

Britain: Terminally ill Ghanaian woman deported and denied medical care

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Ama Sumani, a 39-year-old Ghanaian woman terminally ill with a malignant myeloma, was deported from Britain to Ghana on January 9. She was taken from the University Hospital, Cardiff, in Wales, where she was receiving dialysis treatment, as her kidneys were damaged by the myeloma. Five immigration officers put her on a flight from Heathrow to Ghana that day.

Ms. Sumani had first come to Britain in 2003; she enrolled as a student but was unable to finish the course and took a job. Taking employment contravened her student visa status. She flew to Ghana in 2005 to attend a memorial service for her late husband. On her return to Britain, her visa was revoked.

She became ill two years ago, and doctors say that without regular dialysis she has only weeks to live. A Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) spokesman claimed that “Part of our consideration when a person is removed is their fitness to travel and whether the necessary medical treatment is available in the country to which they are returning.”

Ms. Sumani attended hospital in Accra, the day after arriving in Ghana. According to reports by the BBC and *Independent*, the hospital in Accra will not provide treatment for her. The reports state British officials would provide funding for treatment for three months, but the hospital said that without funding for ongoing medical treatment, they would not be prepared to accept her as a patient.

Her lawyer Sara Changkee said: “It’s just so sad; her only future now is death.”

Annan Cato, Ghanaian High Commissioner in London, has made an appeal to the British government to allow Ms. Sumani to be returned to continue her treatment.

The treatment of the Ghanaian woman is one more

example of the British government’s increasingly reactionary and punitive treatment of immigrants and asylum seekers.

The *Independent* on January 2 highlighted the case of Adedoyin Fadaïro, a three-year-old girl who has been threatened with deportation to America. The child was born in the US but has lived most of her life in London with her grandmother and has no family in America.

The girl’s 32-year-old mother is also threatened with deportation, in her case to Nigeria. She has been held in the Yarl’s Wood detention centre and has been separated from Adedoyin for 10 months. Adedoyin has a kidney condition but is not entitled to medical treatment.

The case has been referred to the European Court of Human Rights, which has ordered the British government to put the threat of deportation on hold whilst it considers the case.

The right of failed asylum seekers to receive medical treatment is currently restricted to emergency care and access to a general practitioner. Other treatments, including provision of antiretroviral drugs to babies born of HIV-infected women, are prohibited. The government’s Home Office and Health Department is due to publish a review imminently that will recommend restricting medical intervention to emergency care only.

The Labour government has taken an increasingly anti-immigrant stance since coming into office. The 2006/2007 annual report of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC), published in April of last year, noted: “The increased use of charter flights (to facilitate deportations) is very worrying; there are now 5/6 flights a month.”

A BIA press release in November 2007 boasted: “Britain’s tougher border controls have led to the lowest level of asylum applications in 15 years....”

[T]his year 45,000 people have been removed from the UK...[matching] the all time high of 2003.... Between January and September 2007 there were 16,520 principal asylum applications lodged, this represents a seven per cent fall in applications compared to the same period in 2006. It is also the lowest number of applications since 1992.”

In a fit of “you ain’t seen nothing yet” hyperbole, the Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, said in a December press release, “People in Britain want to see changes to our immigration system and in 2008 we’ll see them. It’s the biggest shake up for 40 years.”

The plight of one of the most vulnerable sections of workers can only become more precarious.



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