

Did you know the UK is the only country in Europe which locks up innocent children?

On 30 June 2009 some 470 children were locked up in immigration centres. A third had been held for more than 28 days. Most were under five years old.

More than 1000 children of people seeking sanctuary in the UK are detained every year. They are the only children who, whilst innocent of any crime, can be locked up indefinitely.

Around 7,500 children arrive in the UK each year seeking asylum, many with family, some travelling alone. Many have witnessed or directly experienced extreme acts of violence, including torture and rape. Some have been trafficked.

Often children end up in detention because their family's application for asylum has been refused. A family is often detained whilst any eleventh hour legal moves are made, prior to deportation.

Families can be seized without notice, and locked up for weeks or even months at a time. Such detention has a profound impact on children who are already scarred by their experiences, as well as those who have only ever known life in this country.

"...depriving children of their liberty and detaining them for administrative convenience without judicial oversight is never in their best interests..."

The Report of the Children's Commissioner, July 2009

"Fifty-six per cent of detained children were released back to their communities in the UK, their detention having served no purpose other than wasting taxpayers' money and traumatising the children involved. Children we have supported have suffered depression, weight loss, bedwetting and even self-harm as a result of their detention – that is the human reality behind the statistics."

Amanda Shah, Bail for Immigration Detainees

What needs to change?

The practice of detaining children must be ended immediately. Children (and young people whose age is disputed) should never be detained, and families should not be split by the detention of one member

Every child seeking asylum matters and must receive the protection they need. The UK Government programme, Every Child Matters – intended to ensure that every child receives the best education, health care and social provision – explicitly excludes asylum seeking children.

What can I do?

Send a message to the Government and let them know that the detention of children is **wrong**, Turn over to find out what hundreds of people like you are doing for Christmas 2009 – sending **One More Card . . .**

News Update

Good News

From November 2009, the Government has a new duty to make arrangements to secure and safeguard the welfare of children within the asylum system, in parallel with the function of the Children Act for all other children in the UK. This is under Section 55 of the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009.

Further pressure has been brought following the recent release of paediatric reports that document serious psychological and physical health problems to children who are forcibly held in Yarl's Wood Detention Centre.

Bad News

There is no hint that the Government intends to cease detaining children. This would be the most logical action to ensure their best wellbeing.

Now is the time to call on the UK Government to cease detaining asylum seeking children completely, while keeping them with their families, by using alternative ways of monitoring which are already in use in other countries.

“Hello, my name is Dominic and I am 8.”

I like my school and playing with my friends. My favourite subject is Mathematics and I want to be an Engineer when I grow up.

I was very scared when I was taken to Yarl's Wood prison with Mum, in the early hours when I was about to wake up and go to school. I was ill in a caged van on our way to prison. I asked her why we are in detention. Detention is for bad and naughty children. I have never had detention in school before. I have not done anything wrong. I saw bad things happening in prison and there was too much crying. It gave me terrible headaches and I felt sad.

After 50 days in prison they let us come out because I had chicken pox. Now I am upset and angry because Mum says they want to send us to prison again and they will also send us to a different country. Are we really that bad that they don't want us here? I thought this was my home too.”

Dominic Mwafulirwa Junior, Nottingham. April 2009



Send **ONE MORE CARD** this Christmas to end the detention of children

Send an extra Christmas card this year, to Immigration Minister Phil Woolas asking him to stop the practice of locking up children. Write to him at the Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF. Don't forget to include your name, address and the name of your church.

What can I do?

Send **ONE MORE CARD** to Phil Woolas MP and write to your MP and tell them you are appalled by the UK's record on detaining children seeking asylum. You can find out your MP's name and ideas for writing a letter at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/childrenindetention

Citizens for Sanctuary is seeking to get MPs and prospective candidates to sign a pre-election pledge on asylum, including demanding the end to of detention of children. Persuade your local MP and parliamentary candidates for the next election to sign up. www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk

Children's Society and BID can help if you are concerned about a particular child. They provide advice and support to asylum seeking children, young people and families in detention. end.detention@childsoc.org.uk or Tel: 01234 348954

City of Sanctuary is a movement to build a culture of hospitality for people seeking sanctuary in the UK. Towns and cities can sign up to indicate they take pride in welcoming people in need of safety. www.cityofsanctuary.com

For more information see www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/childrenindetention