

Rt. Hon. Damian Green MP
Minister for Immigration
The Home Office
2 Marsham Street
Seacole Building
London
SW1P 4DF

23rd June 2010

Dear Mr Green,

Detention reform

We warmly welcome the commitment of the new government to ending the detention of children. This is a positive step, which we urge you to implement as soon as possible and without recourse to the separation of families.

However, as organisations with extensive experience of the UK's immigration detention system, we believe that there is an urgent need for much wider reform. In our experience, the system is expensive, inefficient and damaging, unnecessarily depriving large numbers of their liberty indefinitely before releasing them. As such, it neither respects the civil liberties of those detained, nor meets the government's requirements for immigration control. Detention reform is therefore entirely consistent with this government's commitment to upholding civil liberties and making substantial cuts in public spending in lieu of the budget deficit.

We the undersigned have extensive experience of the detention system and supporting communities affected by detention, and include organisations working for many years in every detention centre in the UK. We have also seen at first hand the unaccountable and opaque decision making processes and delays in dealing with casework by the UK Border Agency, and the waste and human misery that result. Some of us have conducted research on the indefinite detention of those who cannot be deported, and this has shown that as few as 18% of those detained for more than a year went on to be deported. Many are also detained indefinitely in prison. We have witnessed the devastating impact on the mental health of detainees who are held indefinitely before being suddenly released into the community without preparation or support. We therefore believe that the detention system needs a fundamental rethink.

At a time when large cuts to public spending are being discussed, the UK Border Agency is proposing to build two new detention centres at Bullingdon and Yarls Wood, at vast public expense. It is also seeking to convert two prisons, Morton Hall and Ashwell, to Immigration Removal Centres, which will exacerbate the pressure on scarce prison places. The Agency has also paid compensation for unlawful detention in a succession of cases where detention continued for years with no prospect of removal.

We believe that a sensible option is a moratorium on the opening of further immigration removal centres until an independent inquiry has fully examined the current use of detention. This inquiry should assess detention practices against the need for efficient use of public money, the need to

minimise the impact on civil liberties and the need to minimise the impact of detention on the wellbeing of migrants and their communities in the UK.

We would be delighted to meet with you to initiate a dialogue on this complex matter.

Yours sincerely,

Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainees
Asylum Aid
Asylum Welcome
Barbed Wire Britain
Brighton Voices In Exile
Coalition Against Bullingdon Immigration Removal Centre
Campaign to Close Campsfield
Dover Detainee Visitor Group
The Equal Rights Trust
Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group
Haslar Visitors Group
Lewes Group in Support of Refugees and Asylum Seekers
London Churches Refugee Network
London Detainee Support Group
Manchester Immigration Detainee Support Team
Migrant & Refugee Communities Forum
Migrants Rights Network
National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns
RenéCassin
Scottish Detainee Visitors
Unity Centre Glasgow
United Reformed Church
Yar's Wood Befrienders
Yar's Wood Asylum Casework Support Group
Zimbabwe Association