



## Home Office contractor 'restrains disabled Yarls Wood woman by chain'

Wheelchair user Lovelyn Edobor says Capita firm escorts, acting to deport her, 'dragged her like a goat' at Heathrow



**Diane Taylor**

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A disabled victim of trafficking has complained that she was forced into a waist restraint belt and dragged along "like a goat" when the Home Office tried to remove her from the UK on Saturday.

Lovelyn Edobor, from Nigeria, had been held at [Yarls Wood immigration removal centre](#), Bedfordshire, for several months before the Home Office attempted to forcibly remove her from the UK. The 49-year-old suffers from advanced osteoarthritis in both knees and chronic generalised arthritis, and uses a wheelchair.

She had been given a wheelchair to use at Yarls Wood while she was detained there but was told she could not use it while she was being taken to Heathrow airport. She says she was roughly handled by escorts employed by Tascor, part of Capita and a Home Office sub-contractor.

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On arrival at the airport she requested to use the lavatory. There she was told to put both her hands against the wall and was placed in a waist restraint belt, which she said extended from her waist to her breasts, her statement said. The belt was attached to a long chain and she said she was pulled along "like a goat" with the chain.

"The belt was painful as it dug into my skin especially when they pulled me along and when I sat down," she said. "I began crying and complaining ... about the way I was being treated and the pain that I was in, but they continued to treat me in such a way."

Although Edobor's removal on Saturday was cancelled the Home Office was trying to remove her, using a charter flight to Nigeria on Tuesday evening.

The use of waist restraint belts and other forms of physical restraint has been

heavily criticised by pressure groups. The Home Office's own [guidance about restraint](#) states: "The use of any restraint technique must be done in such a way that it preserves the dignity of the detainee."

It warns that if a proper risk assessment is not carried out restraint could breach the [Human Rights Act](#). It adds: "Restraint will not normally be necessary when the detainee's mobility is severely limited."

On Monday, Edobor provided a witness statement to her lawyers who plan to make a complaint on her behalf about her treatment.

The statement said: "Even now, nearly two days after the incident, I am still in shock and feel very unwell. This whole experience was extremely distressing for me."

She suggested the escorts treated her not as a human being but as an animal. "I felt like I was being dragged along like a goat without any consideration for my feelings or my health conditions. I felt like I was being punished and treated like a criminal, and this has made me very upset."

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While Edobor was in the reception area at Yarls Wood waiting to be taken to the airport, she said she did not know what she would do if she were put on a plane. Her lawyers have mounted a new legal challenge in the high court to try to prevent her removal Tuesday evening.

"I haven't been able to eat properly since the incident on Saturday. The way they restrained me and pulled me along made my condition much worse. I went to see the doctor at Yarls Wood on Sunday and he has booked me an appointment to see a specialist at the hospital. They didn't let me get dressed properly when I was in my room. I'm feeling very cold. I would be better off dead than going back to Nigeria."

Her solicitor, Hannah Baynes, of Duncan Lewis, said: "I am very concerned about the treatment of my very vulnerable client by Home Office officials when attempting to remove her to Nigeria on Saturday evening. My client has severe mobility issues, and the way that Home Office officials denied her a wheelchair and used a belt and a chain to pull her along when manoeuvring her around the airport is completely deplorable. Due to her treatment on Saturday night, my client has been left extremely traumatised and in increased pain. We ask that the Home Office provide an explanation for the inhuman treatment of our client by their staff."

Emma Ginn, coordinator of the [charity Medical Justice](#), has raised concerns about waist restraint belts and other forms of restraint used on immigration detainees over a long period of time.

Ginn said: "This case is shocking but familiar. Medical Justice has documented hundreds of cases of alleged assault by escorts since 2005. We have raised concerns to the Home Office year after year about both individual cases and guidance on use of force issued to escorts, to little avail. We continue to see cases and send our volunteer clinicians to visit immigration detainees to assess and photograph their injuries. It is difficult to understand how a properly conducted risk assessment can conclude that it is appropriate to apply such extreme restraint mechanisms to an individual with severe mobility issues."

In a statement the Home Office said: "We do not comment on individual cases. The dignity and welfare of all those in our care is of the utmost importance and we expect detainees to be treated with dignity and respect. We expect the highest standards from companies employed to manage the detention estate."

A Tascor spokesperson said: "The welfare and safety of people in our care is paramount. We expect Tascor's employees to operate to the highest professional standards at all times, under strict guidelines set by the Home Office. If a complaint is received it is taken seriously and thoroughly investigated."

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