

# Joint Statement to the Home Secretary in Response to the announcement to reopen Haslar and Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs)

2nd September 2024 (Sent via email)

Dear Rt Hon Yvette Cooper,

We are writing to you as local residents of Gosport and Oxfordshire, people with experience of detention, visitor groups to detention, organisations working with people in detention, academics, and others with an expressed concern at the announcement to continue with the plans made under the previous Conservative government to reopen Haslar and Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs).

We urge you to abandon these plans.

## Our asks

1. **[Reduce the Immigration Detention estate](#)**: No human should be incarcerated for administrative convenience. End the use of detention as a tool of immigration enforcement starting by using detention as a last resort and ending the detention of vulnerable people, in line with Objective 13 of the Global Compact for Migration.
2. **[Review and Implement the Brook House Inquiry Recommendations](#)**: Ensure that the systemic failures identified in the inquiry are addressed and that similar abuses do not occur in other IRCs.
3. **[Uphold the Values of Fairness and Humanity](#)**: Align immigration policies with principles of fairness, humanity, openness, diversity and inclusion, as recommended by the Windrush review.
4. **[Invest in community-based alternatives](#)**: Redirect resources away from detention and into community-based support that prioritise dignity, fair treatment, and human rights.
5. **[Engage with Individuals with Lived Experience of Detention](#)**: Any future policy decisions must be led by those with lived experience of detention and migration, ensuring that their voices are at the forefront of creating a truly just system.

## 1. Reduce the Immigration Detention estate

We reject the narrative that detention is necessary or justifiable. It is well recognised - through the testimonies of people detained<sup>1</sup>, in academic research<sup>2</sup>, through public and statutory inquiries into detention<sup>3</sup>, amongst national and international human right mechanisms<sup>4</sup> and in evidence from NGOs working in immigration detention<sup>5</sup> - that detention has a profound impact on people's mental and physical health, with effects lasting far beyond the time spent detained. The removal of someone's liberty as part of an administrative process - without knowledge of a release date - has been described by people detained as "mental torture". Detention significantly increases the risk of self-harm and suicide - 57 people have died in immigration detention in England and Wales since 2000, 31 of these by suicide<sup>6</sup>. We call for a decisive

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.7doors.org/unitedkingdom; \"Nothing Good Comes From Detention\": Voices From Detention. Bail for Immigration Detainees; Immigration Detention, The Hidden Costs - Unchained Collective](https://www.7doors.org/unitedkingdom; \)

<sup>2</sup> Verhulsdonk, I., Shahab, M., & Molendijk, M. (2021) Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders Among Refugees and Migrants in Immigration Detention: Systematic Review with Meta-analysis.

Bosworth M, (2016) 'The Impact of Immigration Detention on Mental Health: A Literature Review'

<sup>3</sup> [The Brook House Inquiry Report \(2023\)](#); [Inquiry into allegations of racism and mistreatment of detainees at Oakington immigration reception centre and during removal \(statewatch.org\)](#); [Review into the welfare in detention of vulnerable persons \(Shaw Review, 2016\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [UN Working Group on Alternatives to Detention Report on Expanding the use of alternatives to detention in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic](#); [UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Report](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Harmed Not Heard - Medical Justice](#); [Rape and Sexual Abuse In Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre. Black Women's Rape Action Project. Women Against Rape, 2015](#); [Re-thinking "vulnerability" in detention: A Crisis of Harm - Detention Forum's Working Group](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Deaths of immigration detainees | Inquest](#)

reduction of the immigration detention estate. No human should be incarcerated for administrative convenience.

The announcement to re-open Haslar and Campsfield IRCs is with the stated intent of increasing immigration enforcement and returns. We welcome the recognition in the Home Secretary's announcement that this must take into account the vital lessons from Windrush. It is our concern that these aims are deeply conflicted. A broken system, rooted in hostile environment policies, is failing countless individuals in detention, just as it did the Windrush generation. Tellingly, the most recent Home Office pilot for "*Alternatives to Detention*" delivered by the King's Arms Project found that 80% of participants – people at risk of detention - were presented with viable options to regularise their immigration status in the UK when provided with adequate legal advice and support in the community<sup>7</sup>. Increasing the use of detention is not the solution to the complex reasons which result in people arriving to the UK via unsafe routes or being unable to regularise their immigration status.

Under the previous Conservative government, the plans to re-open these centres were explicitly linked to the intention to send people seeking asylum to Rwanda. We are greatly relieved that the Labour government has brought an end to the Rwanda Offshoring plans. However, the chaos and suffering of the 220 people detained for removal to Rwanda, without cause, demands urgent reflection. Sadly, this was not an isolated incident. Over the years, immigration detention has been used without accountability, with the majority of people detained, only to be released into UK communities, where they rightfully belong, but at devastating cost to their lives.

## **2. Review and Implement the Brook House Inquiry Recommendations**

The [Brook House Inquiry report \(2023\)](#) found 19 instances with credible evidence of acts or omissions that were capable of amounting to mistreatment contrary to Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In the inquiry, clear links were found between systemic failures of safeguards, an institutional culture of disbelief, indifference and racism amongst staff, and a system which prioritised enforcement and removal at all costs. These findings are not isolated to Brook House IRC or the period April-August 2017. The IMB annual report for 2023 in Brook House IRC found trends including: safety has deteriorated throughout 2023 and concurrently the use of force doubled as compared to 2022; there is a continued failure to properly use Rule 35; and evidence suggesting staff culture and burnout. Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), who visit people in Colnbrook and Harmondsworth IRCs, held a focus group and interviews with people recently detained in centres across the UK and found concerning parallels with the Brook House Inquiry report, including the use of segregation to manage mental health concerns; deficiencies in both healthcare provision and safeguarding, and the inappropriate use of force<sup>8</sup>. This has been echoed by the HM Inspectorate of Prisons, which found all ~~eight~~ seven (*correction made by AVID 11.10.24*) IRCs in the UK to have serious failings in their most recent reports. The inspection report of Harmondsworth IRC found a catalogue of failures, including dilapidated buildings, shortage of experienced staff, overcrowding, and 48% of people surveyed reported feeling suicidal whilst in the centre.

## **3. Uphold Values of Fairness and Humanity**

We invite the Home Secretary to take heed of the Windrush review's recommendation to centre values of fairness, humanity, openness, diversity and inclusion. We state with conviction that the plans to expand detention are out of step with these values. The closure of Haslar and Campsfield IRCs in 2015 and 2019, respectively, was a victory for human rights. It marked a shift toward a more humane immigration system, supported by the recommendations from the Shaw Reviews on the welfare in detention of vulnerable persons and a series of High Court rulings prior that immigration detention had amounted to inhuman and degrading treatment contrary to Article 3<sup>9</sup>. To re-open these centres is to disregard past lessons. Prior to their closure, Haslar and Campsfield IRCs had a troubled history of abuse and neglect. In 2008, following a

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<sup>7</sup> [A Community-Based Alternative to Detention: The Refugee & Migrant Advice Service - King's Arms Project](#)

<sup>8</sup> [After Brook House: continued abuse in immigration detention | JRS UK](#)

<sup>9</sup> [A crisis of harm in immigration detention | openDemocracy](#)

media report of extensive allegations of abuse in detention centres, a report from Medical Justice detailed instances of alleged assault in Campsfield IRC and in Haslar IRC. This included, amongst other highly distressing accounts, the experience of a man detained in Haslar IRC in 2003 who, after a suicide attempt, was placed in isolation through the use of force<sup>10</sup>. Around this time, a freedom of information request revealed 52 self-harm incidents in Haslar IRC in 2004/5 and a further 52 incidents in Campsfield during the same period<sup>11</sup>. In 2010, almost half of the people detained in Campsfield IRC went on hunger strike, stating that they were refusing food indefinitely “*for our voices to be heard*”<sup>12</sup>. Ramazan Kumluca, an 18-year-old seeking asylum, and Ianos Dragutan, aged 35, both committed suicide whilst detained in Campsfield IRC in 2005 and in 2011<sup>13</sup>. This heightened questions and concern amongst local community members who - in both Gosport and Oxford - were distressed by what was happening on their doorstep. They took practical steps to visit people in detention and offer their support.

The government should follow the example set by these communities, who have committed to humanity, compassion and community. Their message is clear: detention is not the answer, change the narrative and change the direction.

#### **4. Invest in community-based alternatives**

The government should prioritise community-based alternatives to detention alongside wider steps to fix our broken asylum system<sup>14</sup> and address the root issues at the heart of our immigration system. The UNHCR’s independent review of the two Home Office pilots demonstrated increased engagement with the immigration system and personal stability, and participants were treated fairly and with dignity. There was no evidence that the pilots reduced compliance with the immigration system and public funds were more effectively channelled through civil society organisations, at significantly lower costs, rather than private contractors. Alternatives to detention align with international standards, such as the Global Compact for Migration, of which the UK is a signatory. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when large numbers of people were released from detention, the UN Network on Migration Working Group on Alternatives To Detention stated that this presented:

*“a unique opportunity to look beyond the current crisis and showcase concretely how migration can be governed without resorting to detention, as envisioned by the framework for action provided by the Global Compact for Migration, including in its Objective 13.*

*States, United Nations entities, civil society organisations and other actors are encouraged to redouble their collaborative efforts to phase out the use of immigration detention – building on steps forward taken during the pandemic, documenting the positive impact of alternatives, reflecting on lessons learned, and ending as a matter of priority the detention of children, families and other migrants in vulnerable situations.”<sup>15</sup>*

The previous Conservative government failed to take this opportunity. We urge you not to do the same.

#### **5. One simple ask**

If you can't meet our other critical demands, at the very least, we leave you with one simple ask: speak to people who have experienced detention. Any decision to expand detention must be accountable to the experiences of people directly affected. Their voices should be the compass guiding any choices about this deeply flawed system.

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<sup>10</sup> [Outsourcing Abuse. Medical Justice UK. 2008](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Freedom of Information Act Request about the number of self-harm attempts 2004/5 and 2005/6](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Campsfield House detainees go on hunger strike | Immigration and asylum | The Guardian](#)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/asylumseeker-s-despair-drove-him-to-suicide-6094753.html>; <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/shine-a-light/investigating-mitie-market-leader-in-uk-immigration-detention/>

<sup>14</sup> [Follow-up Letter to the Prime Minister - Asylum Matters](#)

<sup>15</sup> [UN Working Group on Alternatives to Detention Report on Expanding the use of alternatives to detention in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic](#)

## **SIGNATORIES (representing over 50 organisations and 85 signatories in total)**

1. Dr Chris Wooff, ACAP (Ashton Churches Asylum Project)
2. Aderonke Apata, African Rainbow Family
3. Maya Esslemont, After Exploitation
4. Gee Manoharan, Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID)
5. Miranda Reilly, Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID)
6. Ewan Roberts, Asylum Link Merseyside
7. Nathan Phillips, Asylum Matters
8. Emma Jones, Asylum Welcome
9. Bail For Immigration Detainees (BID)
10. Sam Price, Beyond Detention
11. Border Criminologies
12. Eleanor Brown, CARAS
13. Charlotte Khan, Care4Calais
14. Steve Smith, Care4Calais
15. Sian Summers-Rees, City of Sanctuary UK
16. Coalition to Keep Campsfield Closed
17. Detention Action
18. Jonathan Ellis, Detention Forum
19. End Deportations Belfast
20. Freed Voices
21. Maddie Harris, Humans for Rights Network
22. Michelle Ezeuko, Irukka
23. Yasmin Halima, JCWI
24. Jesuit Refugee Service UK
25. Alison Bell (Co-Chair), Lewes Organisation in Support of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (LOSRAS)
26. G. Tipping, LOSRAS
27. Jean Gould, LOSRAS Prison Visitor Project
28. Manchester Immigration Detainee Support Team
29. Aderonke Apata, Manchester Migrant Solidarity
30. Mazzy Dee, Mazzy Dee's Empowerment Network
31. Sebastian Rocca, Micro Rainbow CIC
32. Lara Parizotto, Migrant Democracy Project
33. Bridget Young (Director) NACCOM
34. Lia Deyal, No Detention, No Haslar
35. Mike Brown, No Detention, No Haslar
36. Oxford Against Immigration Detention
37. Oxford and District Trades Union Council
38. Bridget Banda, Play for progress
39. Natalia Byer, POMOC
40. Leila Zadeh, Rainbow Migration
41. Rachael Bee, Refugee welcome homes
42. Mia Hasenson-Gross, Rene Cassin
43. Abbas Ali, Resistance Kitchen
44. Michael Collins, Right to Remain
45. Kay Marsh, Samphire
46. Kate Alexander, Scottish Detainee Visitors
47. Keisha Gould, Scottish Detainee Visitors
48. Ronnie Tagwireyi, Scottish Detainee Visitors
49. Mary Munro, Scottish Detainee Visitors (vice chair)
50. Noku Sunduza, Seka Candles
51. Nikki Walters, Southampton Action
52. Mark Courtice, Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group (SWVG)
53. Anna Lilley, Stand up to Racism South Coast
54. Emily Crowley (Chief Executive), Student Action for Refugees (STAR)

55. The Bike Project
56. Dania Thomas, Ubuntu Women Shelter
57. Jackie Lederer, Unite Community Portsmouth and District Branch
58. Dr Charles Leddy-Owen, University of Portsmouth
59. Dr Tom Sykes, University of Portsmouth
60. Rebecca Hamlet, University of Portsmouth
61. Claudia Bradshaw, University of Portsmouth
62. Nicodemus Awai, University of Portsmouth
63. Mel Steel, Voices in Exile
64. Sonja Miley, Waging Peace
65. Women for Refugee Women
66. Paola Uccellari (CEO), Young Roots
67. Clara Della Croce
68. Dr Sarah Anderson (former visitor to detainees at Campsfield House)
69. MT Talensby
70. Catherine McCartney
71. Sally Jones
72. Jan Probert
73. Malcolm Little
74. Emily Barnes
75. Courtney Thomas
76. Kate Smart
77. Laura Robbie
78. Sheila Curran
79. Stephanie Lewis
80. Amy Hurley Dugdale
81. Peter Cotton
82. Natalia Byer (Local Resident)
83. Joanna Knight
84. Zoe Gardner
85. Anonymous
86. Anonymous

**Co-ordinated By:** The Association for Visitors to Immigration Detainees (AVID), Coalition To Keep Campsfield Closed and Border Criminologies.

**Organisations List:** Asylum Welcome, Beyond Detention, Detention Action, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) UK, Lewes Organisation in Support of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (LOSAS), Manchester Immigration Detainee Support Team, Scottish Detainee Visitors, Waging Peace, Women for Refugee Women (WFRW), The No Accommodation Network (NACCOM), Rainbow Migration, Detention Forum, Asylum Matters, Portsmouth City of Sanctuary, No to Haslar, South Winchester Visitor Group (SWVG), Right To Remain, Ashton Churches Asylum Project (ACAP), African Rainbow Family, After Exploitation, Asylum Link Merseyside, Community Action for Refugees & Asylum Seekers (CARAS), Care4Calais, City of Sanctuary UK, End Deportations Belfast, Humans for Rights Network, Joint Council for Welfare for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI), Manchester Migrant Solidarity (Manchester MiSol), Micro Rainbow, Migrant Democracy Project, Oxford Against Immigration Detention, Oxford and District Trades Union Council, Play for Progress, Polish Migrants Organise for Change (POMOC), Refugee Welcome Homes, Rene Cassin, Resistance Kitchen, Samphire, Seka Candles, Southampton Action, Stand up to Racism South Coast, Student Action for Refugees (STAR), Ubuntu Women's Shelter, Unite Community Portsmouth and District Branch, University of Portsmouth, Voices in Exile, Young Roots, The Bike Project, Freed Voices, Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID), Mazzy Dee's Empowerment Network.