



# Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group Newsletter

Spring 2006, Issue 17

## A Detention Centre in Every Home?

**It is likely that we will start seeing a rise in the use of electronic tagging as a condition of release from detention.**



Electronic monitoring is a key aspect of the New Asylum Model, as laid out in the government's five-year asylum plan. Until recently it was only used with an asylum seeker's consent but this has been reversed and tagging is now enforceable. Tony McNulty recently confirmed that the proportion of people fitted with tags is set to rise as the Home Office begin rolling out their Electronic Monitoring Policy.

### What does it mean in practice?

People will be fitted with an electronic tag to be worn on their ankle. The individual will be informed of the times and days when they are required to be at home. The tag sends a signal to a monitoring unit installed in their home, which communicates to a monitoring control centre run by a private company. This is tagging at its most basic. It is likely that when satellite technology is further developed, this might also be used to track people's movements as well. A Home Office Source is quoted in the *Scotsman* as saying, 'Accuracy is down to inches, so we will be able to pinpoint the side of the street that someone is walking on.'

**Tagging will be used as a complement to existing monitoring strategies.** So although someone might have a tag fixed, they can still also be required to report in person to a police station or reporting centre. The criteria used for deciding whether or not someone should be tagged include whether they have made a late or opportunistic claim, whether they come from a 'high intake nationality', whether they are a Third Country case or have a case with a non-suspensive right of appeal. Additionally, if someone has a criminal conviction or a previous history of non-compliance with immigration law they are more likely to be considered suitable for tagging.

**Civil liberties groups argue that this measure is an infringement of human rights** – criminalising and stigmatising law-abiding asylum seekers. One Zimbabwean woman recently wrote to the campaign group NCADC, 'I am not a criminal or rapist, its my 4th week with this tag and I do not know what's gonna happen.' The tag, and the knowledge of being under constant surveillance, is enough to frighten the most law-abiding of people – let alone someone who comes from a country where the authorities routinely monitor for more sinister ends.

## Fund Raising for GDWG

Raising funds for our running costs is not easy. We're not eligible for government assistance and rely on the goodwill of a small number of charitable trusts and the generosity of groups and individuals. With this in mind, Doreen from the Crawley group came up with a novel fundraising idea...



*It all started when I went to the village hall for a charity evening do and the man next to me flashed some post cards. No, not the dubious sort, but ones with varied drawings and scribbles on them. 'What do you think of these?' he said. He is the director of Care, a charity for the elderly. An art student in Edinburgh had wanted to raise some money in memory of her uncle so she sent postcards to artists asking them to draw on them and return them to her. These were then auctioned on ebay making some serious money. What a simple idea.*



**'The cards will be auctioned on ebay'**

*I thought to myself, 'We could do that. We could send egg-shaped cards to celebrities/artists/high profile people asking them to personalise and sign them. We could then auction them worldwide at Easter.'*

*I inveigled my daughter to help write the 'begging' letter, then I started to write lists of who we wanted to write to. After all, whose drawing or autograph would you want to buy? Then came the big learning curve for me on the internet. I am a computer novice, a Luddite, a woman who likes pens and paper and who still writes letters by hand. My brother-in-law gave me a useful web address and I was off! By delving and digging I have found the addresses of 100 celebrities, amongst others Philip Pullman, Alan Rickman, Michael Pallin, John Cleese, Terry Pratchett and Prince Charles. My son then said that a mail merge was essential. This was beyond my comprehension so an angelic Christina Fitzsimmons (fellow GDWG volunteer) came to my rescue, waved her fingers over a hot keyboard for many hours and sorted me out.*

*After the letters were posted I didn't expect miracles, but was surprised that we have already had a steady stream of responses. So far Richard Curtis, Ian Hislop, Charles Dance, Prunella Scales, Joanna Lumley, Alan Rickman, Kathleen Turner, Libby Purves and the cartoonist Nicholas Garland have all returned personalised cards (a selection is reproduced on page 3). We'll keep you up to date with the amount of money raised.*

*The truth is I've become a bit obsessive – give me the name of a famous person and I'll seek them out!*

# DESTITUTION – Living on the Edge

## Two destitute asylum seekers tell their story...

*Increasing numbers of asylum seekers are contacting us upon release from detention in desperation. Not eligible for financial support or accommodation, they find it a daily struggle to survive. Many are in this situation because they have had their claim for asylum turned down but there is no safe route for them to leave the UK. Others are waiting for the Home Office to decide whether or not they are eligible to proceed to the next stage of the appeals process. Eugene and Daniel (not their real names) are asylum seekers from Africa, currently living in a town in the Midlands. They are not currently eligible for any government support.*

### Are there many others in your position?

**Eugene** Yes, I know many people who on release from detention or prison find themselves without any support.

**Daniel** There are a lot of people here from different nationalities who are in that situation without support of NASS and who do not have a legal advisor. To give you an example, there is a recruitment agency in this town; last week immigration officers and police went there to arrest illegal workers. In two and a half hours they arrested 36 failed asylum seekers. These are people who are obliged to use fake documents to look for work simply to pay for their daily food and rent of their house.



### What's the most difficult thing about your current situation?

**Eugene** First of all the cost of living in England is high. You can find yourself in this situation suddenly without being able to work and unable to meet your basic needs. This results in a situation of permanent stress and we know people who have become mentally ill.

**Daniel** The main problem in this situation is making a living – having shelter, food and other things, when the future is so dark and there is the fear to be arrested and be sent into detention. Not only that, the permanent depression and stress.

### How do you keep up your spirits up in the face of such enormous pressure?

**Eugene** It's difficult to say how you do this in such a deplorable situation, despite the fact that friends sometimes help you with food, or a corner of their house in which to get some sleep. One feels fragile, ashamed and disappointed. You simply can't have a high morale because neither in this country nor your country of origin do you have any peace or future. Sometimes things seem so dark that you think of suicide or committing acts abhorrent to yourself and society.

**Daniel** It is impossible to keep your mind all right in such a situation because you are alone and haven't got a thing. You don't have anyone and you are manipulable by anyone who can propose you anything to help you to survive. That is why sometimes you can see some failed asylum seekers becoming suddenly prostitutes or thieves or armed robber or criminal. It is so terrible and not only do they become a bad person for the community but some of them that I know fall into depression and madness.

### Have you found it easy to find people in the community who will help and support you?

**Eugene** The numbers of people in this situation are growing. It's a fact that many have come to the UK with the intention of contributing to the development and construction of this country, instead they find themselves thrown in the street. I am lucky that I have a benefactor, a pastor from my church, who takes care of me, and a few others in our religious community help me practically and emotionally. However, I'm a rare case – not many are so lucky. I share anything I receive with them because for us solidarity is a fundamental principle.

**Daniel** The community here is not like in Africa, where if you are in difficulty your cousin or your uncle can help you or give you a shelter. To give you more detail on my case, I live now in a bedroom with three guys from my country and we share everything (rent, electricity, gas, clothes – everything) it is not nice but we have no choice. To have money sometimes we are forced into doing black job. This morning, due to the fact that the landlord will come to collect his money, we did not have breakfast and we have to struggle to give him the rent. You see that life is so hard and only people like your organisation can do something for us. But we can't go back home due to the problems there and here they do not accept us, so we are in the middle of nowhere. As we always say, we are in the hands of God.

### HOW TO HELP?

*With our already limited funds, it's impossible for us to provide a sustainable source of financial help for people in this situation, although in emergencies we are sometimes able to help out with a small one-off payment to someone in dire need. If you can contribute to this small fund, which is also used to help destitute detainees returning to their countries of origin, then all donations will be gratefully received.*

*We usually try and put people in contact with groups, churches and religious groups in the area they are living, and encourage them to build their local networks. Sometimes people are eligible to apply for hardcase financial support, or appeal against a decision to refuse them... talk to the office if you know someone in this situation.*

*If you are interested in local initiatives to help, the Refugee Trust in Brighton is struggling to support destitute asylum seekers in the area – [www.therefugeetrust.org.uk](http://www.therefugeetrust.org.uk).*

**Church Action for Poverty is spearheading a campaign 'Living Ghosts' to end destitution. They need people to sign up as a supporter and spread the word amongst churches and other groups [www.church-poverty.org.uk](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk)**

# SEEKING ASYLUM IN BRITAIN:

## A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

Asylum seekers and refugees are the subject of much media and political attention but they are often misrepresented. In this small piece, I shall briefly examine why people go into exile and the situation in which they find themselves as asylum seekers or refugees in the UK.

Immigrants or asylum seekers come to Britain in many categories. Some come as genuine asylum seekers with profound fear for their lives, some as economic migrants, some as family reunions and many other reasons that compound today's immigration pattern. Those who come as genuine asylum seekers, of whom many are responsible persons, do indeed have a profound risk to their lives. But as they defy all odds and get to this side of the world, pejoratively incensed immigration personnel often welcome them. They are then bundled into waiting caged vans and then thrown into detention centers around Britain. This makes life harder and more complicates the vicious circle of hardships they may have experienced.

Today over 20,000 asylum seekers are warehoused or detained against their will. Numerous reports show that this barbaric and inhumane act has contributed enormously to the numbers of asylum seekers who have committed suicide whilst in detention. Detention centres also lead to the

*'How should we live in this brave new world, and how can we stay free in it?'*

spread of infectious diseases to which are being added to the stresses of being incarcerated for doing no wrong. The stresses that this causes have a bad impact on the health and general feelings of

detained asylum seekers. This in turn causes depression and embitterment within detainees. It's indeed out of order that anyone should be detained without criminal charges, and in any case for detention to be done, it should be the last resort to all other avenues.

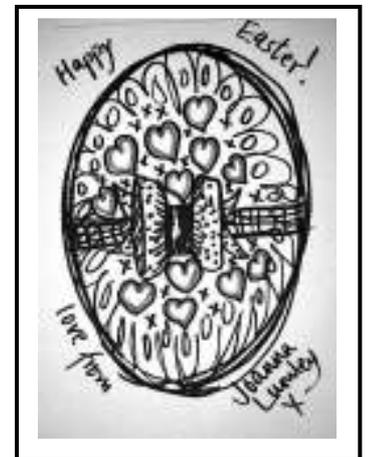
**Detention does actually have a negative impact on the mental health of asylum seekers**, and in psychiatric terms, the price paid is indeed enormous. Just consider someone escaping brutal

disenchantment and his goal is modern Europe, where he sees a beacon of hope, peace and freedom, but is welcomed by further incarceration. There is obviously going to be psychological damage.

**Some detention centres like Dover, Doncaster etc were prisons then turned into Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs).** Little has been done to transform these ex-prisons into immigration holding places. The manpower and policies remain the same and no effective change has been done on this. In my opinion, conditions in these centres are appalling and it's inappropriate to detain innocent young men and ladies in such conditions.

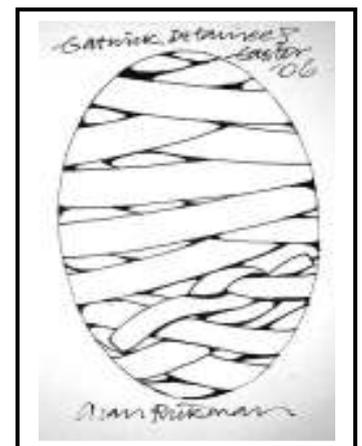
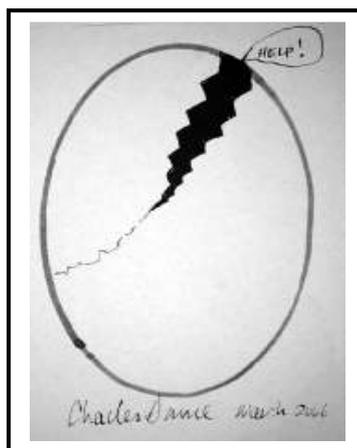
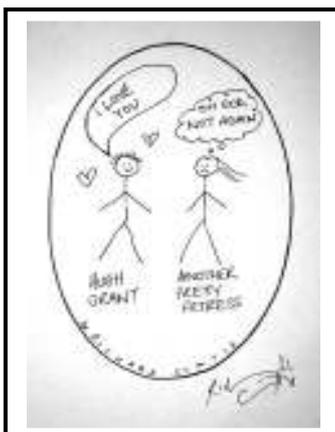
**As a result of detaining already desperate, despondent and distressed people**, over 8 asylum seekers have died in such vexatious conditions and many more have made suicide attempts. The most recent of such tragic scenes happened at Harmondworth IRC on the 19th of January 2006.

*By David from Uganda (not his real name), who was in detention for over three months last year.*



## Some of the Celebrity Cards

*from top left clockwise; Prunella Scales, Nicholas Garland, Joanna Lumley, Alan Rickman Charles Dance & Richard Curtis*

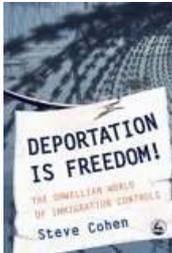


# Book Review

## Deportation is Freedom! The Orwellian world of immigration controls

By Steve Cohen

2006 Jessica Kingsley Publishers



**This book explicitly sets out to change people's minds and attitudes towards immigration controls. Whatever you'll make of it, it is certain to make you think.**

While existing immigration controls are unfair and keep getting worse with every piece of legislation, the author takes the argument further and argues that immigration controls can in fact never be fair. This is because it's a contradiction in terms – immigration controls are all about excluding certain categories of people from entering the country. Cohen looks at the history of controls, all of which have been designed to exclude people from certain places at certain times. He concludes that immigration controls are unfair because they are at heart racist.

Given the campaign element of the book, this isn't a balanced account for or against: Cohen makes the case for the total abolition of controls. This aside, the interesting part in this book is Cohen's comparison of the climate under which immigration debates take place with George Orwell's made-up nightmare-scenario society in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. If this seems like a long shot, then think about the way we are presented with contradictory policies by the Home Office. For example the focus on integration, at the same time as indefinite leave to remain has been reduced to a few years. Another example is the Home Office's stated objective of building a fairer and more tolerant society at the same time as the appeals system has been curtailed and plans are ahead for the detention, or tagging, of ever more people who haven't committed a crime. This is classic Orwellian *doublethink*, where language has corrupted rational thought.

In a world where asylum seekers are being left destitute and where children can be taken away from their parents, or where people can be locked up indefinitely, I guess the Home Office line would be that you can be free from all that if only you leave the country: Deportation is Freedom!

Jessica Gustavsson

# DETENTION NEWS

## GOOD NEWS FROM DOWN UNDER

Australia has reversed its policy of mandatory detention for all asylum seekers. Until recently, asylum seekers of all ages were held for many years in remote detention centres but a recent study has concluded that detainees suffered from a range of mental disorders, primarily due to their incarceration. A recent article in the British Medical Journal reports that the observations of British health professionals concur with those of their Australian counterparts. The article concludes that 'by continuing to document the psychosocial impact of detention, the medical profession is well-placed to add its expert voice in shaping humane immigration policies'. British Medical Journal 4 February 2006, Vol 332

## THE MEDICAL JUSTICE NETWORK

Medical Justice is a network of ex-detainees, doctors and other experts, working on a voluntary basis to improve health care for asylum seekers who have been detained. They have produced an excellent leaflet setting out people's rights as per the Detention Centre Rules and the Operational Enforcement Manual. The aim of the leaflet is enable detainees to become aware of what their rights are and to challenge any denial of their rights. We'll be circulating it at support group meetings for discussion, or ask us to email it to you.

## Welcome to New Volunteers!

A warm welcome to new volunteers who have joined us since the last newsletter:  
**Claud Isidore and Amir Ikramulhaq (Crawley), Bob Dare and Jonathon Holland (Reigate), Hilary Houston (Oxted) and Celia Stubbs (Brighton)**

### JOB VACANCY Assistant Co-ordinator

See website, or call office for details. Deadline March 24<sup>th</sup>

[www.gdwg.org.uk](http://www.gdwg.org.uk)  
Tel: 01293 434 350



## AVID 2006 CONFERENCE

### Advocacy – Working for Change

*This year the Association of Visitors to Immigration Detainee's (AVID) annual conference takes place on Sat 18 March from 10 – 3.30 pm at Friends House, 173 Euston Rd, London. Speakers include:*

v **Revd Prof Canon Nicholas Sagovsky**  
Canon Theologian at Westminster Abbey

v **Jane Aspden**  
Quality Initiative Project Leader for the UNHCR

v **Nancy Kelly**  
Head of International and UK Policy at the Refugee Council

An opportunity to meet volunteers from other groups and learn more about AVID's advocacy and campaigning work on behalf of visitors and detainees.