

Inquiry into the use of Immigration Detention SUBMISSION FORM

Information about yourself	
Your name	Not provided
Your contact details	Not provided
Do you want your name to be made public?	No
Do you wish to give oral evidence before the inquiry panel? (Please note that due to a limited amount of time available, the panel will not be able to take evidence directly from everyone.)	No
Are you making this submission by yourself or is someone helping you? If so, who is this person?	Yes. Refugee project co-ordinator helping me.
Date you are completing this form	22 nd September 2014
If you are you in detention now...	
When did your detention begin?	
Is this the first time you are detained in the UK?	
If this is not the first time you are in detention, can you tell us how many times you were in detention before and how long?	
Can you tell us a little about why you are in detention?	
If you are no longer in detention and are currently living in the community...	
When were you released from detention?	19 th November 2007
How long were you in detention?	3 months
In which detention centres/prisons were you detained?	Yarl's Wood
Can you tell us a little about why you were in detention?	I overstayed my visa.
Do you now have a right to remain in the UK?	Outcome of fresh claim imminent.
If you are still waiting to hear from the Home Office about their decision on your case, how long have you been waiting?	7 years

Questions form the panel – Please read the sub-questions on pages between 12 and 15 of 'The Guide for Individuals'. Make sure your answers will not be longer than 3,000 words.

1) When I arrived I went straight to the yard where they send new people – for 3 to 4 days. Then I went to Avocet (wing) for a good 3 months. At the time, there were whole families in detention and I used to see them at church. What scared me at the beginning was the doors: door after door, each one to be locked, guards always with me. There was a group of us, around 15 girls from the same region in Africa and some were from Dove (wing) and we used to try and meet up in the library but there were the doors, so many security doors to go through. I'll never forget the noise they made when they came to check on us at 5am; their boots would wake you and sometimes you had not long managed to get to sleep. This used to scare me alot and I remember thinking that this baby inside me was not going to survive. Even up to now, I always have to turn the volume on my phone off completely at night. You also see that big fence outside the window and I remembered the same thing at maximum prisons in Kenya, except it is for murderers. The food was not nice at all, the way they cooked it – I remember a lady from my country who had been in prison and she said that the food was far better in prison than at the detention centre. Me, I was pregnant but within one week they told me I was going to be sent home. This paralysed us: the stress, the lack of sunlight. They used to say people were pretending to be depressed to avoid going home. Some were even taken to the airport naked or near-naked and came back beaten. There was a fire in the laundry one night and we were outside in the cold for four hours.

2) There was a health centre – you could go there if you were depressed. But they asked me if I wanted an abortion. There was ‘legal corridor’ where you could go for legal advice or finding out about your case. They gave me something like a ‘bleeper’ and when you heard the ‘beep’ you had to go straight to the ‘legal corridor’. But to go anywhere, you had to be escorted by guards because they had to open the doors. I always felt like the baby was coming. There was a specific hour for making phone calls or using the library but this was accessed through many security doors. You could request an interpreter. There wasn’t much room for dignity and respect with so many people of different nationalities, some having fights, shouting at each other, taking their clothes off and inmates sleeping with guards – so people were inmates and they didn’t even respect each other.

Better access to education in the form of short courses would help. Removing the doors, the fences, the guards, the morning visits; we’re not criminals. Outside areas should be provided, somewhere to e.g. play football.

3) My emotional and mental problems started in detention. I was always worried about receiving letters afterwards. One week in detention is like a year and there were no counselling services. We used to pray together, a group of us girls from my country. The whole experience gave me a very bad impression of white people and made me feel angry about them whereas previously in my home country we saw white people on the television and looked up to them. For my experiences in detention and afterwards, I accessed a counselling service via a local women’s centre. The whole process, particularly section 4 support and having to use vouchers has been painful.

4) My friends couldn’t visit me in detention because they had no money to get there – most of them I didn’t see again. After I left detention, I was on Section 4 support. My baby was born two months after I was released – I used to cry alone with my baby behind closed curtains. I trusted people less. People smiled but didn’t mean it. I lived in fear of being detained again, even returned and it left me with much resentment. The whole experience makes you feel criminalised. When I was taken for a pregnancy scan at Bedford Hospital, I was accompanied by four guards, one at the front, one at the back and one on each side. And the embarrassment: I was wearing the grey clothes issued by the prison (I think because mine had got too tight due to the final stages of pregnancy) and people would look at you. The same as when using Section 4 vouchers at the supermarket. They thought I must have done something wrong; perhaps I was a prostitute or a drug addict.

5) I worry about the lasting impact on those not just awaiting but actually being deported.

6) There wasn’t really any special support for people with disabilities. Nor any separate areas for pregnant women, access to a mid-wife etc.

7) There should be a maximum limit of six months. The uncertainty is the worst thing and I’m still living in a form of detention, not knowing what the outcome of my case will be, what my future and that of my children will be...

8) The current arrangements for authorizing detention are disproportionate: It was 5am when they came to arrest me with 5 cars. I was pregnant but I was in the police cells for 3 days with only a small ‘mat’ against the cold. At first, they said they were going to take me to the embassy then they took me to Yarl’s Wood.

9) The current immigration detention system has an impact on the wider community, it damages communities. There should be freedom to work. The money, the cost of detention could be used to develop people’s lives, not the opposite.

10) Reporting seems to be effective and is preferable to detention. Even tagging would be better than detention – you would at least have some form of freedom and access to fresh air. It is horrible waiting for them to come for you...