



association of visitors to  
immigration detainees

His Majesty the King  
Buckingham Palace  
London  
United Kingdom  
SW1A 1AA

Monday 24th July 2023

**From our margins to Your Majesty, Sir,**

We are writing today as refugees, asylum seekers, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, neighbours, and fellow individuals who have made this country our home; we come together to implore you to use your platform and speak out against the cruelty inflicted upon us by the government in your name.

The signatory for this letter includes 20 nationalities and one person who is identified as stateless. Among us are community leaders, activists, business owners, students, and those who proudly identify as British. Despite our differences, we share one common thread - being detained in immigration detention centres. Our so-called “wrongdoing” was simply being immigrants. Our punishment? Being locked up – out of sight and out of mind.

Immigration detention in the UK is used for ‘administrative purposes’, a form of non-criminal incarceration used by the government rather than the judicial decision to detain someone. We have collectively wasted 13 years and five months in detention; some of us were detained for one month, some of us detained for over three years, and many have been detained more than once in different detention centres. This begs the question of the overall purpose of our collective detention.

**An Untangled Path of Postcolonialism**

Racism, racialisation and the immigration system in the UK are tightly interwoven. In that web, administrative detention is a powerful tool and establishes a clear hierarchy of belonging, delineating who is deemed worthy of belonging and who is not, leaving the unchallenged authority of the government’s executive branch to decide. This, however, has roots in the colonial past; for example, British colonisers of Australia, Africa and Asia used administrative detention with a dual purpose: firstly, to eradicate the Indigenous population and secondly, to enforce the confinement and exclusion of other groups deemed as outsiders, in order to create a racially and culturally homogeneous nation-state<sup>(1)</sup>. Administrative detention in the colonial era often played a bureaucratic role *‘of classification for labelling, dividing, and controlling people into different population categories.’* British settlers enthusiastically adopted this practice throughout the British Empire. This was a dark history to relinquish!

Nevertheless, the characteristics of administrative detention have not changed throughout history. It is often unreviewable, automatic, marred by a lack of transparency, accountability, and indefinite.

People endure these conditions, often left powerless over their environment, in the hands of private contractors responsible for managing some of the vulnerable people we have in the community. The fate of someone escaping war in Sudan or fleeing Taliban in Afghanistan is in the hands of the Home Office junior officials and a tangled web of bureaucratic chains of command to mask their decision, which could put someone in danger. Vast amounts of academic research conducted within the estate of British immigration detention have evidenced the notion and the connection of the *'racialised and postcolonial'* nature of immigration detention in the UK. We all agree. By closely scrutinising administrative detention, it becomes evident that the persistent practices of confinement, classification and unfettered executive authority wielded to determine the fate of specific populations continue to be deeply embedded in the very core of British politics. There is an urgent need to challenge and dismantle the enduring legacy of these oppressive systems. <sup>(2, 3)</sup>

As millions watched you ascend to the throne in May, we ask that you remember the colonial legacy of the United Kingdom and how racism has been perpetuated against people of colour, including those from Commonwealth countries. As Commonwealth citizens affected by this system, we feel betrayed by a nation that was supposed to share our cultural heritage and values. As for those of us who are not part of the Commonwealth, we want you to know Britain's standing on the world stage is being tested for your humanity and morality. The existence of Immigration Detention is morally exhausting. We ask that you recognise the historical injustices and trauma inflicted upon our communities and use your position to advocate for change. We collectively believe that the racism and dark side of the colonial legacy still underpins the current immigration detention system to deprive us of liberty.

The Illegal Migration Bill, now received Royal Assent (an Act), is another manifestation of this legacy, targeting vulnerable people seeking refuge from war, persecution and other forms of violence. This Act will terrorise children, families, and pregnant women and has ripped apart the safeguard for survivors of trafficking. This Act seeks to criminalise us, the victims of war and persecution, for seeking safety and protection. This Act will punish us for seeking a better life for ourselves and our families.

We are aware of the limits that come with the royal duty and the constitutional issues to overcome. You will not be able to dismantle immigration detention or instruct your government on how they manage these cruel policies. We can relate to your feelings of powerlessness; after all, we have all experienced it in our way. However, you have a voice and a strength that can speak to millions of Britons who will listen to your plea. We ask you to speak to the conscience of your nation and stop this Act from poisoning the very fabric of modern British society, which is rooted in welcome and hospitality.

King Charles, we implore you to remember that there are real people with real lives, dreams and hopes for a better future behind statistics and rhetoric. We have come to the UK seeking safety, a chance to rebuild our lives and to contribute to this country. Instead, we are treated with suspicion, hostility, and inhumane treatment. We ask that you put yourself in our shoes and imagine what it would be like to flee your country for safety; imagine a life stripped of royalty and the promise of protection, replaced instead with a life of banishment and isolation, where you're forced to fend for yourself without any support or resources. Let that sink in.

## **Case Studies: Life Inside the Immigration Detention**

We have listed some stories of people who are currently detained indefinitely in immigration detention centres and 'quasi-detention' estates:

### **01. Person X, detained at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Center**

"I was detained three times without committing any crime. Three weeks, eight months, three months – trapped in a cycle of uncertainty. Thrice taken to the airport, thrice on the plane, ready to be deported. It's been 12 years of fighting for my life, and now, at 65 years old, my mental health is shattered by the trauma endured in detention. I sought safety here, but peace remains elusive."

### **02. Person Y, detained at Colnbrook Immigration Removal Center,**

"I was detained in Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centre for a month, bearing an electronic tag for one year and five months, and reporting every two weeks in Hounslow Central. For 22 years in the UK, my adulthood has been wasted. No children, no family - a life in limbo. Suicidal thoughts plague my mind, born from the needless detention of an innocent person like me."

### **03. Person Z, who used to work in Buckingham Palace, was detained at Yarl's Wood IRC**

"I grew up learning the Queen's English, cherishing the values of inclusivity within the Commonwealth. Moving to the UK, I saw a job advert to work in the Palace, and friends and family told me not to dare because there was no possibility. I did, I succeeded, and for me, I thought barriers had been broken. However, years later, detention shattered that illusion.

Despite my connections to the UK, I was told to 'integrate' elsewhere, despite having uncles and, aunties and cousins here, and I questioned the very essence of belonging. My thoughts became clouded as to how much more one can be integrated into the UK system when I have worked and learnt a lot of the history working in this very British institution. This experience awakened me to the persistence of postcolonialism, race, and economic expansionism within the system. As the new monarch, I implore you to be an interlocutor of your government, upholding the value of inclusivity that the British people desire. May your reign be a beacon of hope, declaring a future where humanity triumphs over adversity."

*Together, these stories shed light on the injustices faced by individuals trapped within the confines of immigration detention. Their stories call for action, urging us to break down the barriers that perpetuate suffering and to envision a future where compassion and inclusivity prevail.*

In conclusion, we have signed this letter to stand in solidarity with all who are imminently facing institutionalised punishment under the current Immigration detention policies, despite its obvious flaws and the harm it has caused all of us <sup>(4)</sup>. Our hope remains unwavering that a different approach can be found. However, the government in your name is seeking to expand the detention estate, subjecting vulnerable individuals to quasi-detention facilities like barges and disused barracks. This cruel policy persists without change, relentlessly tightening its grip and inflicting untold damage on those simply striving to survive. It pains us to acknowledge that our immigration system targets individuals based on the colour of their skin and punishes them for circumstances beyond their control—where they were born.

Let us be clear - what we have shared with you is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the horrors of immigration detention. We implore you to take action and witness the true extent of the suffering by visiting a detention centre. Our visitor groups are prepared to facilitate your visit, not to legitimise this abhorrent system but to scrutinise it and push for its dismantling.

We sincerely appreciate your attention to our letter and eagerly anticipate witnessing your unwavering commitment to justice and equality. Your leadership, compassion, and foresight have the power to transform the UK into a beacon of hope, demonstrating what it truly means to welcome migrants. Utilise your powerful voice to bring positive change to those trapped in limbo. Remember, this is happening under your leadership—let us take decisive steps to end immigration detention.

**We have the honour to be, Sir, yours sincerely,**

*Some of the signatories wanted to remain anonymous\* and the list of their country of origin is listed below:*

**Gee Manoharan** ✉ (main correspondence: [gee.manoharan@aviddetention.org.uk](mailto:gee.manoharan@aviddetention.org.uk) )

**Aminata**

**Aderonke Apata**

**AJ\***

**Aminata**

**Anonymous I\***

**Anonymous II\***

**Bayo Osa-Emmanuel**

**Brian Mamvuto**

**Buba\***

**CK\***

**Danny\***

**Diana\***

**Ebrima comma**

**Flower\***

**Hope\***

**Ivo Kuka**

**Janahan Sivanathan**

**Kaveh G Dezfuli\***

**Margarite\***  
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**Olivier T\***  
**Queen of Liberty\***  
**Seth Kaitey**  
**Stella Maureen Shyanguya**  
**T\***  
**Taher Belabbas**  
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#### **Nationalities list:**

Algeria, Bangladesh, Cameroon, DRC, Egypt, Ethiopia, France-Kenya, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudanese, Trinidad and Tobago, Zimbabwe, Stateless.

#### **Reading list:**

- Refugee Tales, edited by David Herd and Anna Pincus, Volumes I-IV
- Departing Black Britons: Portraits of Deportation to Jamaica, Luke De Noronha
- Hostile Environment: How Immigrants Became Scapegoats, Maya Goodfellow
- No Friend but the Mountains, Behrouz Boochani
- This Land is our Land: An Immigrants Manifesto, Suketu Mehta
- Dignity, Women and Immigration Detention, Alice Gerlach

#### **References**

1. A. Nethery, Incarceration, classification and control: Administrative detention in settler colonial Australia. *Political Geography* 89, 102457 (2021).
2. M. Bosworth, S. Turnbull, "Immigration, Detention, and the Expansion of Penal Power in the United Kingdom" in *Extreme Punishment: Comparative Studies in Detention, Incarceration and Solitary Confinement*, K. Reiter, A. Koenig, Eds. (Palgrave Macmillan UK, London, 2015), 10.1057/9781137441157\_4, pp. 50-67.
3. M. Bosworth (2013) Can Immigration Detention Centres be Legitimate? Understanding Confinement in a Global World. in *The Borders of Punishment: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Exclusion* (Oxford University Press), p 09.
4. S. Shaw (2016) Review into the Welfare in Detention of Vulnerable Persons. ed H. Office (Home Office, [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)), p 349.