

Inquiry into the use of Immigration Detention

Written Submissions

Introduction

1. My name is Ntambwe Nkombe. I came from the DRC, and have been in the UK as an asylum seeker since 2001.

How long did you stay in detention? What was the reason you went to detention?

2. I been in detention for 10 good months.
3. Normally I came from prison. I was arrested in January 2010 because I was working illegally. I was destitute since 2003, sleeping rough with no income at all. Then I started to work just in order to survive and was arrested by the police. When I went to court, the judge gave me 16 months in prison. I have done 8 months in prison and then was kept in prison for an extra 3 weeks by Immigration. Then I was transferred to Brook House removal centre on 02 October 2010. So I was in Brook House for 10 months until 28 July 2011 when I got bail.

What was your experiences of living in immigration detention? What were the conditions like?

4. It was terrible also unfortunately to be in this situation. For me prison it is better than the detention centre. In prison you know at least how long you will be doing in there when you have your sentence. But in detention you do not know how long you will doing in there. Even, you could spend 2 or 3 days in there, but you would not know. It is so difficult, especially when you find that other detainees have been in detention for long time - see people who were there 4 years - and they still do not know when they will be released or even if they will be deported.
5. When I left prison, I thought that I had finished my sentence and could be released. But when we arrived at Brooke House I could see straightaway that it looked like a prison, they even have cell inside and lock you up there.
6. Your first night there, you start to hear these horror stories about detention that you cannot believe: that there is no time limit and people had been there for 2 years, 4 years. But they were not stories - I saw it with my own eyes. Even people who had tried to go home through the voluntary return, they were still there, sometimes 3 months, sometimes 6 months after.

7. In detention centre there is not much thing to do like jobs and activities. In prison, whether you are working or studying, there is something to do. In detention, there is nothing much to do, all day. You just sleep, wake up, sit, sleep, wake up, sleep again.

How easily could you access services such as legal advice, healthcare, pastoral support?

8. It is not easy at all to access the legal aid. Most of them are working for the Immigration Officers – it seems that all their advice is going that way, and they do not work for your case.
9. The healthcare in detention is the basic one: there is not much special care or support. Some time, if you are suffering in your cell, they just neglect you. One night, I was feeling very bad, I couldn't eat, I had a headache. I called the officers and they did nothing. They told me, a nurse can come in the morning, and they left me.

Did you think you got enough support to deal with any mental, physical or emotional issues you experienced in detention?

10. To be honest, there is not any support to deal with mental, physical or emotional issues. But somehow I still cope on my own, and because of others people who were helping me in this situation.

Do you think detention had any longer-term impacts on you, your family and/or your wider community?

11. Yes, I do think so. I had lot of problems with detention – but it is very difficult to talk about it even now.

Is there anything else about detention that you would like to share?

12. Detention centre not good at all for the people held there. They will tell you that it is just a detention centre for short period in order to control of the immigration system. But in reality it is more than that: more than even a prison, believe me. I just do not know why in a country like the UK, they are locking people up like that and that there is no time limit.
13. I think people in the UK – ordinary people – they just don't know what happens in detention. I was an asylum seeker since 2001, and even I did not know until I was there.