

Information about yourself	
Do you want your name to be made public?	No
Do you wish to give oral evidence before the inquiry panel?	Yes
Are you making this submission by yourself or is someone helping you? If so, who is this person?	Madeleine Crowther from Waging Peace gave me some help writing up my account. E: maddy.crowther@wagingpeace.info T: 0207 243 0300 A: Park Place, 12 Lawn Lane, SW8 1UD
Date you are completing this form	22/9/2014
When were you released from detention?	03/01/2012
How long were you in detention?	Five month and six days - from 29/07/2011
In which detention centres/prisons were you detained?	Harmondsworth and Colnbrook
Can you tell us a little about why you were in detention?	My application for asylum in the UK had been refused
Do you now have a right to remain in the UK?	I have temporary admission in the UK, I do not have a right to remain here
If you are still waiting to hear from the Home Office about their decision on your case, how long have you been waiting?	Nine years and five months
Submission	
<p><i>1) Your experiences of living in immigration detention, including the context and duration of your stay;</i></p> <p>I come from Sudan and sought asylum in the UK in 2005 after facing persecution. I was arrested during one of my regular visits to an immigration reporting centre on 29 July 2011, as my application for asylum in the UK had been refused. I was taken to Harmondsworth and then Colnbrook and kept in detention for a period of five months and six days, until 3 January 2012.</p> <p>During detention I was subjected to treatment which made me feel like a criminal, despite the fact that during my long stay in the UK I had never broken the law or even been to a police station. I felt very disappointed, as I expected more from this great country, and its government and laws.</p> <p>Detention was horrible. The cells are sometimes so small that you have to go out of the room and come back in just to turn around. You're locked in these tiny cells with your roommate for so much of the day. At Harmondsworth we were free to access facilities and go about freely from 7am to 8pm, but at Colnbrook you were locked in for four hours during the day, in two two-hour intervals. During this time you can't access any of the facilities and get very bored. The officers weren't helpful, they were more like machines who never talk to you.</p>	
<p><i>2) The conditions in immigration detention, including your ability to access services such as legal advice, healthcare, pastoral support;</i></p> <p>Because I was arrested during one of my regular visits to report I was not prepared for life in detention. I did not have any money on me, and none of my friends or contacts knew where I had been taken. Without money, I did not have the means to contact my solicitor or anyone who might be able to help me. I felt so lonely and helpless that I became suicidal.</p> <p>I felt it was inadequate that none of the officers at the centre were Home Office employees. It meant I couldn't deal with the Home Office directly about my case, but only contact them via fax, which took a long time. This delayed my case considerably. In addition, the private companies that ran the centres, G4S and Geo, made it difficult for me to access legal advice. The centres' offices would sometimes receive documents relating to my case and delay passing them to me. In one instance, they kept a document I had to sign for one week.</p>	

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;

Physical

I have chronic pancreatitis, for which I've received medical attention before, including having surgery in Leeds. When I entered detention I was on medication to manage this condition, but when they arrested me and I was taken to Harmondsworth I did not have this medication on me. I was made to wait a week to see a doctor, and without my medication I was in a lot of pain. When I did see the doctor he changed my medication and it made my condition worse.

After three months I was in such pain that I asked an officer to call an ambulance for me. He refused, not believing it was an emergency. I called an ambulance myself, but again they didn't believe me and they cancelled it. I was in such pain that I spent that night screaming. It was only when my condition deteriorated and I collapsed the next day that they took me to Hillingdon hospital. I was taken there in handcuffs and chained to my hospital bed, as the below image shows (taken on 20 December 2011). I was watched over by two officers at all times during my stay in the hospital, for a total of three days. I was given morphine to manage the pain of my condition.

I also told staff at Colnbrook that I had been tortured in Sudan and beaten with pipe cables. Nursing staff at the centre completed a Rule 35 report on 17 October 2011, but this was later deemed inadequate by an outside doctor, Dr Teresa Wozniak, from the organisation Medical Justice, as it incorrectly stated I did not have visible scars on my body. Dr Wozniak confirmed I had a number of mature scars, including a cigarette burn, consistent with my account of my torture, during a consultation on 28 November 2011. According to the official guidelines I should not have been detained in the first place.

Mental/emotional

Due to the conditions in detention, my inability to get in touch with my solicitor or my friends and family, and the fear of being returned to Sudan, I began feeling very helpless, depressed, and eventually suicidal. I tried to commit suicide on 9 November 2011 at Colnbrook by taking an overdose of Paracetamol. After this failed, I felt I had no alternative but to go on hunger strike. For 39 days I refused to eat, except for a couple of days, when I was given Ensure (as I was not aware it was a nutritional supplement at the time). None of the staff offered medical attention or referred me to a mental health service during the time of my hunger strike. Luckily, I was in contact an organisation called Waging Peace [Article 1's sister organisation], and they put me in touch with the organisation I mentioned before, Medical Justice. Dr Wozniak found I had lost at least 10% of my body weight, from 78kg to 71kg, and that I was possibly suffering from postural hypotension and so was unfit to board a plane to leave the country as I couldn't physically stand to do so. She also confirmed that I had severe depression with suicidal intent. The Colnbrook healthcare team did not take my blood tests as specified by the Department of Health's then relevant Guidelines for the Clinical Management of people refusing food in detention settings and prison, leaving weeks between blood tests, even where there were clear abnormalities. I was only taken to hospital once Dr Wozniak assessed my condition. I only stopped my hunger strike when I heard my fresh claim for asylum had been accepted and I would not be sent back to Sudan.

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

I now have flashbacks due to my bad experience in detention. I feel very depressed and suicidal.

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 the detention centres are suitable for people with physical or mental disabilities, pregnant women or young adults. My own treatment shows it isn't suitable for vulnerable detainees with pre-existing health conditions, mental health issues, or who have suffered torture in their home country. And when I was in detention I noticed disabled people, in wheelchairs or who had one leg, who couldn't use the detention centre facilities, like the library, courtyard or cafeteria, because of access difficulties. I also saw old men who had difficulty getting up to the second bunk on their bunk beds, so the sleeping arrangements were completely unsuitable for them.

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

Claiming asylum is not a criminal act so I do not think anybody should be detained for it. Being detained for a long period has a very negative impact on your physical and mental health.

7) Are the current arrangements for authorizing detention appropriate?

They're not working. Despite saying that I had suffered torture in Sudan, and Dr Wozniak of Medical Justice finding evidence of this, the Rule 35 report completed by nursing staff in Colnbrook on 17 October 2011 wrongly said I had no visible scars on my body. According to the official rules I should not have been detained in the first place, but the system just isn't working as it should.

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

Financially, you spend everything you have in detention and are unable to earn any more money. I am now homeless and destitute.

Socially, when you come out of detention most people treat you like a criminal, as they do not know the difference between detention and prison. I also found my mood changed once I left, making it hard to maintain friendships. In my case I lost most of my friends.

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?

In an ideal world, you'd get rid of detention entirely. It's an entirely inappropriate solution. Because of this, almost any alternative sounds better in order to maintain people's physical and mental health and general well-being.