

'Lost Souls' of the Detention System

Lord Lloyd of Berwick chose the debate on immigration detention for his valedictory speech to the House of Lords, an appropriate end to a parliamentary career devoted to protecting the rights of the vulnerable. The speakers in the debate, bar government representative Lord Bates, were unanimous in their condemnation of the practice of indefinite detention. They drew upon a variety of values and experiences in coming to this judgement, but most heartening to hear were the quotes of victims of indefinite detention, given voice in the hallowed House of Lords. Lord Lloyd of Berwick conveyed great sympathy and compassion in his speech towards a Somalian national who was locked away for three years and five months, asserting that "on no possible view could that be regarded as reasonable".

Both the policies of the government and the practices of the Home Office were discussed with reference to the recent [Parliamentary Inquiry into Immigration Detention](#). Baroness Hamwee thanked the variety of NGOs who contributed to the report and decried the "culture of disbelief" that exists in the Home Office, which forces asylum seekers to fight for every inch of their rights. The Earl of Sandwich quoted [Detention Action](#), who had described indefinite detention as a "uniquely British phenomenon", and the peers often referred to the fact that Britain is the only country in Europe to have indefinite detention.

Furthermore, the "mid-Victorian" conditions of indefinite detention were condemned by Lord Hope of Craighead, emphasising the human impact and "how totally abandoned these individuals appeared to be...like lost souls". Lord Scriven highlighted the particularly harrowing experiences of LGBTI asylum seekers. He quoted from the case of JB (Jamaica) against the Home Office to show the unique risk of harm for LGBTI asylum seekers; they suffer from fear and prejudice both at home and in detention.

The many issues raised by the peers demonstrate why indefinite detention is a complex problem that links LGBTI rights, mental health, women's rights and anti-torture activism.

Representing the government, Lord Bates expressed sympathy for the experiences of those who have suffered under the current asylum policy. He was constrained, however, by party policy, and was only able to offer relatively minor concessions such as an increase in female staff at Yarl's Wood and a slight widening of the remit of the Shaw Review into the wellbeing of asylum seekers in detention.

The other peers from the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Labour and the cross-bench were united in their desire to pursue justice for some of the most vulnerable people in Britain. It is evident that a common sense of decency and a basic respect for human dignity is not a party issue.

The speeches persuasively conveyed why a radical rethink of the detention system is necessary to assure the safety and wellbeing of those who seek sanctuary on Britain's shores. The Lord Bishop of Peterborough quoted the maxim that "justice delayed is justice denied".



The contents of the parliamentary inquiry report demonstrate that justice has long been delayed for asylum seekers in Britain. Let it no longer be denied. It is clear that it is #Time4aTimeLimit

Read the full House of Lords debate [here](#) and the detention inquiry report [here](#). To get involved, send us an email at info@renecassin.org