

Name : R, from Latin America, as told to Naomi Blackwell, Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

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R asked not to have his name made public.

He would be prepared to give oral evidence if his name were not made public.

Executive summary

Detainee has lived and worked in the UK since 2003. He has claimed asylum and has on-going Judicial Review proceedings.

My experience of living in immigration detention

1. I was held in immigration detention for 7 months. The treatment of the people in detention is awful; there are some really bad people in detention, both G4S guards and other detainees.
2. I found I was not treated as a human being. This was the hardest thing for me. It was the simple things that ground me down. For example, I asked for a razor in order to shave and the guard was talking to a fellow guard. The razor was right beside him. He made me wait for half an hour for it. It may seem little, but when you are faced with daily humiliations, it builds up and destroys you.
3. Most of the detainees are suffering from stress. This is made worse by the guards, some of whom are openly hateful towards us, as if we have personally done something to them. There are some guards I never approach for help because they are abusive and enjoy their power. I simply try and avoid them.
4. I have never committed a crime. I have never hurt anyone. I came into the detention as a person who is very gentle and I am leaving with a lot of anger and feel revengeful. I am definitely a changed person. It has not made me a better person.
5. The system is designed to break you, designed to make you give up and say, OK I will return to my country of origin.
6. This is like a prison. People lose respect from themselves and others. They start bullying each other. Some of the people terrify me. There is nothing good about this system. It destroys everyone.
7. The food is of appalling quality. I always get a headache after eating it. It is so cheap, I worry what I am ingesting. Aramark are really appalling. Sometimes we get bread with mould on it. They don't seem to mind.

Legal

8. I was seen by a solicitor from one of the exclusive contractors. She said 'Sit down'. She didn't introduce herself, didn't tell me her name. I said hello to her and she told me to 'shh'. She was really rude and unpleasant. Three times I tried to speak to her and she would not let me speak. She did not say what she was going to do. She treated me as if I was a delinquent. She said she would send a solicitor the following week. I dressed up smartly and waited, but they did not come and they did not call to say they were not coming. There was a complete lack of respect. I called and left a message.
9. On Monday she appeared as if nothing had happened. She told me to sign the form and told me that they were the best firm in Europe for quality of legal representation.
10. In the end they prolonged my detention. I have lost a lot of money because there was no-one to pay off my credit card each month and it has just been mounting. I did not complain, as I did not think it was worth it.

Healthcare

11. I have been prescribed sleeping pills because I cannot sleep at night for worrying. If I wake up before the cell is unlocked, I get panic attacks, it is an awful experience, waking up day after day, locked up, never knowing when you will get released.
12. I prefer to take my pills at 11pm so that I don't wake up while the cell door is still locked. There is a nurse here who is really awful and dismissive. She said she would not let me have my tablet at 11pm, I had to take it at 8pm. So they give it to me, and you have to take it there and then, you are not allowed to take the pill to your room and take it when it is time, so then I fall asleep after about 20 minutes. I then wake up at 5 am and have three hours panicking. I try and control myself, I sit and make bracelets and try desperately to concentrate on something to occupy my mind that so I don't feel I am going crazy. It makes you feel really anxious and claustrophobic. It is very frightening.
13. Then in my block there are some guards who put the television on at 6.30am really loudly. They do it simply to annoy, as no-one is out of their cells, so it can only be for their own amusement. I don't know why they feel they have to abuse people, it is very peculiar.
14. There is only a very small outside area. It is not enough for everyone to exercise and calm down.
15. I requested a transfer to Tinsley House as there are a lot of ex-prisoners in Brook House. But they did not accept my transfer. They moved me around a lot though. I was also held in Harmondsworth. I think I moved about five times and it is very unsettling and not good for your mental health. You have an hour or an hour and a half to gather your things and go. You do not have time to organise anything or speak to your solicitor, you don't know where you are going.

16. It is hard having no credit to make phone calls. The reception for phone calls is appalling at Brook House. My solicitor could never get through to me. She would end up calling Gatwick Detainee Welfare Group and they would have to try and get hold of me.
17. My emails stopped working whilst I was at Brook House. You cannot access any websites that are useful to improve your situation, or inform you about your detention.
18. It is also hard thinking about my credit card bill and that every month I am detained, the bill is mounting and I will come out in debt.
19. I am a different person now, I am a different Ruben. I am harder, I am bitter. I used to float through my life, painting and working, but that Ruben has gone. My right to my liberty was taken away and I have never harmed a soul. I am a good person and they have turned me into a bitter one. If you treat a bad person badly – they are only going to come out worse and you have no way of controlling this.
20. Everything here is suffocating, claustrophobic. Sometimes you feel you cannot breathe and you want to call a guard, but you try and calm yourself down. I managed to, I am older, but some of the more vulnerable ones, they cannot cope. They become more and more ill and then you release them into society and you wonder why they do not function anymore. Some start smashing things up because they lose control of their minds.
21. I feel very resentful of the government. Very resentful of this country. I want revenge. I was always such a loving and caring man and now I am hardened. I have been living with hardened criminals and I have been treated like a dog. The system has changed me.

Departure

22. I was released late in the afternoon, about 4pm. My bail address was in Wakefield. By the time I arrived in Wakefield, it was 3 o'clock in the morning. I was too scared to sleep in the station, but I subsequently met a young man who had slept there all night. I spent all my money on a taxi to the Section 4 accommodation. I had to report the next day in Leeds. I could not report, because I spent the day being transferred to Birmingham and then back to Wakefield. I was really worried about missing the reporting and worried I would be re-detained. It is difficult trying to call solicitors and groups to help when you have no money.
23. I have since been moved again to Birmingham and back again.