

Bulletin 4 July 2008

SDV News and events

SDV Music Night – Saturday 12 July

Make sure you put this date in your diary for our next gig. Scott McDonald and David Lawson (blues/folk) will make up the bill. There will be a (very reasonably priced!) licensed bar, make sure you let your friends and family know.

You can download posters and fliers for the event from the SDV website

www.sdv.org.uk

Immigration, asylum and detention news

Support pregnant women in Yarl's Wood IRC demanding an immediate independent investigation

In a letter sent to Black Women's Rape Action Project, five pregnant women from Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre describe systematic neglect and an institutionalised failure to provide the vital resources and healthcare which expectant mothers are entitled to, and which SERCO, the multi-national running Yarl's Wood, have a duty to provide. At least five other women have suffered similar appalling treatment: All were denied urgent antenatal healthcare and their supplementary dietary needs.

On 21 June, four of the women went to the healthcare centre in Yarl's Wood because they were suffering vaginal bleeding. Despite their symptoms, none were examined or given treatment. They were told to return to their rooms. One woman, who continued to bleed, had to be taken to hospital later that evening. She had a miscarriage and her premature baby was stillborn. Two other women subsequently collapsed. The authorities tried to deport one woman despite the fact that she was still in pain and clearly unfit to travel.

Women are demanding an "urgent investigation by an independent body about sinister situations that are happening to avoid future unexplained miscarriages and inhuman treatment."

What you can do: Write in support of women's demand for an immediate independent investigation into their atrocious treatment. Please send letters to:

Rt. Hon. Jacqui Smith, Secretary of State for the Home Office
Fax: 020 7035 0900 Fax: from outside the UK +44 20 7035 0900
Email: Privateoffice.external@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Anne Owers CBE, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 1st Floor Ashley House 2 Mouck Street, London SW1P 2BQ Fax: 020 7035 2141

Stephen Shaw, Prisons Ombudsman Fax 020 7035 2860, mail@ppo.gsi.gov.uk

Independent Asylum Commission via the website [enquiry form](#) or post: 112 Cavell St, London, E1 2JA

Asylum-seekers put at risk by law, warns top judge

Labour's tough stance on immigration may have forced courts to send asylum-seekers back to their home countries to face "torture or death", one of the most senior judges in England and Wales has warned.

Lord Justice Sedley, a Court of Appeal judge, accuses the Government of threatening the independence of the judiciary by imposing a rule that obliges judges to dismiss an asylum-seeker's story if that refugee has fled their home country using a false passport. Sir Stephen Sedley, writing in the London Review of Books, warns that such a measure "is a serious invasion of judicial independence".

The judge, who caused controversy this year over his call for a national compulsory DNA database, said: "As is obvious, many people fleeing persecution have no option but to travel on false papers. An enactment which may have the effect of prescriptively requiring a judge to disbelieve an individual's otherwise credible story, and so possibly send them back to torture or death, is a serious invasion of judicial independence."

Sir Stephen is supported by immigration judges and other members of the senior judiciary, as well asylum campaign groups.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/asylumseekers-put-at-risk-by-law-warns-top-judge-858323.html>

UN Refugee Agency concerned over asylum decision-making

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has issued findings from its fifth audit report on the UK asylum system, focusing on asylum decision-making in detention centres, where some individuals are held while their applications are being decided in accelerated procedures.

UNHCR's latest audit highlights serious concerns with the UK Border Agency's 'fast track' refugee status determination process in Yarl's Wood and Harmondsworth detention centres, and found that the emphasis on quick decision-making does not allow caseworkers to reach well-reasoned decisions on some individual cases.=

"The tight time-frame for decisions - which are usually made within three days of an asylum seeker's arrival at a detention centre - often results in cases not being given full consideration", said Jacqueline Parlevliet, head of UNHCR's office in London.

According to UNHCR, some decisions within the Detained Fast Track demonstrate a limited understanding of key concepts in refugee law and do not engage sufficiently with the specific facts of the individual claims, for example in relation to gender issues.

Full story at:

<http://uk.oneworld.net/article/view/160773/1/>

Woman 'assaulted' by UK security guards during forced removal

The Government is investigating claims that a 26-year-old asylum-seeker from Cameroon was so badly assaulted during her forced removal on a British Airways flight that she has to use a wheelchair. Stephanie Toumi claims that British security guards kicked her in the back of the leg and held her head down for two hours on a flight from Heathrow to Brussels earlier this month. Her injuries were so serious that Belgian immigration officials refused to allow the escort team to fly her on to Cameroon, claims Ms Toumi, who fled her home in March after being tortured and abused by a village chief.

In April, the Home Office rejected Ms Toumi's asylum claim and fast-tracked her case to Yarl's Wood detention centre in Bedfordshire for an early removal flight from the UK on 5 June. Ms Toumi alleges she was assaulted by four Group 4 Securicor (G4S) guards when she approached BA staff on the plane to inquire about her luggage.

She alleges: "The escorts threw themselves on me. One scraped me and I fell on my stomach, the other trapped my arms, twisting them behind and the other two put on handcuffs. I felt a very severe pain in my body and I wanted to twist my right foot to get up, but one of them totally paralysed this foot by giving me a sharp blow with his knee.

"When they finished handcuffing me one of them caught hold of my hair to lift me up. I felt ill as I have never felt ill all my life." She alleges that when she started crying, the guards said: "Shut up, stupid whore."

Full story at:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/woman-assaulted-by-uk-security-guards-during-forced-removal-856897.html>

Man deported by mistake wins Home Office payout

The Home Office yesterday agreed to pay an undisclosed sum in an out-of-court settlement with a British citizen of Bangladeshi origin who was deported to Pakistan in error. The settlement, thought to be for tens of thousands of pounds, was agreed as Tula Miah, 34, was about to take his compensation claim to the high court.

Miah, from south London, who was diagnosed as schizophrenic in his teens, was put on a plane by immigration officials after they mistook him for a Pakistani failed asylum seeker and absconder.

He claimed he had been held in chains and beaten in Pakistan, partly because his custodians were angry that he could not communicate with them. Miah came to Britain from Bangladesh at the age of 12 and spoke no Pakistani languages.

As a condition of the settlement, he and his lawyers are not allowed to discuss its terms or even the fact that it has been reached.

A UK Border Agency spokesman said: "The UK Border Agency carries out all removals with dignity and compassion, and takes very seriously any claim that proper procedures have not been followed.

"We are currently undertaking the biggest shake-up of our border security in over 40 years. This includes locking people to one identity by linking their fingerprints to a secure database and to any visa issued around the world.

"Later this year, we will roll out ID cards for all foreign nationals. This will make it easier than ever to confirm people's identity and remove those with no right to be in the UK."

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/jun/10/law>

Other news and events

Mansewood Allotments Open Day: Sunday July 6 from 1pm, Mansewood High Park (off Burnfield Road)

Come and see our coordinator's and treasurer's veg-growing prowess in operation, buy produce and plants, chutneys, jams and cakes. All welcome.