

INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF IMMIGRATION DETENTION

A point of view from Dr Pamela Cressey MBE,MB,BS

This submission follows ten years of work at Oakington Immigration Reception Centre as a voluntary chaplain, active supporter of the Freedom from Torture Foundation, the Medaille Trust and Amnesty International. In the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Immigration paper of July 2006 I submitted written evidence (HC77511 - Ev 33).*(a)* My opinions then are still relevant to this enquiry.

My answers to questions "for other respondents" are:-

1) The use of Detention Centres within UK does not provide an appropriate environment for asylum seekers if they centres are in the form of a prison, with barbed wire, locked doors, uniformed officers in police-type clothing especially those with military or prison backgrounds. There is a need for a safe place for newly arrived asylum seekers as they are helped to sort out their eligibility for asylum, but firstly their physical and mental requirements need to be met in a humanitarian and expert way. They will be frightened, tired, hungry, cold, lonely and confused, usually including by language and customs. They often do not know where they are. Those who have been trafficked or smuggled here must be protected from interference by their perpetrators. Any reception centre needs expert workers to address all these basic needs before embarking on the road to working out their future. Otherwise inappropriate arrangements may cause major, often traumatic, difficulties to themselves and to society.

2) a) Unless it has changed radically since November 2010 when Oakington closed there is generally inadequate provision for pregnant women, who have different customs, food requirements and who fear the future for their unborn child. Language may form a further barrier. Specialized medical care needs to be available. For very young families the regimented mealtimes with limited unfamiliar menus are a major barrier to well-being, and daily routine needs to be individually arranged. Older children and teenagers have special needs for socialising, education and nurturing as they are very confused and upset by their frightening situations. They often feel responsible for the plight of their parents and siblings. I overheard a 10-year-old boy earnestly telling his three-year old sibling that they must do something to stop their parents being taken away.

b) Detainees with health problems and disabilities require specialised care. One asylum seeker had been attacked in a shared prison cell by a convicted murderer while waiting to be transferred and needed specialist attention for a broken jaw and missing teeth, but he kept being moved before medical procedures could be carried out. (Eight centres including four prisons from 12.5.09-29.11.09) He was deported in this damaged state with no compensation for the maltreatment and no arrangements for his physical or psychological welfare. *(b)* Similarly a farmer from Sri Lanka who stepped on a landmine which blew off his lower leg was deported in real danger, on crutches. Addenbrookes hospital in Cambridge had already begun treatment and were making a prosthesis for him, which could not be fitted because of his abrupt deportation..

c) Young adults need to learn life skills in order to survive in hostile countries, but these were rarely if ever available.

3) The impact of immigration detention is profound - humiliation, fear (including fear of returning home with no money or prospects), disintegration of family ties for lack of communication. Mixed faith- and national- dormitories of 12 men caused severe tension. Other detainees' stories and their own experiences caused flashbacks and nightmares. There is frequently need of longterm counselling which cannot be arranged with the uncertainty of immediate future destination, including deportation. Unsuitable counselling from lawyers, chaplains and other workers may cause great distress when giving inappropriate counselling or predictions, engendering despair and even suicidal tendencies.

4) Undefined duration of detention is unacceptable and very stressful, as it may be from 10 days to many months, often due to inefficiency in paperwork, including loss of vital documents. This unknown may lead to despair in detainees and relatives. There are grave anxieties about money, as many are the bread-winners for an extended family. It is also very expensive.

References (a) House of Commons Immigration Control

(b) Frank Musar

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Chaplain and volunteer at Oakington Immigration Reception Centre (2000-2010)

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