

Regarding Ms Maimuna Jawo Previously detained in Yarl's Wood

1. My name is Mrs Marjorie Jawo and I write to supplement evidence given by **Ms Maimuna Jawo at the APPG Enquiry on 17th July**. Ms Jawo is my sister in law – I have known her for about 10 years first through my charity work in the Gambia and for the last 6 years I have been married to her brother. I am British born. I am Trustee of UK Reg Charity '1to3' working in Maimuna's home village to support education and welfare. I can only relate my experiences of visiting Yarl's Wood and seeing Maimuna in great distress, leading to worries for my husband (her brother) and myself.
2. Even though I had stayed in the Jawo compound in the Gambia on many occasions, such is the secrecy around FGM, and until Maimuna rang me from Yarl's Wood detention Centre in March 2012 I had no knowledge of the her FGM related problems and physical harm she had suffered many years before. Neither did I know that she was, indeed in detention.
3. When she rang me from Yarl's Wood she explained that, until another detainee told her that she could have her sim card, she was unaware of this facility. **By that time she had been in detention for several weeks without being able to contact anyone in the family. I consider that it is inhuman and unacceptable that the staff did not inform her of this right.** Had she not been able to contact me (it seems my number was the only one on the sim card), I dread to think what would have happened to her mentally and emotionally.
4. Maimuna has told me how frightened and scared she was on arrival at Yarl's Wood in the middle of the night, after many hours in 'the van'. She no idea where she was and what was going to happen to her
5. I consider that the current detention system does not support the needs of detainees. When first interviewed (Fast Track) Maimuna asked for an interpreter but her request was refused, saying her English was good enough. In such stressful circumstances, needing to express yourself in a tongue not one's own mother tongue is very traumatic.
6. Detainees are in no mental state to cope with the Fast Track system. It is what it says - FAST- and Maimuna was unable to cope with the fact that she could have appealed in the short' window' of time. I have seen the transcript of an interview (by a man) and it is obvious she is confused. As far as I am aware she was never interviewed by the same case worker and one interview took place on the phone.
7. **Female detainees should always been interviewed by a female case worker; keep the same case worker throughout the detention period and always be offered an interpreter where necessary.**

8. The impact of immigration detention is severe and detrimental to mental health. **Maimuna suffered PTSD symptoms** - nightmares and 'bloody' flashbacks to the events which drove her away from the Gambia. She even considered self harm.
9. Whilst in Yarl's Wood Maimuna accidentally cut her finger and although she had some treatment (Bedford hospital) this was not followed up and even today that finger is not fully functional.
10. The fact there is no time limit on immigration detention causes untold distress. We visited Maimuna five times between March and in July 2012 (when she was released without warning) and each time she talked about how long she had been there and the **fear of not knowing for how long and what was going to happen to her.**
11. She has not seen her children since 2009 but her application for asylum is based on the fact that if she continued to refuse to carry out FGM she would suffer physical harm and ostracism by the whole Fula community in her village of Wellingara. I have personal experience of threats given regarding Maimuna when I was visited by a group of the very powerful 'elder women' during my visit in March 2012. Further threats have been received from senior male village elders.
12. My husband and I attended a bail hearing in April 2012. On arrival we were told that it was unlikely that we would be allowed into the courtroom. When we protested that we had driven 80 miles and that my husband would lose a day's pay, permission was given. Bail was refused on the grounds that she was likely to abscond (which we refuted) and that the arrival of travel documents for removal to Gambia was imminent (which never happened). This refusal did nothing to improve her state of mind and she was very distressed when we were allowed access to speak to her across a glass barrier after the hearing.
13. For visitors wishing to see detainees in Yarl's Wood, the security system is oppressive. Photographs taken; finger prints taken and on entering the visitors room, a pat down body search. Phones, handbags etc must be left in a locker. The type of personal toiletries allowed are restricted – no aerosols for instance.
14. I would have thought that it would cost the Government far less to house asylum applicants in hostels from where they would have to sign in on a weekly bail basis, than to run a detention centre such as Yarl's Wood.

Mrs Marjorie Jawo
19th July 2014