

1. My name is Etzali Erendira Hernandez Chavez, I'm 29 years old and I'm from Mexico. I claimed asylum based on my sexual orientation, in January 2014. Part of the conditions of my asylum claim was to report in a weekly basis to the police station at Middlesbrough, North Yorkshire, England.

2. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2014, I got myself ready to go to the station at 9:00 am, without having any food as I considered it wouldn't take a long time.

I went to the counter; the immigration officer told me that I needed to wait because someone would come to talk with me about my case. After a couple of minutes, two police officers asked me to follow them to a room, where they checked my personal belongings, took personal information and finally told me that as my claim has been refused, I have to stay in the police station till they could move me to an immigration centre.

I was not allowed to go back home to pack my stuff or even to use my mobile to inform someone about the situation. They took me to the back of the police station, where another immigration officer took my personal information again, asked me if I wanted to read the detention guidelines, I said yes, but she replied that I didn't need to read them as it was boring. She couldn't find my ethnic group in the system, so she decided to catalogue me as "East European". I am Mexican. They offered me a drink and took me to a police cell. The whole time I asked myself: **"Why do I need to go to a police cell? Why I can't wear my shoes? I have never done anything wrong, why I'm being treated as a criminal?"**

At night, I asked the police officer for something to eat, she replied that I had already eaten "tea" and the only thing she could give me was a hot drink. I was woken up in the middle of the night to tell me that they were moving me, never asking if I was feeling fit or mentioning where I was going to be taken. On the van I found out that I was taking to Dungavel Immigration Detention Centre in Scotland. They gave me a sandwich, chips and water.

3. We arrived in Dungavel at 6 am; they took at least one hour to process my information. I was only allowed to bring certain amount of clothes; I wasn't allowed to use my phone and they gave me one, my telephone number and the serial number of the phone they gave were recorded on the computer. Which means **that my phone logs (calls and SMS) were being monitored without authorization**. Can't find any logical reason for my right to privacy to be invaded in this way, the fact that I was under detention, doesn't mean that I don't have rights.

They took me to the female area, where I shared room with other 7 girls, with only two toilets and 2 shower rooms. The breakfast was served at 8 and they gave me a doctor appointment at 11, which left me without time to sleep. I was given an induction about how the centre works and what they were expecting from me during the time I stayed there.

4. When I went to the doctor, I told him that I had a problem with my right knee as all the fluid was on the back. He checked it and prescribed medication. He told me

that he wasn't sure how long would I be there so there wasn't much he could do for me. I told him that I was in the process of being referred to the specialist by my GP in Middlesbrough. He said he'd do his best to get me an appointment in the hospital, which didn't happen, even though he got my previous medical records.

I was prescribed naproxen, a couple of days later to my arrival; I went to the nurse to tell her that the medicine wasn't good for me as my stomach was swollen and hurting. She replied that I hadn't been taking the medicine for a long time, so she was unable to tell that was a reaction of it. The following week I was given an appointment to go to the doctor, who said that it was for sure that I couldn't take that medicine and prescribed a new one that took almost one week to arrive.

5. During the induction, I was told about the jobs available, English classes and internet and library access. Other detainees told me that I needed a Scottish solicitor; the staff never mentioned that there was a list of legal aid solicitors in the library or that I have access to a catholic priest or counsellor. The next 5 weeks, I worked at the laundry, went to English and art classes.

At some point during my first day at Dungavel, I could contact my partner, whom in that time was in Netherlands for family holidays. It took me more than one day to be able to contact her and she was really worried that something bad happened to me.

6. For at least 4 days, I didn't have any jacket or something to cover myself, as I left Middlesbrough with summer clothes, when I asked the staff for one, they said that they didn't have which was a lie. Thanks to this I was forced to contact a friend and asked her to send me a jacket. When I got my parcel, the staff at the reception told me that I'll be allowed to bring it with me even though I had already exceeded the maximum weight permitted, because apparently a jacket would considerably increase the weight of my baggage.

7. I want to remark that even with all this my stay at Dungavel was considerably smooth in contrast with the other detention centres. There was at least two occasions that we were left without toilet paper, washing powder and bread, for at least a couple of days. The only answer we received was that they'd bring it.

8. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, I was told that I'd be move to Pennine House as I have been given removal directions for the 5<sup>th</sup> of June from Heathrow Airport.

The following Sunday (1<sup>st</sup> of June) after lunch I was taken with other two women from China and Poland, to get "discharged" from Dungavel. We waited in a small room for more than one hour, as the van that was supposed to take us was delayed. The Chinese lady got sick during the travel and we're forced to stop at Kendal Police station, which delayed our trip around 2-3 hours. She wasn't offered any help beyond stopping at the place mentioned and water.

We arrived at Pennine House, next to the Manchester Airport, around 8-9pm. As a part of the process, I had to see the nurse before going to the room. The nurse at that day was beyond being professional or helpful, she said that she didn't need to

take my weight, temperature or asked about my knee. I told her that I was under controlled medication, which means that I need to take the medicine at the same time every day, she said that it wouldn't affect at all if I took it in a different time.

After this I was taken to the room. In this detention centre is possible to go outside in a sort of cage, to take fresh air during specific times, however, there's not natural light.

I shared with the same ladies I was travelling with. The food we were given was pre-prepared food. At this point, all the memories from being in the police cell came back, as the mattress and food in this place are the same as the police station.

9. The next day (Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June) we were moved to Colnbrook. The lady from Poland had her flight at early morning and we're moved from Pennine House after 6 pm and arriving in Colnbrook around 11pm. They took at least one hour to take our information again.

We were taken to the rooms around midnight, it's important to point that Colnbrook is a male detention centre and there's not opportunity for women to go outdoors. The women that smoke have to share the same room without enough ventilation. There's not natural light or fresh air.

Before each meal, we were asked to go back to the room for one hour. On Tuesday, I did this for lunchtime but I wasn't call for it. I went outside to ask for it and the "officer" told me that I was lucky that the food trolley was still in the unit. My roommate came out as well, and the two officers said that they had called everyone for lunch.

10. Later that day, I was sent to see the doctor with another group of ladies. One of them from Bolivia, who looked to been in a lot of pain and could hardly walk. I talk to her and she told me that she had a surgery a couple of months ago and that the wound was hurting her and during the four days she had been in that detention centre this was the first time that she was sent to see the doctor.

11. The Wednesday, when I went outside my room around 10 am, I saw a lady from Egypt talking to the morning officer (a blonde and slim lady, 40-50 years) about what the time she'd be taken to the airport and getting help to call to her country and let them know that she was flying that day. The officer told her that she couldn't help her as it wasn't her job to look for international code to make calls and that she could use the internet for that. The Egyptian lady replied that she didn't know how to use the computers. However, she didn't receive any help from the staff.

After this, she asked again the officer what time she'd be pick up to go to the airport, her flight was schedule around 4-5pm, to what she replied that she needed to be patient and stop asking. During lunch at 1pm, the evening officer (black hair, possibly from India or Pakistan, around 30-40 years) came in and the lady asked her about being taken to the airport to what the officer replied that she'd contact immigration to get information.

A half and hour later she told the lady that immigration had forgotten to book her a spot in the van to the airport, so she wouldn't be flying that day. The Egyptian lady got into a breakdown and she told me that she was asked to sign a paper where it said that she was voluntarily returning to her country and that she'll fly the day after.

The next day a similar situation occurred with a girl from Albania, she didn't speak English and she wasn't getting any help from the officer to call a friend to help her to find a solicitor, as in Colnbrook the solicitor's visits are in a weekly basis and the day set for it, was already gone.

The last thing but not least important thing that happened was that one day, could be the same Wednesday, by "mistake" they brought chicken rice curry for vegetarian people and only tell them after we all had started eating.

12. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June after lunch I was moved to Yarlswood, even when they moved around 4 other girls that morning, they decided to move me alone. I arrived in Yarlswood around 6-7 pm. During this time, an officer was sent to search me and another girl that was waiting as well. The officer call me "freshie" and later justify herself by saying that she forgot we were there and that she didn't mean to offend me. **How can she forget that we were there, when she was searching us?**

One more time, my mobile phone was taking away from me and I was given a phone with a pasted sim card, obviously without top up. **How am I supposed to contact my partner? How am I supposed to contact my lawyer and support network to tell them where I am if I have not credit on the mobile? And the smallest top up is £10, money, that when you're left without any sort of help is something that you don't have.**

13. We waited for at least 3-4 hours for the nurse to come and take the information about our health. When the nurse finally came, I was directed to the health care room, where she asked me general information about my health and keep on asking me about my sexual orientation the all time.

By the time I was sent to the dormitories it was around midnight, with only a light snack as food. The dormitory had a blue mattress as in the police station, there was not light in the bathroom and the air conditioner was on the all night and I only had a light blanket to cover myself.

On Saturday, I asked about the time to go for medication, I was told that they will call me around 9:30pm, around 10pm I went to the office and asked why I wasn't being call to go for my medication. The officer said I wasn't in the list and asked if I really needed to take the medicine.

After more than half and hour waiting, I was finally taken to the health care, the nurse told me in a very rude manner that I didn't come to the doctor's appointment, I replied that the phone they gave me never showed that I needed to

go to health care, she said that a slip was placed under my door, which wasn't true. She threatened me by saying that if I didn't assist to my next appointment, they will cancel any further medical treatment.

My roommate was a lady from Philippines that was going back to her country the next day (Saturday evening) and arrived to Yarlswood early morning the same day as me. I recommended her to double check about the transport to the airport. To find out, not for my surprise, that it wasn't being booked by the immigration officer at Heathrow Airport. They knew, as the officer from the Crane Unit told us, however, they didn't book it. Luckily for her, they manage to pick her up in time for her flight.

All this leads me to some questions: **If during the all time we're in detention we're told till boredom that we're not criminals, why are we treated like this? Why people that are agreeing voluntarily to return to their countries are being put under unnecessary stress? Is it really necessary to bring people to a detention centre and pay for their stay for less than one day?**

The rude attitude and lack of experience and training of the staff in Yarlswood is more than tangible. The people that are in charge of the "sport, social and cultural activities" have no idea about what's going on the centre. I was looking for the praying room to assists to mass and they weren't able to tell me the timetable or where it would take place.

The custody officers will make racist jokes about detainees and will show not compassion or empathy towards our needs or enquiries. For example, in this place is necessary to order the food for the all following week in an interactive kiosk that they assume everyone will know how to use, in case you don't do it, you'll get vegetarian food by default. A Chinese girl couldn't order her food and when she asked for help, the officer told her that she had been long enough in detention to know how things worked.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June, I was informed that I had a bail hearing without giving me any written document. I asked if I'd be move to Scotland, to what they said they'd only know after coffee time around 10pm. I was advised to pack my belongings and be ready to travel. Around 10:30pm I went to the office to ask again as it was late and I was told it was a long journey. The officers looked at me, laughed and said that I wasn't going anywhere and that I could go back to my room.

As final thoughts, I wonder if some day my partner will ever be able to stay calm if for some reason I can't tell her where I am, will she keep on getting afraid each time that I can't contact her for a couple of hours, or will she be able to go to Netherlands for a couple of days without fear?

And even more, will I be able to go to any governmental building/institution without fearing that I will be send again to any Detention Centre? Will I some day forget all the unnecessary stress I was put on? Will I get over the trauma of being in a police cell without a logical explanation?

Since the day I was released, no one from immigration or NHS, has asked me if I required some sort of counselling after the things I went through. And do not even ask about getting any help to get involve again in the community. I had lost at least 5-7 kg during my stay in detention and I didn't have any medical treatment for my knee.

I was advised by my lawyer to remain in Scotland to get help from him and not start over my case once again. This only meant to be away from my partner and friends living in Huddersfield. On the top, immigration has make sure that being outside gets as difficult as to be in a detention centre, without any kind of support, counselling or access to information. Going through an asylum application is hard enough like having to deal with despotism and indifference from the government the all time.