

GDWG Newsletter Winter 2011

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group

Building momentum: GDWG collaborate to push for detention reform

GDWG have been working closely with the London Detainee Support Group and AVID, under the auspices of the Detention Forum, over the past few months, in an attempt to engage with government on the issue of detention, with the idea that we can put forward our ideas about where things are going wrong, and how these problems may be addressed. The joint letter we sent last year to the Immigration Minister, Damian Green, signed by another 27 detention-related organisations, pointed out that detaining large numbers of people, many for very long periods of time, was not only extremely costly in both financial and human terms, but that it was also largely ineffective in that more than one third of those de-

tained are subsequently released back into the UK.

Following on from the letter, sent back in June this year, we organised a Parliamentary Meeting on 1st November, chaired by Julian Huppert, Lib Dem MP for Cambridge, and



Picture courtesy of the Detention Forum

attended by numerous MPs, Lords, and other interested parties. The meeting was a significant success in terms of engaging with some new MPs with IRCs in their areas, including Henry Smith, MP for Crawley, who has already been very helpful to us, and who has indicated that he is interested in the issue. We anticipate that this will be an ongoing process, and do not expect any immediate results, but we are encouraged that we have some momentum building. We have recently heard that Her Majesty's

Inspector of Prisons and the UK Border Agency Independent Chief Inspector are planning a joint piece of work looking at the use of detention, which they will be conducting towards the end of next year, another good sign detention is an issue that is of concern to more than just NGOs who work in the area.

A follow-up meeting with Julian Huppert early in the New Year has encouraged us further, and given us some further ideas, including the possibility of either an adjournment debate or back-bench debate, as well as the possibility that we could attempt to push the issue onto the agenda of either the Home Affairs Select Committee or the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Of course reform in this area is always going to be controversial, and always going to attract significant opposition from certain parts of the political spectrum, the public and the tabloid press. However, we remain hopeful that our arguments, based on both humanity and common sense, will in the end prove to be too powerful to ignore.

Nic Eadie

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Drogba and Djembe!

GDWG volunteer's travels in Africa

After six years volunteering for GDWG and many more teaching, Kate took what she calls an 'elderly gap year' just to prove to herself that she could! Twelve months later she is back, happy to see friends and delighted to speak in her mother tongue again, with tales of gorilla trekking, whale watching, and Drogba on the pitch in the World Cup!

Kate visited Kenya, Tanzania and Zanzibar, Mozambique, Mauritius and South Africa. Most of her time was spent in Morondava in Madagascar where she lived on the



beach, taught English as a foreign language, learnt to sail a pirogue (local canoe fishing boat), learnt to gut

fish with a pen knife, drank cocktails and learnt djembe drumming (the drumming and cocktails mixed well together!). Kate became acquainted with malagash cul-

Volunteers' page

ture including ancestor worship and describes vividly the Easter tradition of families going for a picnic on the beach with food, drink, chairs, tables, crockery, cutlery, tablecloths and any musical instruments they could lay their hands on.

Kate misses the starry night skies with no light pollution, the sea often warmer than blood temperature, and the beautiful Baobab trees (left). She has returned to visiting for GDWG with the welcoming polite formality of the people of Morondava inspiring her visits to detainees in Brook House.

Anna Pincus

Recipes from around the world: Spicy Sri Lankan Lamb

I have been visiting Morgan at Tinsley House since July. Very soon we began talking about food which seems to be a bit of a preoccupation for detainees. He told me how to cook this recipe (his Mother's) which I wrote down in my notebook on my visit. You will have to guess at the quantities in some parts, I'm afraid. The first time I made it, it was too dry and the spices 'burnt' (didn't taste of anything). The next time I added more meat stock and it was delicious!

Ingredients:

Dry:
Mustard seeds
Cumin (Jeera)
Coriander powder
Cardamoms
Cloves

Turmeric (Eldi)
Cinnamon sticks
Garam Masala
Salt (to Taste)

Fresh:

1 or 2 Onions

Coriander leaves
Garlic
Ginger
Green Chillies
(Optional) Tamarind Paste - mix with hot water
Oil
Diced Lamb (or goat, mutton, pork, beef, chicken or fish)
Meat Stock

Method:

1. Warm the oil in cooking pot. When hot add 1 or two onions, sliced, and 2

or 3 green chillies, chopped. Brown.

2. Throw in mustard seeds and cumin seeds, 1 tablespoon each. Add cardamoms, cloves, coriander powder. Add 1 or 2 teaspoons turmeric. Add ginger and garlic and 1 or 2 cinnamon sticks. Stir for 2 minutes. Add garam masala (1 or 2 tablespoons) and stir till like brown paste.

3. Cut lamb into cubes then add to pan. Add meat stock (1 pint) and salt. Cook over low heat for 1-2 hours with the lid on.

4. Add chopped fresh coriander and tamarind paste (optional). Stir and cook with lid on for 5-10 minutes.

Eat with rice, Nan or couscous. Enjoy!

Jill Francis, Brighton volunteer

Out of sight:

What happens after detainees are removed?

So often we know little about what happens to people we have visited once they are removed from the UK. There are the occasional phone calls or emails, but for the majority of people, we will never know what happened to them on their return or what their future holds.

I visited a young man from Afghanistan who had come to the UK at the age of thirteen. He had developed mental health problems during the six years he was here. The community mental health team who had been supporting him helped him to understand he was suffering from post traumatic stress as a result of being separated from his family at such a young age, and from his experience of life as an unaccompanied minor in the UK.

After losing his battle to remain in the UK, he was returned to Afghanistan four months ago. I received a phone call from him shortly after he returned, and he told me he had managed to get to the border of Pakistan. He was staying with an agent on the premise that he would pay the agent to smuggle him into Pakistan, and then on to Europe. He reported that he had been shot at by US forces the day before and said things were very danger-

ous for him. He pleaded with me to give him £500 to pay the agent.

Before he was deported, he had discussed with me the possibilities of being recruited into the Taliban in lieu of any family support. He told me he had discussed this with fellow Afghan returnees in Brook House. I met another GDWG visitor in Tinsley House who was also visiting a young Afghan man, he had expressed similar thoughts to her about what his fate would be upon return to Kabul. He had not ruled out joining the Taliban forces.

So what does happen to the thousands of (often young) men who are deported to Afghanistan? With little job prospects and estrangement from family members, the option of having a place and a purpose, even if that involves fighting for the Taliban, may be more favourable than destitution. There is no research published by the Home Office about what happens after people are deported, and we will never really know what happens to most people. Perhaps it's easier for us if we don't have to.

Louise Peim

GDWG's weekly Brook House advice surgery

GDWG has been holding a weekly surgery at Brook House for a few months now. The surgery is on a Wednesday morning from nine thirty to midday with two members of staff seeing five people each. The appointments are booked by us in advance and are open to anybody who wants them; we regularly see people who are waiting for a visitor or people who want help with practical things, such as writing to their MP.

For example this Wednesday morning I saw a twenty five year old from Eritrea who is currently waiting for a visitor and struggling in Brook House; an eighteen year old from Afghanistan who is facing deportation; a Chinese man with little English and two children and a wife in the UK with no solicitor and an appeal hearing looming; a man from Liberia whose lawyer has dropped him; and a Jamaican man who has been in the UK since the 70s.

We find that speaking to someone face to face is easier in many ways, and allows us to gain peoples trust and explain what we can and cannot do to help them. Speaking to a greater number of people in person means that we now hope to be able to meet everyone before we allocate them a visitor. It is also an opportunity for us to talk to people who might not feel confident speaking in English over the telephone.

Hannah Jackson

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Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group is a registered charity, set up in 1995 to offer friendship and support to asylum seekers and other immigration detainees held in detention at Gatwick Airport.

Dates for your diary

Next area group meetings:

- Brighton: 8th March
- Crawley: 7th February
- Horsham: 9th March
- Oxted: 21st February
- Reigate: 9th March
- GDWG 15th Anniversary event: 1st March (see below)
- GDWG AGM/training session: 7th April

We are 15! Please help us celebrate...

On Tuesday 1st March, 2011 we shall be celebrating our fifteen years as a charity with a get-together at Christ Church United Reform Church, Worth Park Avenue, Pound Hill, Crawley in the company of Sheila Hancock CBE who has kindly accepted our invitation to comper the evening. This is our opportunity to thank our volunteers for all your much-appreciated visiting. Join us for live music, food supplied by Brighton Voices in Exile, the company of our patrons and ex-detainees. It is an invitation-only event, but if anyone has not registered their intention to come or would like to help with the arrangements for the event in any way, please contact Anna in the office apin-cus@gdwg.org.uk

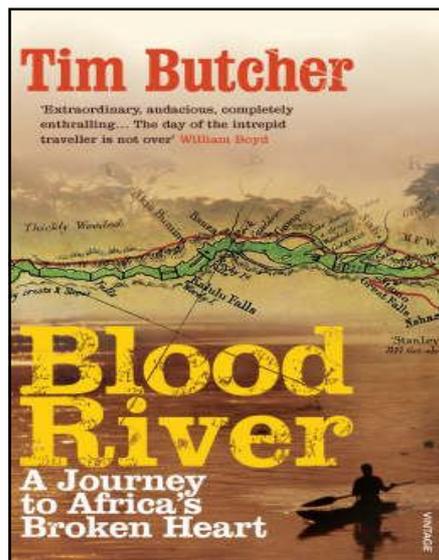


Book review – Blood River by Tim Butcher

In this superb account of Daily Telegraph reporter Tim Butcher's attempt to retrace the footsteps of H. M. Stanley's famous expedition down the length of the Congo River, the author not only gives us a glimpse into the current state of what is surely one of the most dangerous countries on Earth, but also tells the history of colonial brutality and exploitation, followed by post-independence violence and economic and social decline.

What strikes the reader most, and a message that it repeated throughout the book, is that the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is perhaps the only country in the world where conditions for the vast majority of people are far worse now than they were a hundred years ago. The country, one of the most resource-

rich in the world, has been ravaged by various different foreign influences over the centuries, stripped of its bountiful minerals, diamonds, rubber and even people during the



slave period, leaving a country today that has been torn apart by war between many different militias and factions almost without break since

independence from Belgium was granted in 1960.

Butcher's journey is certainly a dangerous and difficult one. The country's infrastructure has been all but destroyed, leaving the author some perilous journeys by motorbike and river. In his final analysis, not only of Congo but of Africa more widely, he states that, 'While outsiders led by Stanley can be blamed for creating this situation, the people of Africa must share responsibility for showing themselves unable to change it... The cruelty and greed of African dictators is mostly to blame, but it is also true that the peoples of Africa have not been capable of working together to rein in the excesses of dictators.' A bleak story in many ways, but at the same time a fascinating look at a country with a history steeped in bloodshed, and a future that still hangs in the balance.

Nic Eadie