

## **Bulletin 16 February 2009**

### **SDV News and events**

#### **AGM, Committee and Treasurer**

The date for the AGM will be confirmed this week.

A new committee will be elected at the AGM so think about putting yourself forward as a committee member.

After 3 years, Michelle will be standing down as Treasurer at the next AGM. This means this role will need to be filled. The person does not need to have massive financial expertise. He or she would simply need to be numerate and Michelle would provide a handover to go through the procedures. If anyone is interested in this role, or knows anyone who might be, please contact Kate or a member of the committee.

#### **Good news re funding**

SDV has been awarded £2,000 from the Celtic Charity Fund towards phonecards and other items for detainees. Several other funding applications are in process and you will be kept informed of progress.

### **Immigration, asylum and detention news**

#### **Let asylum-seekers work – Leading article in The Independent**

Maybe it is a consequence of the recession. Maybe it is simply that the court system still moves at snail's pace. Whatever the reason, the vexed question of asylum-seekers is moving up the public and political agenda again.

Earlier this week a family from the Democratic Republic of Congo was awarded a record £150,000 in compensation for unlawful detention. The couple and their two children had been detained in Yarl's Wood detention centre for eight weeks in 2006. Their asylum claim was subsequently granted.

The case came two months after the award of £38,000 to a woman from Cameroon, who had been held at Yarl's Wood, despite rules designed to ensure that victims of torture were not detained in this way. Both cases are expected to give the green light to other cases concerning torture victims or young families.

Yesterday the Church of England Synod - which this week has shown an admirable concern for some of the grittier aspects of life in this country - called for asylum-seekers to be allowed to work pending a decision on their application. Speakers argued that the current system leaves people in poverty and without dignity, and they put their weight - by a vote of 242 to one - behind a call for the rules to change.

Permitting asylum-seekers to work is the single measure that would do most to improve their lives - but not only theirs. It would discourage them from working in the black economy, foster social integration and help to quell accusations of "scrounging".

Even better, of course, would be administrative streamlining that produced a system able to check claims more efficiently and consistently than at present, and make definitive decisions with more urgency. This is what changes introduced two years ago were supposed to do.

Recent National Audit Office figures show, however, that the backlog of applications doubled last year, despite a fall in the number of new claims, and that only one in 10 of those turned down was deported. Until we have an asylum system worthy of the name, applicants should not just be permitted but encouraged to seek employment. The current ban is counterproductive and inhumane.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/leading-articles/leading-article-let-asylumseekers-work-1609199.html>

### **Why some deportations are a black and white issue**

The problem for Jamiu Omikunle wasn't so much the validity of his visa as the colour of his skin.

He's the Nigerian student awarded £20,000 on Tuesday for having been unlawfully detained at Aldergrove airport, held in a detention centre in Scotland for nine days and threatened with deportation.

Mr Omikunle was lucky. He had a friend in Belfast who found him a lawyer who tracked him down to Dungavel Centre in Lanarkshire.

Nobody knows how many people legally present in the UK have been unlawfully expelled, or how many of these cases began with arrests at Belfast port or airports.

Mr Omikunle arrived at Aldergrove from London on June 2 last year. His purpose was to act as godfather to Syienna, the infant daughter of his friends Jahawill and Caroline. As he entered the terminal building he was stopped by an immigration officer. He says, "I was conscious of the fact that only black people were being stopped. I was very uncomfortable about this."

<http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/eamon-mccann/eamon-mccann-why-some-deportations-are-a-black-and-white-issue-14184389.html>

### **Parliamentary question on Immigration detention and mental health**

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government how many detainees now in immigration or asylum detention were mentally ill when detained; and how many have become mentally ill while in detention. [HL1180]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead): There is no single definition of mental illness and the term can cover mild mental disorders such as anxiety and depression and more serious psychotic disorders.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/text/90211w0002.htm#09021177000376>

## **Parliamentary question on length of Immigration detention**

Lord Hylton: To ask Her Majesty's Government whether they will adopt a statutory time limit for immigration or asylum detention comparable to that of other European Union countries. [HL1181]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord West of Spithead):  
We have no plans to do so.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/ldhansrd/text/90211w0002.htm#09021177000376>

## **Other news and events**

### **Anti-Deportation Workshop Saturday 14 March 2009 - 1:30-3:00 pm**

Facilitator: Pol Yates: [polyates@phoncoop.coop](mailto:polyates@phoncoop.coop)  
Hosted by: Umoja Inc Women's Group  
Venue: YWCA Glasgow,  
3 Newton Terrace,  
Sauchiehall Street,  
Charing Cross,  
Glasgow G3 7PJ

The aims of the workshop are to discuss:

1. Reasons to set up an anti-deportation campaign
2. How to set up an anti-deportation campaign (basics)
3. Empowering of asylum seekers

Enquiries/further information: Pol Yates: [polyates@phoncoop.coop](mailto:polyates@phoncoop.coop)

### **DEC Gaza appeal**

After an 18 month blockade of Gaza and three weeks of heavy shelling the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is now completely overwhelming.

Thousands of people are struggling to survive with many having lost their homes and most down to their last supplies of food and only limited amounts of fresh drinking water.

Click on the link below to donate:

[www.dec.org.uk/item/200](http://www.dec.org.uk/item/200)