



association of **visitors** to
immigration detainees

First Parliamentary Inquiry into Detention criticises the indefinite detention of migrants:

“We cannot go on as we are”

3rd March 2015

AVID welcomes the publication today of the findings of the first cross party [Parliamentary Inquiry](#) into immigration detention in the UK¹. After six months of examining over 180 written submissions and evidence from 26 witnesses including – crucially – current and former detainees, the cross party panel² has concluded that “we cannot go on as we are”. The [report of their findings](#), launched today in Parliament, calls for thorough reform of the detention system, asks for a time limit on detention and outlines the need for the UK to learn from other countries in seeking community based alternatives.

AVID welcomes the recommendations of the Panel, particularly their recognition that:

“...little will change by tinkering with the pastoral care or improving the facilities. We believe the problems that beset our immigration detention estate occur quite simply because we detain far too many people unnecessarily and for far too long. The current system is expensive, ineffective and unjust”

Change in cultureand a time limit

The report is delivered in two parts, the first looking at the detention system in the UK (lengths of detention, Detained Fast Track, use of alternatives) and the second looking at conditions in detention. This includes, for example, Rule 35 reports, internet access and health care amongst other aspects of life in detention. Both sections are evidence based and draw on testimony from a range of witnesses including medical and legal experts, NGOs, and ‘experts by experience’: current and former detainees. Those of us who heard or read the testimony of current detainees given late last year cannot fail to have been moved by the bravery of those who shared their experiences. In particular the direct testimony of those currently in detention, given over the phone to the panel in Westminster, was a radical move and one which adds great weight to the findings.

¹ The Parliamentary Inquiry was launched in July 2014 and was a joint Inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration.

² The Panel was Chaired by Sarah Teather MP. Members were Paul Blomfield MP, David Burrowes MP, Richard Fuller MP, Julian Huppert MP, Jon Cruddas MP, Caroline Spelman MP, Lord Lloyd of Berwick, Lord Ramsbotham, Baroness Lister, Baroness Hamwee.

From the very beginnings of the report, it is clear that the panel rejects further ‘tinkering’ in terms of a low level change to the conditions and standards in detention. Instead, they are calling for widespread and full scale reform of the detention system. It is their conclusion that the system itself requires a fundamental rethink; the problems outlined in the report will not be resolved merely by chipping away round the edges of what it refers to as ‘pastoral care’. To this end, the panel draws out four key recommendations:

- There should be a **time limit of 28 days** on the length of time anyone can be held in detention.
- Detention is currently used disproportionately frequently, resulting in too many instances of detention. The presumption in theory and practice should be in favour of **community-based resolutions** and against detention.
- Decisions to detain should be very rare and detention should be for the **shortest possible time and only to effect removal**.
- The Government should learn from international best practice and introduce a much wider range of **alternatives to detention** than are currently used in the UK.

AVID’s Director, Ali McGinley, said *“we welcome the cross party inquiry into immigration detention and its findings, launched today. For too long immigration detention has been ignored and the system has been allowed to continue largely unchecked, the result being widespread failings which have left many vulnerable migrants languishing for indefinite periods. Many people will be surprised to read that the safeguards recommended by the panel today are not already in place in a country like the UK which prides itself on its tradition of civil liberties. We are pleased that the panel is recommending fundamental reform and hope that the weight of this report will influence change in a way that has been sadly lacking before now, despite widespread criticism from statutory monitoring bodies, international human rights mechanisms and the courts”*

You can read [AVID’s submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry here](#).

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