



## **PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF DETENTION**

Parliament is launching an inquiry into detention in the UK. The inquiry is taking testimony from people who have gone through detention. Tell us your thoughts on detention to help René Cassin change the immigration detention system.

**NAME:** Shehab

**ARE YOU OVER 18:** YES

**DATES IN DETENTION:** 2008 for 2 years and a half

**WHERE YOU UNDER 18 AT ANY POINT DURING THE TIME YOU WERE DETAINED:**  
NO

**NAME OF DETENTION FACILITY:** Colnbrook and Gatwick

### **1. What were your experiences of living in immigration detention, including the context and duration of your stay?**

I am Palestinian, my parents arrived in Palestine after fleeing Kuwait after the invasion by Iraq. I arrived in England in 1996 from Cyprus where I was married. At the end of 1997 I claimed for asylum but the administration lost the file and I was finally granted temporary admission.

I was working for more than 11 years in North Wales, I had a normal life, I was paying taxes like everyone.

But in 2008 I was convicted to 12 months of jail in Liverpool and I spent effectively 6 months in prison. After I was released, I was detained by the UKBA because it's a law that any migrant convicted for 12 months or more should be deported.

But they could not send me back to Palestine because of the situation with Israel and they tried to see with the Cypriot authorities but I have no more link with Cyprus now so they can't.

In the meantime I was detained for two years. Detention is exactly like in prison but I would say even worse. I can tell because I spent 6 months in prison but prison is better than detention for two reasons:

- in prison I felt more useful because I was repaying my debt to the society and I was also working there.
- in prison, I knew when my detention will end, it even ended before because of my well behaviour. But in detention, you never know when it will end, you just wait and you are put from a centre to another.

Also conditions of detention are awful just like prison. The difference is that you just go from down to down. My mental health was affected because I didn't understand why I was detained again. I had did my prison sentence, I had paid my debt to the society, all I wanted was my life back, be able to work again, pay tax and be a normal citizen.

All the years I was working in North Wales, I had a temporary admission because the UKBA could not decide on my situation or could not deport me somewhere, then I go to prison and they say they have to deport me but it was obvious it will take time or be impossible because if they didn't manage to do it for more than 11 years, how could they deport me now suddenly?

**2. What were the conditions in immigration detention like, including your ability to access services such as legal advice, healthcare, pastoral support?**

It is very hard to have access to any health care because you have to fill forms, wait for so long, it takes time. For instance, since 2006, I have a problem at my shoulder, I need an operation. When I was in detention, I manage to book an operation but I didn't have any information about the date of the operation for security reasons. I was finally bailed out just before the operation but they didn't give me my medical file so I wasn't able to attend the operation and now without my medical history it is hard to fix this situation.

For legal advice, it is just formal. Lawyers come but they are not here to take your asylum case they can just help to bail you out, it's what they did for me, or to tell you that you have to be deported. They come, they hear your story, they make you sign papers so they can be paid and say they did their job but they never help with your asylum case. I signed 3 forms for my asylum case and they did nothing. One just helped to bail me out but that's all. And today my asylum case is still pending.

**3. Were there any longer-term impacts of detention on you, your family and/or your wider community?**



Despite of the mental health problem where I had breakouts at some stage, the long terms effects are also economical. I used to work and pay taxes in UK, now I have a card which states that I am not allowed to work here, even if I want to. And I am still not free, I have to report every week to the UKBA and as I cannot work, I'm just surviving with the 35 pounds a week and supermarket vouchers provided by the UKBA. I live in a shared room in a UKBA housing accommodation but I still don't have the control over my life.

**4. Is there any other information about detention that you would like to share?**