

30/09/2014

Good day!

I am writing this statement for the request of an 'Inquiry in to the use of Immigration Detention'. I am an asylum seeker in the United Kingdom whose case is currently ongoing. I have a civil case which is also ongoing and for these reasons I would rather prefer to be anonymous in this subject matter otherwise stated. The information below is a statement of truth as I observed or witnessed during my time in immigration detention.

1. I was detained by the Home Office for three periods. My first detention was at Morton Hall IRC in Lincoln. It was only when I was there I felt able to confide in a nurse that my real reason to fear return was on account of the persecution I had suffered because of my sexual identity. I do feel gratitude to her. I was released from Morton Hall IRC and sent to stay in Huddersfield at an Asylum Support Centre before being taken back a few days later to Morton Hall IRC. I remained there for two months and was then moved to Harmondsworth IRC because I had removal directions. I was moved to Gatwick IRC because the removal direction did not proceed. I became very afraid as I was roughly handled and feared what next would happen as I continued to be in detention. I hunger strike and after a week I was transported back to Harmondsworth IRC where an enforced removal resulted in severe injuries.
2. In Morton Hall IRC it was very tough to access proper legal advice because it took two weeks just to see a legal personnel and close to another two weeks for them to visit Morton Hall IRC again. The Healthcare System was enough to handle minor issues though despite the close to a week appointment waiting period. Some medical care had to be accessed outside the detention centre. Pastoral support was limited as Clergyman only visited on Sundays and it was difficult to get spiritual support because of congestion on that day. At Harmondsworth IRC it was extremely difficult (as was in London) to access legal advice as my lawyer never visited me while in there presumably because they

were based in Lincolnshire. Therefore the support they offered me was reduced to an extent. At Gatwick IRC it was also a nightmare to get legal support because my lawyer did not visit me though they tried to keep in contact. Healthcare in Harmondsworth was difficult because detainees had to be taken outside the detention centre to access medical support as there is not a wide range of facilities there. Healthcare at Gatwick is also a problem because what was available was very limited as it's a primary kind of healthcare. Pastoral support at Harmondsworth IRC was also limited though a Father visited me twice in my sick bed. I could not manage to get any pastoral support at Gatwick IRC.

3. My time in these detention centres caused me to suffer emotionally and mentally to such an extent that (although it is all a blur to me now) I apparently thrice attempted suicide and I was placed on suicide watch. The overall stressful situation was the cause too of my hunger strike and it was very difficult to obtain healthcare support to deal with these issues as there was no counselling and the mental health care on offer is insufficient and my ill health was not taken seriously.
4. I was a healthy young man prior to my detention and capable of carrying out my own affairs but being held in captivity for such a long period of time had a severe impact on my physical and mental health. I had no freedom and was made to feel like a criminal being locked up in a prison- like institution coupled to the fact I may be deported back to my home country where I would again be persecuted for my sexuality.
5. Long term impact of being detained has led to deterioration of my mental health due to the fact I was imprisoned for such a long time and was badly assaulted on an enforced removal during this period. I am no longer the outgoing person I used to be. The assault has impacted on my trust in people and caused me to be timid, anxious, and unsociable. Socialising is a problem as I am nervous around people I don't know. I am unable to sleep at night as I have nightmares, without medication. It has caused me to be depressed and rely on antidepressants. I am worried that I could be detained in the future and be subject to similar treatment again. This causes me great anxiety on a daily basis. My friends and family feared for my health and safety whilst I was kept in detention. I would say that my experience in detention has affected me

more badly than the violence I suffered in my own country on account of my LGBT sexual identity.

6. Detention centres are scary places for people who are not criminals. I have never been imprisoned before and found the whole experience traumatising. Accesses to facilities we take for granted on a daily basis were limited. Sources of information like the internet were insufficient. Food was of limited choice and we were bound to accept what was on offer resulting in lack of appetite. No privacy and at some centres the rooms are shared with other detainees who could have health conditions or mental issues. For instance at one stage in Harmondsworth IRC I was sharing with a detainee who had chicken pox and had to be checked I had not contracted it at Hillingdon hospital. Medical facilities in detention centres are on the level of primary healthcare and are too limited in service and patients have to be taken elsewhere for treatments. Being taken everywhere in handcuffs causes me to lose my dignity.
7. Detention is not an easy place for LGBT people as we like to maintain discretion about our sexual identity when we cannot be sure of the reactions of the people around us. This contributed to my fear. If someone in detention befriends a gay man, they can be accused of being gay as well.
8. Because I was so scared about what would happen to me if I was returned to my country, I would have liked to know much more about what would happen on the journey and if they had made any plans for me to enter the country without immigration officials knowing about my case. This is because my story was read in the media and it is life till date. Various radio stations like Radio France and Cameroon national radios all covered my story as well as the BBC and Ajazeera not living out the CNN just to name a few. The Worldwide coverage of my sexuality as was exacerbated by the 18 January assault added to my fear in detention as well as out of detention as I am exposed to severe danger now should I get deported.

Thanks a lot.

Asylum seeker