

Angolan asylum seeker killed during forced British deportation

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Asylum seeker Jimmy Mubenga died October 11 as a result of an attempt to deport him from Britain to Angola.

Mubenga, 46, came to Britain in 1994. According to his lawyer, he had been a student leader in Angola and had to flee after coming into conflict with the regime. His wife fled also. She told the *Guardian*, “They killed my father and they threatened to kill Jimmy. They were looking for him. We had no choice but to leave”.

Mubenga, his wife and their young son were given exceptional leave to remain in Britain following a long legal battle. They settled in London, and he worked as a forklift truck driver. They had a further four children.

In 2006, Mubenga was involved in a brawl in a nightclub and was given a two-year prison sentence for actual body harm. After his sentence finished, he was transferred to an immigration detention centre and again threatened with deportation. He was eventually released, but was repeatedly taken into detention over the course of the last two years, interspersed with periods of being able to live at home.

His final application for a judicial review was refused in August.

Following this, he was picked up by immigration officials, who required him to report to them each Monday. He reported as usual on October 10, but on this occasion was detained and moved to the Brook House removal centre at London Gatwick Airport.

The following day, he was moved to Heathrow airport where he was due to be deported on a scheduled British Airways flight to the Angolan capital Luanda at 8:00 p.m.

Mubenga was escorted on the plane by three guards from the private security firm G4S, contracted to ensure his departure and accompany him to Angola. G4S, formerly known as Group 4 Security, works for the

British government's UK Border Agency, and runs detention and holding centres for immigrants as well as deporting those judged to have no legal basis to remain.

Provision of such services has become big business, and G4S is reported to be the second largest private employer in the world, with more than half a million staff. It enjoyed a cosy relationship with the former Labour government. John Reid was paid £50,000 a year by G4S after stepping down as home secretary, but still an MP.

Mubenga was taken onboard the plane and was seated at the back, one guard on each side and one in the seat immediately in front of him.

Once on the plane he became distressed and began to resist his deportation. The guards responded by restraining him, using handcuffs and piling on top of him, pushing him down in his seat.

Several witnesses saw the incident. One, Kevin Wallis, a 58-year-old oil engineer, had a clear view of the events being in a seat directly next to the block of seats with Mubenga and two of the escorts.

Wallis witnessed the guards' attempts to restrain Mubenga over a prolonged period. He described the force used as excessive. Mubenga was calling out that he could not breathe. This lasted about 10 minutes. He went limp and the guards started checking him for vital signs.

G4S, in a statement, described the incident as one in which Mugenga “became unwell on a flight while being deported”. The Home Office likewise claimed he “became unwell”.

When Wallis was informed of these statements by the *Guardian*, he retorted that it was “absolute rubbish”.

Eventually paramedics were called to the plane but, according to Wallis, Mubenga was left in his seat while they were on route. Wallis and other witnesses do not

recall any announcement asking if a doctor was on board.

Michael, another witness, told the *Guardian*, “I am not sure he got any attention from anybody until the medics got there, and that was 15, 20 minutes after everything went quiet. Maybe somebody could have revived him if they had been asked. I can give CPR”.

When the paramedics arrived, they ordered the guards out of the way and tried unsuccessfully to revive him. He was taken to hospital where he was pronounced dead. An initial post mortem proved inconclusive.

The police announced an investigation into the death and the three guards were arrested October 18, but released on bail until December.

In 2008, a report was issued by Medical Justice, a British charity that seeks to expose and challenge the inadequate health care of detained immigrants. The report was called “Outsourcing abuse: The use and misuse of state-sanctioned forces during the detention and removal of asylum seekers”. It explained, “Asylum applications are at a 14-year low, yet the proportional use of detention has increased 7-fold.... While the practice of using private companies for running detention centres and escorting of forced removals may contribute to a certain level of ‘see no evil, hear no evil’, our understanding is that the Home Office is aware of an unacceptable level of alleged abuse through its own complaints procedure...this report reveals what may amount to state sanctioned violence, for which ultimate responsibility lies with the Home Office”.

A recently published report by the Institute of Race Relations, “Driven to Desperate Measures: 2006-2010”, catalogues the deaths of 77 asylum seekers and migrants over the last five years, which is attributed to direct or indirect racism resulting from government immigration policies.

Of the 77 they note, “44 died as an indirect consequence of the iniquities of the immigration/asylum system—by taking their own lives when claims were not allowed, by meeting accidental deaths evading deportation or during the deportation itself (Jimmy Mubenga), by being prevented medical care, by becoming destitute in the UK”.

In the general election held last May, all the major parties scapegoated immigrants in an attempt to deflect blame for deteriorating social conditions away from their policies favouring the tiny rich elite who hold

political power. In its manifesto, the Socialist Equality Party explained, “The hysteria against Muslims, asylum seekers and immigrants is intended to justify...repressive measures and to divide working people along racial and religious lines”.

In 1995, the Socialist Equality Party held a Workers Inquiry into the death of Joy Gardner as police attempted to deport her. The results were published as *The Truth about the Killing of Joy Gardner: A State Murder Exposed*.

Joy was a 40-year-old mother of two. She came to Britain legally from Jamaica in 1987 to be reunited with her mother and other family members. She applied for leave to remain in the country on compassionate grounds. Her request was denied without her being informed and deportation proceedings were begun against Joy and her five-year-old son, Graeme.

At 7:40 in the morning, five police officers and an immigration official forced their way into her home in Crouch End, north London. Joy was thrown to the ground, bound with leather belts and gagged with 13 feet of surgical tape. She suffocated, suffering massive brain damage and never regained consciousness. On August 1, 1993, her life support was ended.



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