



PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate use

Injustices faced by women in immigration detention highlighted by new research

Violent treatment during removal attempts, lengthy periods of detention and a failure to meet women's needs have been documented in new research into women in detention published today.

'They took me away' – Women's experiences of immigration detention in the UK by Bail for Immigration Detainees (BiD) and the Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid (RWRP) highlights shocking testimony from thirteen women asylum seekers, who were detained for periods ranging from one week to 86 weeks.

The women's experiences illustrate that detention is often not used in line with stated policy. Women described struggling to find lawyers and being unaware of, or unable to exercise, their legal rights.

Women also described being unable to access physical and mental health care and treatment in detention, and felt that their health deteriorated as a result. The women who got out of detention and went back to live in the community continued to experience a fear of being re-detained and lived under the shadow of the ultimate fear of being removed from the UK.

"The women we interviewed were traumatised by their experiences in removal centres in the UK. We are grateful to them for speaking out, and we believe that their experiences are shared by large numbers of women asylum seekers and migrants in the UK every year. We demand an end to the practice of locking up women, men and children without respect for their basic rights, and without automatic access to an independent review of their detention" said Sarah Cutler, co-author of the report.

Debora Singer, Coordinator of the Refugee Women's Research Project at Asylum Aid, stated

"This research highlights three key points for action. Firstly, there is a need for the government to make fundamental changes to the legal framework for detention to make it comply with domestic and international human rights norms. Secondly, those running the centres need to adhere to the existing guidance and rules so that women's needs can be met - in their predicament both as women asylum seekers and women held in detention. Thirdly, the recommendations of HM Inspectorate of Prisons must be fully implemented."

ENDS

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Notes to Editors

1. The report was written by Sophia Ceneda and Sarah Cutler and published jointly by BID and RWRP. Copies are available to download at www.biduk.org/pdf/women/women_in_detention_in_word_02Sep04.doc or http://www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP_RRP_Publicationslist.htm For hard copies, please contact Bethany Collier on 7377 5123 or bethanyc@asylumaid.org.uk

1. BID and RWRP are holding a public meeting to be chaired by Baroness Shirley Williams on Tuesday 19th October 2004 from 5.00 to 7.00 p.m. at Portcullis House, Westminster to discuss the issues raised in the research. Speakers will include Shami Chakrabarti, director of Liberty, and women who have experienced detention. Invitations available to download at http://www.biduk.org/pdf/BID_RWRP_invite_19_Oct_email_version.pdf Email info@biduk.org to confirm attendance.

2. Women can be detained under the Immigration Acts at removal centres and prisons in the UK. Centres currently used to detain women are Tinsley House, Yarl's Wood, Dungavel and Oakington. Women usually make up around 10% of the total number detained. According to the most recent Home Office statistics, 190 women asylum seekers were being detained on the 28 June 2004.

3. Immigration detention is used without sanction by a court, is without time limit and has serious implications for the physical and mental health of those detained. Many thousands of asylum seekers are affected by detention each year, however, no official statistics are published as to the total numbers detained annually.

BID is a small independent charity that prepares and presents bail applications on behalf of those detained under Immigration Act powers, and campaigns against the use of immigration detention www.biduk.org

Asylum Aid is a charity that gives free legal advice and representation to people seeking asylum in the UK. The Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid provides legal and asylum support advice specifically for women asylum seekers backed up by a programme of research, advocacy, outreach and training www.asylumaid.org.uk