

Response to Parliamentary Inquiry on Detention

August 2014

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Background biography

1. *I am Ethiopian, 37 years old and I have been detention in the UK for collectively over 4 years.*
2. *I first came to the UK in 1996 and claimed asylum. After nine years of waiting for a decision I received Indefinite Leave to Remain.*
3. *In 2005, I was involved in a fight in a club and pleaded guilty in an act of self-defence and was sentenced to two years. I served half of this before I was transferred to a Category B prison, told my status had been revoked and I was given a deportation order.*
4. *In 2007 I was transferred from this prison, in Norwich, to Chelmsford HMP.*
5. *After I tried to hang myself I was moved to Dover IRC. I was there 6/7 months before I was transferred to Colnbrook IRC, where I was held until 2008.*
6. *The Home Office then moved me back to Dover IRC. I was there for one and half months before I got into an argument with a staff-officer and my arm was broken.*
7. *I was sent to Manchester HMP, still under immigration powers, and held there for another year. I was eventually released on bail in 2009 and forced to wear a tag for nine months.*
8. *After being caught smoking cannabis, I was re-arrested and served 64 days in Peterborough HMP. When I was released my Section 4 address had been cancelled so I went to the Housing Association who could not find me on the system and called the Home Office.*
9. *They took me to Morton Hall IRC (2012). I was released on bail after 5 months.*
10. *After I won my immigration case in the Upper Tribunal, the Home Office appealed against the decision. With this news, I decided to sign for voluntary return because I could not take it anymore and my mental health was deteriorating.*
11. *The Home Office then detained me in Birmingham and returned me to Morton Hall IRC. I was there for two months before I was transferred to Colnbrook IRC and given a flight date for the 4th February 2014.*
12. *When I discovered this was for a flight to Kenya, despite daily direct flights to Ethiopia, I questioned the Home Office. Shortly afterwards, the FRS said they were withdrawing my application for voluntary return because they could not obtain travel documents.*
13. *In July 2014, I was moved to Harmondsworth IRC, where I am dictating this submission now.*

Conditions in immigration detention

14. *Right now, where I am sleeping is covered in bed-bugs. The room is very small. Here I share with a nice person, but in the past I have had to share rooms with bad, violent people.*
15. *In Colnbrook, there is one microwave and one fridge between sixty-six people. It is madness. People get angry and violent.*
16. *Most of the staff here are ex-army officers and they let you know it. It is like we are prisoners-of-war. They don't care about us. They see us as worthless foreigners.*
17. *With the cuts to legal aid things have got a lot worse for people who need legal assistance. The time you have with solicitors is not enough but enough worse, the quality of their work is very bad. I've seen many, many people in detention who had strong cases but their chances were significantly harmed because of a poor solicitor*

who just sat on their case. It feels like the whole of detention is a business and we are the ones getting screwed.

18. Just 200 yards away you can see the airplanes take off. For people terrified of being returned to their country this is traumatic. Each plane represents a deportation and each deportation represents a death sentence.
19. None of the windows are open. For someone like me, who has problems breathing, it is horrible. I feel suffocated. It makes me anxious. I have to carry around a whole suitcase of medicines.
20. Prisons are better to be in. There they wash your clothes properly, it is hygienic. Here, the conditions are appalling. Because you are there to be deported there is no investment in us as people. You can feel it from the staff. They don't treat your problems because you are there one minute, gone the next.
21. Healthcare feels like a way of just covering over the cracks without actually doing anything. All they do is hand out paracetamol, whatever the problem. I have evidence from different psychiatrists which says I should not be here in detention. They ignore this. It means nothing to them. My suffering is more annoying to them than a serious problem that needs fixing.
22. When my arm was broken in Dover IRC (after an altercation with a staff-member) they moved me to Colnbrook, in the middle of the night, with a cast. When I got there the nurse said she had better take a photo of it but the manager would not let her. They were happy to hide this incident.
23. Segregation in detention is very bad. It is punishment – for hunger-striking, for protesting for our rights, for resisting deportation. You are left to rot there, with just the wall to look at. It is torture. It is designed to break you. I was shocked to hear they use these kind of tactics here in the UK.

Mechanisms to deal with mental, physical or emotional issues before or during stay in detention

24. There is no real 'support' in detention. There are counsellors and there is healthcare, but these are bogus. There's no genuine care. There's no genuine action. The detention centre is an industry with one objective – to wear you down. These kind of mechanisms are just another part of the project.
25. I have seen extremely vulnerable people in detention. The safeguards are a joke. I have seen elderly people, survivors of torture, disabled people in wheelchairs – all of the category of people the Home Office say they won't detain. The answer to these problems is always the same: paracetamol.

Long-term impacts

26. I am a peaceful, loving person. But detention has brought in me a great anger. The stress of being locked away indefinitely has pushed me into darkness.
27. My illnesses are getting worse and I have lost hope now.
28. All I want is my freedom but they are killing us slowly here.
29. I am thirty-seven years old and the best years of my life has been spent here – I have missed out on fatherhood, developing my working skills, everything. And for what? For who? My life has been stolen.

Other information

30. The government needs to put a time-limit on detention like everybody else in Europe.
31. The Home Office needs to make sure that the staff they have at detention centres are trained professionals.
32. The Home Office needs to do a much better job of kicking racism out of the UK detention estate.