

Immigration and asylum

Home Office subjects asylum seeker to 407-mile detour across UK

Mohamed Ahmed was released from detention and sent to Liverpool, only to be returned to his accommodation in London, 22 miles from where he was being held



Mohamed Ahmed was arrested and detained at the Heathrow immigration removal centre. Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/AP

Diane Taylor

Wednesday 13 April 2016 10.40 EDT



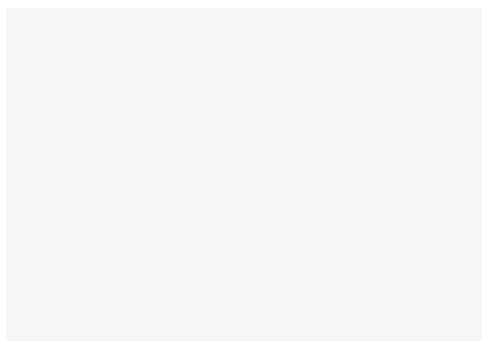
Shares

168

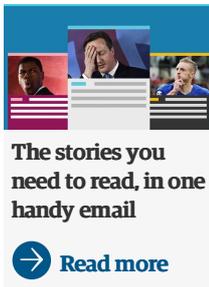
[Save for later](#)

An asylum seeker who was released from detention was subjected to an extraordinary nine-day, 407-mile detour by the Home Office costing at least £5,000 to the taxpayer before being returned to his accommodation 22 miles from the original detention centre.

His lawyers say that as a survivor of torture he should never have been detained in the first place and that the whole bizarre 48-day episode could have been avoided.



Mohamed Ahmed, a 34-year-old asylum seeker from Darfur in [Sudan](#), says he was tortured by the Omar al-Bashir regime and that his extensive torture scars have been confirmed in an independent medical report.



His ordeal began on 15 February when he attended a Home Office reporting centre in London Bridge for a routine monthly reporting session. He was arrested and detained at Heathrow immigration removal centre because his removal from the UK was imminent. Yet the Home Office issued neither removal directions nor a plane ticket.

“The Home Office has detained me twice before and then released me and it was horrible being locked up again,” he said. “I was imprisoned by the Bashir regime and tortured and I felt very traumatised to be locked up again. I had lots of flashbacks about what happened to me when I was imprisoned and tortured in Sudan. While I was in detention at Heathrow I would wake up in the morning and for the first few minutes I would feel OK. Then I would remember that I wasn’t free but had been locked up again.”

Ahmed’s lawyer Harbinder Kaur Singh, of Duncan Lewis Solicitors, challenged his detention and argued that it was unlawful to detain him because he is a survivor of torture and has outstanding legal representations with the Home Office. Ahmed has not committed any crime and since he arrived in the UK in May 2012 has missed only one Home Office reporting session when he was ill, so is not considered at risk of absconding.

After several weeks of legal arguments the Home Office agreed to release Ahmed. However, the Home Office has just informed him they plan to remove him from the UK on Thursday 14 April. His lawyers are challenging the planned removal in the high court

According to Stephen Shaw, the former prisons ombudsman who produced a damning report about detention earlier this year, the average cost of detaining someone for one night is £92.67. So Ahmed's stay cost approximately £3,614.13.

"One week before the Home Office detained me they had moved me to better accommodation in east London and I was so happy to be in a safe place," said Ahmed.

His room in the new accommodation in east London was left vacant while he was detained and all his belongings remained in it. He assumed that when he was released from detention he would be sent back to the same accommodation.

Instead he remained separated from his room and his belongings for a further nine days. He was told by the Home Office to get on an 8pm train to Liverpool that night.

He arrived at the Home Office accommodation in Percy Street, Liverpool, just before 11pm but spent less than an hour there. Officials sent him from there to Wigan by taxi.

"By the time we reached Wigan the taxi meter showed more than £50. I told the driver I had no money to pay him. He told me not to worry and said: 'The Home Office is paying'."

While there, staying in a £75-a-night hotel, his lawyers and the non-governmental organisation Freedom From Torture began to make representations for him to be returned to London, arguing that as a survivor of torture he is supposed to be accommodated close to where he receives his trauma therapy.

After nine days of representations the Home Office agreed to return Ahmed to London. A 12-seater people carrier was sent to drive him back to London. But the only people in the people carrier were Ahmed and the driver.

Finally, 48 days after he left his bedroom in the Home Office accommodation in east London Ahmed returned there on Monday of last week (4 April). His room had been left empty in that time with the bill picked up by the taxpayer.

Singh said: "The way this matter has been handled is extremely concerning. Our client is a vulnerable individual with a strong outstanding claim to be addressed by the Home Office; he had been detained unlawfully and following release, the Home Office's treatment of him was utterly incompetent, not to mention an entire waste of taxpayers' money."

Ahmed is happy to be back in his accommodation in east London but received a new blow when he was told that because he has been absent at the English classes he was attending at a local college for almost two months he is no longer allowed to continue to study. The whole episode is likely to have cost the Home Office more than £4,000 excluding legal fees. If a successful unlawful detention claim is brought this figure could triple or quadruple.

The Home Office said: "The UK has a proud history of granting asylum to those who need our protection and we are committed to providing safe and secure accommodation while applications are considered. The cost of using hotel accommodation to board asylum seekers is borne by individual contractors who make such decisions, including which premises are used. We have made clear to our providers that the use of hotels is only ever acceptable as a short-term contingency measure."

The costs

Cost of detention - £3,614.13

Railfare to Liverpool - £81

Taxi to Wigan - £50

Hotel in Wigan - £675 (nine nights at £75 a night)

People carrier to London - cost unknown

Cost of rented room in east London - unknown but more than £1,000

[More news](#) [Topics](#) [Immigration and asylum](#) [Sudan](#) [Africa](#)

[Middle East and North Africa](#)



popular

[back to top](#)

all

[world](#) > [uk news](#) > [immigration and asylum](#)

Sign up to our daily email

Email address

Sign up

[facebook](#)

[twitter](#)

[jobs](#)

[guardian labs](#)

[subscribe](#)

[all topics](#)

[all contributors](#)

[solve technical issue](#)

[about us](#)

[contact us](#)

[complaints & corrections](#)

[terms & conditions](#)

[privacy policy](#)

[cookie policy](#)

[securedrop](#)

