

## **Sharp rise in detention of asylum seeker children shown by new statistics**

Detention charity Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) today condemned a six-fold increase in the number of asylum seeker children being detained by the UK immigration service in the last six months.

Statistics published today by the Home Office show that on 26 June 2004, 60 asylum seeker children were detained in removal centres under immigration act powers. This is double the number of children detained when the last snap-shot was taken in March 2004, and six times the number of children detained in December 2003, the first time child detention statistics were published by the government.

The latest figures also show that over 16% of children were detained for longer than 14 days – way above the maximum period of a few days recommended for children by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. On 26 June, 5 (8 %) children had been locked up for between 15 and 29 days, and a further 5 (8 %) for between 1 and 2 months. The other 50 (84%) children had been detained for 14 days or less.

The use of detention for asylum seeking children is prohibited by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has been condemned by HM Inspectorate of Prisons. Inspection reports by HMIP concluded that children should not be detained for more than a few days where absolutely necessary and recommended that independent welfare assessments be carried out after a matter of days.

*“As these figures today show, children are being detained in significant and increasing numbers. There is no statutory time limit and no requirement for their detention to be sanctioned by a court. In our experience, many do not have legal representation and are therefore unable to exercise their right to a bail application. We have serious concerns about children’s welfare. Having conceded last year that detained children deserve some protection by way of an assessment the government have as yet failed to put any concrete measures in place with social services”* said Sarah Cutler, BID Policy Officer.

BID also criticised the inadequacy of snapshots about child detention, which do not provide sufficient detail for the impact of the policy to be monitored.

*“These figures show an alarming increase in the number of children detained in the UK on a given day. But it is very hard to work out just how many children are affected each year, or what happens to them because the official statistics still fail to include information as to how many are removed or the total numbers detained”* said Sarah Cutler.

**ENDS**

**Contact:** Sarah Cutler, Policy and Research Officer, BID 020 7247 3590 (BID office) / 07870 643373 / [sarah@biduk.org](mailto:sarah@biduk.org)

### Notes to Editors

1. Children in asylum seeking families can be made subject to the detention of one or both of their parents. They can be held for an indefinite period in a 'removal centre'. (Until 2002, removal centres were named detention centres). Families accommodation exists at Dungavel House in Scotland, Tinsley House, near Gatwick and Oakington Reception Centre in Cambridgeshire.
2. There is international consensus, enshrined in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that children seeking asylum should not be detained. The UNHCR Guidelines on Refugee Children states in its preamble (page 37): "*Refugee children are children first and foremost, and as children, they need special attention.*" "*It is UNHCR's policy that refugee children should not be detained.*"
3. In her report of an Inspection of Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre carried out in August 2003, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons stated that "*This confirms our view, expressed in other reports, that the detention of children should be an exceptional measure, and should not in any event exceed a very short period – no more than a matter of days. The key principle here is not the precise number of days .... It is that the welfare and development of children is likely to be compromised by detention, however humane the provisions, and that this will increase the longer detention is maintained... We therefore believe that there should be an independent assessment of the welfare, developmental and educational needs of each detained child, guided by the principles set out in international and UK domestic law in relation to children. This should be carried out, to advise on the compatibility of detention with the welfare of the child, and to inform decisions on detention and continued detention.*" October 2003, HMIP report on Dungavel, p 45
4. In December 2003, the government committed to carrying out assessments of detained children's welfare at 21 days – see Home Office Stat054/2003 'Government welcomes select committee support for new measures on asylum', 16 Dec 03. However, no tangible procedure for assessments is yet in place – see 'Delay in Dungavel children's welfare checks', Community Care Magazine, Aug 12, 2004
5. Statistics about the number of children detained were included in the Quarterly Asylum Statistics for the first time in December 2003. Statistics for 27 December 2003 showed 10 children in detention on that day. On 27 March 2004, 30 children were detained.

BID is a small independent charity that prepares and presents bail applications on behalf of those detained under Immigration Act powers. In 2001 it was awarded the Liberty/Justice Human Rights Award. A summary of BID's casework with detained families from February – November 2003 and an update in May 2004 can be downloaded at our website at [www.biduk.org](http://www.biduk.org)

### Bail for Immigration Detainees

Registered Charity No. 1077187. Exempted by the OISC. Ref. No. 200100147