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Man with mental health issues who sewed his lips together being 'unlawfully' held in detention

Exclusive: Zayed Khan, who arrived in the UK after fleeing dangers in Afghanistan, is being kept in immigration detention despite 'deteriorating' state of mental health including acts of self-harm

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6 comments



Zayed Khan, 26, is being kept in Colnbrook detention centre despite having committed multiple acts of self-harm since being detained, in what legal experts say is a breach of law *Asif Anwar/Duncan Lewis*

A man with mental health issues who recently sewed his lips together and “smashed” his head against a wall is being held in immigration detention in breach of the law, lawyers have said.

Zayed Khan, 26, arrived in the UK in 2016 after fleeing Afghanistan following the murder of his mother in a bomb blast carried out by the Taliban, who later attempted to recruit him. Medical notes seen by *The Independent* express concerns he may have been a victim of torture.

Earlier this month, Mr Khan, who has been at Colnbrook immigration removal centre (IRC) for five months, reportedly smashed his head against a wall outside a courtroom after his bail application was refused. He later proceeded to sew his lips together with a needle in protest against his continued detention.

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Home Office ignores medical advice to keep mentally ill detained

Despite **government policy introduced last year**, which states that vulnerable people should not be detained inappropriately – including those with mental health issues and victims of torture – Mr Khan remains in the IRC 20 days after the incident.

His solicitor, Asif Anwar of Duncan Lewis Solicitors, said Mr Khan had been seen by nurses and GPs in the centre and been on “suicide watch” in his cell, but had no contact with psychological or psychiatric professionals since carrying out the acts of self-harm.

Mr Anwar said the “shortfalls” of the IRC and the Home Office in this case were “extremely concerning”, urging that keeping the 26-year-old in detention was in breach of the Government’s own Adults at Risk policy, which is designed to ensure vulnerable people are not locked up.

“We are working on several fronts to have Mr Khan released urgently, however the shortfalls of the IRC and the Home Office here are extremely concerning,” Mr Anwar told *The Independent*.

“Several attempts were made to release Mr Khan from detention prior to this horrific incident. The Secretary of State were aware that he was a potentially vulnerable asylum seeker and have exacerbated the deterioration of his mental health by maintaining his detention.

“It is concerning how little was done to prevent the incident from happening, particularly as instructing solicitors had notified the Secretary of State of Mr Khan’s will to self-harm.”

Mr Khan was detained by the Home Office in August for failing to carry out his obligation to report and maintain ties with the Home Office, which he had allegedly been unaware of due to the fact that he had no legal representation at the time.

During his time in Colnbrook, Mr Khan has been assessed by a medical practitioner, who expressed concerns that the 26-year-old “may have been a victim of torture”.



Home Office ignores medical advice to keep mentally ill detained

A report drawn up by the doctor states Mr Khan’s account of being attacked by members of the Taliban in Afghanistan was “plausible”, citing that a “large laceration on his scalp” was consistent with his account of “blunt trauma with a rifle”.

Mr Anwar has requested a psychiatrist review of Mr Khan’s current condition, and will lodge a judicial review of his detention later this week, which if accepted will be heard in the High Court.

In a statement to *The Independent*, Mr Khan said he had left Afghanistan because of the war between his government and the Taliban, adding: “I lost my mother in a bomb blast and I have little hope that I will ever see the rest

of my family again. I thought I would be treated better here, but being locked up for five months has driven me mad.

“I would rather die than go back to Afghanistan or stay in this centre anymore. Until I had a solicitor, no one told me what was happening. I was moved from one detention centre to another and never really knew what was happening to me.

“I feel like unless I do something like harm myself, no one will listen.”

The case comes after *The Independent* revealed that the Home Office was systematically ignoring independent medical advice not to detain people who were mentally ill as part of their bid to crackdown on immigration.

An analysis of files found that hundreds of immigrants with mental health conditions were being held in detention centres against the advice of medical practitioners, in breach of the Government's Adults at Risk policy, which was introduced last year to ensure vulnerable people are not detained inappropriately.

Shortly before in October 2017, the **High Court declared the Government's policy on torture victims was unlawful**, ruling that individuals had been wrongly locked up during their asylum claims despite doctors submitting evidence of torture and ill-treatment to the Home Office

When approached for comment on Mr Khan's case, a Home Office spokesperson said: “The UK has a proud history of granting asylum to those who need our protection and each claim is carefully considered on its individual merits.

“Any decision to maintain detention is made on a case by case basis but the welfare of all those in our care is of the utmost importance and we expect detainees to be treated with dignity and respect.”

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