience of living in immigration detention

1. I was first detained in April 2010, after I had served three months of a six month prison sentence for deception, as I had been trying to get a job without permission to work in the UK. I was brought to the UK first in 2003 by traffickers, who then forced me to work for them in a warehouse for five years. I escaped in 2008 and spent long periods homeless and sleeping on buses before I was sent to prison. I was only told that I was going to be handed over to Immigration 3 or 4 days before my sentence finished.
2. I spent the next 2 years and 8 months detained, and spent time in many detention centres: Colnbrook, Dover, Lindholme and eventually Brook House. I was transferred between centre so many times, and there never seemed to be a reason. I would just be woken up in the night and told that I had five minutes to pack and leave. You can never say no or they will force you. If you argue or struggle they will hurt you. I was so scared. It made me think of all the time since I was a small child in my country that I had been locked up and forced to work in very bad conditions.
3. I was finally released on bail in December 2012, after I had made more than 20 bail applications. They had all been refused as they said I would abscond. I have not missed any

signing at the Home Office since I was released. However, I was detained again in July 2013 when I went to sign. I was not told why. I spent another 6 months in detention in Harmondsworth. They gave me four different removal directions during this time, and even twice they took me to the airport, but all of them were cancelled. I don't know why, apart from the last one when I applied for Judicial Review. I was finally released on bail after I got a good solicitor. I have been signing on again every week for the last 9 months, and have my Judicial Review hearing next month.

#### The conditions in Immigration detention

4. For me, the conditions in detention were very terrible. Particularly bad are the healthcare services, which let me down very badly. I had a serious medical problem but the healthcare services were very very appalling, particularly in Dover IRC. They cancelled many hospital appointments that I had without giving me a reason, and I often went many days without the medication that I need. Twice I was taken to hospital only to find that no appointment had been booked, or they had been cancelled. My letters from hospital were intercepted. I complained about my treatment, which went all the way to the ombudsman. He found that the Medical Centre at Dover had breached the rules, and I received an apology from the manager at Dover. I was in very bad health as a result of this, but all I got was an apology. When they did take me to hospital appointments I was always handcuffed. I felt so bad and intimidated, I was very angry, I couldn't think. I felt like I was a slave again, not even human.
5. I also found it very hard to find a good solicitor to take on my case. I did not really trust solicitors as my criminal lawyer had let me down so badly and lied to me, and I was so depressed when I was in Dover that I didn't really leave my room. I wrote my name down to see a solicitor many times but often I was told that they could not take on any new clients for two or three months, so many people could not find a lawyer before they were removed from the country. You often sign legal aid forms then hear nothing for weeks before being told they cannot help. You are forced to use these firms only. When I did speak to the lawyers who came to the centre they told me that they couldn't help me because I had a deportation order. So many lawyers have messed up my case for so many years. I had to represent myself at almost all my bail applications, but I didn't really know what to do and I was always refused. Now I am lucky as I have found a good lawyer, but there aren't many around now.
6. For me the conditions in the centres were so bad. The food was not healthy at all and not tasty either. The officers in Dover treated me so badly, like I was a prisoner. One of them racially abused me, but when I complained I was told that he was only joking with me, and that I had abused him, which I absolutely did not. Nobody listened to me. I never knew what was going on. I cannot understand why I was held in these prison-like places for so long. There was no need to hold me there.
7. I did get good support from one religious visitor in Brook House, and through him I found the visitors group. They were the only people who helped me get through this experience. I tried to commit suicide twice, but the Father helped me get through that. My visitor relieved me of so many things. She was someone to talk to and to share what was happening. Without them both I don't think I would have survived.

### Whether there were appropriate mechanisms to deal with mental, physical or emotional issues

8. I am a victim of trafficking, and I have been treated very badly by many people my whole life. When I was detained both my physical and mental health got very much worse, but I do not feel I was given the right help. I don't think it is possible to care for people like me in detention, and I don't think people like me should be detained.
9. When I was moved from Dover to Brook House, after being detained for over a year, I told the Brook House doctor that I needed a single room because I have a lot of nightmares and shout out a lot at night, plus I get very scared when I think that I will be sleeping with anyone else in the room due to something that happened to me in the past. I have a fear of being attacked, so I told them I could not share. They gave me a room on my own for three nights, but on the fourth night they brought someone in to share with me. I told them I could not share, so they said I had to go to the block as punishment. I stayed there three days but then they promised me they would put me in a single room when I left. However, the first night I left the block they suddenly put someone else in my room just before lockup at night. I did not sleep all night. I did not feel safe. I spoke to the Chaplain about this, about how I was so scared, and told him that if I had to share a room then I wanted it to be with a Christian. Eventually I was allowed to share with another Christian. I still found it very difficult to sleep, but every day I tried to find the strength to overcome my fear.
10. I told the Home Office that I was tortured, that I should not be in detention. They wouldn't do anything about it, even though they seemed to believe it sometimes, and I gave them medical evidence to prove it. It was even accepted in my asylum application, but they told me I could just go back to my home country and live somewhere else where the people who hurt me could not find me. This treatment by the Home Office led to my mental state being very very bad, and this still affects me now.

### Any long term impacts of detention on me and the wider community

11. My detention has affected me in so many ways. I find it very hard to be around people as I was isolated for such a long time. The detention made everything else that happened to me before even worse. It felt like I was being endlessly punished. I am still now in limbo. I can't work, I can't study, I can only wait. My life is being wasted. I am still a prisoner. This is affecting my whole being.
12. I am in some ways fortunate as I have met some people through my Church who have supported me, and I am now able to live with one of them. This means I get no other financial support, and I have to sign on every week at the Home Office, which is more than ten miles from where I live. The people I live with give me money to get the bus, but without this I would have to walk. I have never missed a signing, but when I asked to sign only once a month they refused.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

13. **The best thing you can do is limit how long you can keep people in detention. It was so difficult not knowing how long I would be there for.**

14. **Judges in the immigration courts should be more accountable. At the moment they are not fair, they do not listen to us, believe the Home Office more, and are able to make any decisions they want to without giving real reasons.**
15. **Detainees should be paid a fair wage in detention. At the moment they are exploited by being paid £1 per hour.**
16. **Healthcare needs huge improvement. Medication should be given to all those that need it.**
17. **People who have experienced torture or who have been trafficked, or are in any other way vulnerable, should never be put in detention. It is far too harmful.**
18. **Transferring detainees around to different centres should stop. It is very disruptive and there usually didn't seem to be any reason for it.**
19. **People should not be separated from their families by detention. I saw many people that this happened to, who were often detained a long way from their families outside.**