

UK inquest reveals brutality of immigrant detainee's death

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A Home Office internal inquiry into the death of a seriously ill man in hospital in 2012 exposes the barbaric treatment of immigrants in the UK.

The 43-year-old man, whose name his family requested not be published, had a heart condition. At the time of his death, he was sedated and remained handcuffed while lying in a hospital bed.

The man was married with three children and was being detained at Harmondsworth immigration removal centre, near Heathrow airport. He was not judged to be any risk to the public, but was detained because he allegedly failed to report to police under his bail conditions.

On November 9, 2012, while being detained he became seriously unwell and was taken to Harefield hospital in Middlesex suffering from heart problems. He was to die eight days later at the hospital, on November 17, before he could receive the aortic valve replacement he needed.

He was being detained by GEO, the private security contractor employed at Harmondsworth. The details of his detention are harrowing to read. Until seven hours before he died, he was attached by his wrists to a two-metre closet chain, with handcuffs put on him for some of the time.

He had requested he be allowed to go home to be surrounded by his family before he died. The Home Office declined his request and two subsequent requests from his solicitor. The report says of this affront to human dignity and democratic rights, "There would appear to be a serious breakdown in communication under the current detention reporting process."

The *Guardian* states, "The man said he wanted to highlight the fact that he was dying while chained in the media, but this did not happen before he died."

The man died at 1.25am on November 17, yet as late

as 15.45pm on November 16, with officials aware that he was dying, GEO still refused to remove his restraints. This was despite the Home Office reportedly asking that it do so. A GEO manager said the use of handcuffs had been appropriate. The report claims that one Home Office official had not even been made aware that the man was being restrained until two days before he died.

GEO was concerned about being fined if the restraint was removed. Under its contract, if a detainee absconds there is the potential fine of £10,000. According to the *Guardian*, a GEO officer interviewed in the report said he feared losing his job if this happened.

The report blandly calls for improved guidance regarding the restraint of detainees who require hospital treatment, regarding a case of someone who was in fact dying before the eyes of his persecutors.

This is not the first time a detainee has died under such horrific conditions. Alois Dvorzac, an 84-year-old Canadian man suffering with Alzheimer's disease, died at Harmondsworth in January 2013 while in shackles.

Dvorzac, who only wanted to be allowed to travel to see his daughter, was not applying for asylum. He had arrived at London's Gatwick airport, frail and confused, on a plane from Canada. He had no luggage, but had money in his pocket. He was on his way to see his daughter in Slovenia, his country of birth, but could not provide immigration officials her address or telephone number.

Dvorzac insisted that he could obtain the details they wanted from friends in Austria, while making his way by train to Slovenia. The officials were not satisfied with his explanation and placed him in a holding room.

When Dvorzac started to suffer chest pains, he was taken to hospital in handcuffs and, held between two officers, treated like a criminal. At hospital, he was tied

to a long escort chain, which had a handcuff at each end—one for him and another for the guard. He was kept like this for five hours. The chain was only removed when a nurse could not feel a pulse. Dvorzac died 20 minutes later.

The UK's immigration detention centres are run by private companies as businesses with little or no accountability. The Home Office will only answer questions about these companies under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI). Even then, information is continually held back on the grounds of commercial confidence.

Data obtained this year from the Home Office, via an FOI request from the NGO No Deportations, showed that suicide attempts in detention centres are at an all-time high. In 2015, there were 393 recorded suicide attempts, up 11 percent on the previous year. In 2015, 2,957 detainees, including 11 children, were on suicide watch, as they were considered a risk.

An independent review published in January this year into the welfare of immigration detainees called for a significant reduction in the numbers detained. The review was carried out by prisons ombudsman Stephen Shaw, and said pregnant women should not be detained at all.

A spokeswoman from the charity Medical Justice, which works to improve the health of immigration detainees, said, "We find that many detainees have serious mental health issues, having suffered torture in the home countries and then faced with the trauma of indeterminate detention.

"The increasing numbers of detainees who self-harm or attempt suicide is very concerning and the healthcare provided in immigration removal centres is not adequate to deal with the levels of mental distress"

In May this year Tascor, a private security firm, was heavily criticised when eight security guards were used to deport a fearful man onto a Home Office removal flight from Stansted airport to Nigeria and Ghana.

In 2013, Tascor guards were accused of a brutal assault as they attempted to deport Marius Betondi, an asylum seeker from Cameroon. Betondi was examined by Dr Charmian Goldwyn, who had been instructed by Medical Justice. Goldwyn commented that the "number, pattern and distribution of injuries [to Betondi] is in my opinion typical of their attribution to deliberate blows to the face caused during a recent

assault."

Tascor is a subsidiary of the Capita outsourcing group, who took over a Home Office deportation contract from Reliance Secure Task Management in 2012. Tascor are involved in the removal of 18,000 individuals each year from the UK.

Reliance had taken over the contract from G4S in April 2011. This followed the death, six months earlier, of 46-year-old Jimmy Mubenga. Mubenga, a healthy father of five, died while being restrained by three G4S guards, whilst being deported at Heathrow airport in October 2010.

An inquest jury in July 2013 found that Mubenga had been unlawfully killed. Yet in December 2014, all three G4S guards were acquitted of manslaughter.

Racist texts found on the mobile phones of two of the guards were read out to the jury at the inquest, yet these texts and the fact that an unlawful killing verdict was reached were withheld from the jury at the criminal trial.

The UK holds at least 30,000 men and women in its detention centres each year. This is more than any other European country, and includes victims of torture, rape and trafficking, as well as women who are pregnant.



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