

# DETAINEE ABUSE FILM SPARKS INQUIRY CALL

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*Verbal and physical abuse of immigrants at detention centres has caused concern.*

## by Nadeem Badshah

CAMPAIGNERS have urged ministers to improve the way migrants in detention centres are treated after allegations emerged of verbal and physical abuse from guards.

Lawyers and charities have called for a review of claims of rough treatment towards detainees at removal centres, including Brook House near Gatwick Airport in Sussex.

The Home Office has pledged to carry out an independent inquiry into alleged abusive treatment of immigrants in detention centres, which handle more than 25,000 people every year.

But there are concerns over when the inquiry will submit the report, with a number of other inquiries taking place, including over the 2017 Grenfell tower fire in west London and the contaminated blood scandal, due to start in April.

A BBC Panorama exposé on Brook House, based on undercover footage shot by a detainee officer, revealed physical and verbal abuse of detainees by officers. Brook House is run by private contractor G4S, which has conducted its own review into the claims.

Harjap Singh Bhangal, an immigration solicitor at GLS Solicitors, told *Eastern Eye*: "As a law

who regularly visits clients in detention, I often hear stories of mistreatment inside detention centres. However, the recent BBC *Panorama* [programme] provided full-blown evidence of this.

Many Asian illegal immigrants are detained at this time in the UK, mainly at Harmondsworth near Heathrow.

People often have misconceptions that detention centres are a lot softer than prison; however, for immigrants detained there, it is nothing short of prison.

“On the flip side, immigration staff have a difficult job, with many immigrants often trying everything in their power to avoid being deported.”

“However, this is part and parcel of the job, and every detainee has a right not to be abused. Often, access to doctors and counsellors is not provided and language and communication problems exist,” Bhangal added.

“A review of treatment of detainees in detention centres will be welcomed by all as there is a great room for improvement in the way detainees are treated.”

The terms of the inquiry into removal centres, which have not yet been agreed, will be carried out by the prisons and probation ombudsman (PPO).

It comes after figures showed suicide attempts in detention centres had risen more than 100 per cent in recent months, with almost two a day on average through the summer period.

Duncan Lewis Kett, a solicitor for firm Duncan Lewis, is dealing with a case of alleged mistreatment of detainees at Brook House.

He said the scope of the inquiry would follow Article 3 of the European Convention of Human Rights which says state agents and bodies must not engage in torture or the infliction of inhuman and degrading treatment on individuals.

Kett told *Eastern Eye*: “A key component of the UK’s investigative duty under Article 3 is the

Investigation/inquiry should be done swiftly. Any mistreatment of detainees held under immigration powers should be thoroughly investigated and those responsible held to account.”

Meanwhile, a report in 2017 found that more women are being detained at Yarl’s Wood in Bedfordshire despite evidence that they are victims of torture, rape and trafficking.

The review by the chief inspector of prisons, Peter Clarke, renewed calls for a strict time limit after finding that 15 detainees had been held for between six months and a year and had been in detention for more than three years.

Savita Vyas, 33, who has lived in the UK for more than a decade, was sent to Yarl’s Wood after being refused a spouse visa.

She said: “I had been living a very nice life in the UK, working, paying my taxes, paying my health surcharge.

I want to try to move on and forgive and forget what happened to me in detention. But I’ll never be able to forget that feeling of being an animal taken to the slaughterhouse.”

A Home Office spokesman said: “The Home Office has asked the PPO to undertake a dedicated, special investigation.

The PPO has agreed in principle to conduct an investigation although the terms of reference are yet to be agreed.”

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