

René Cassin: Indefinite Detention Campaign 18 month review

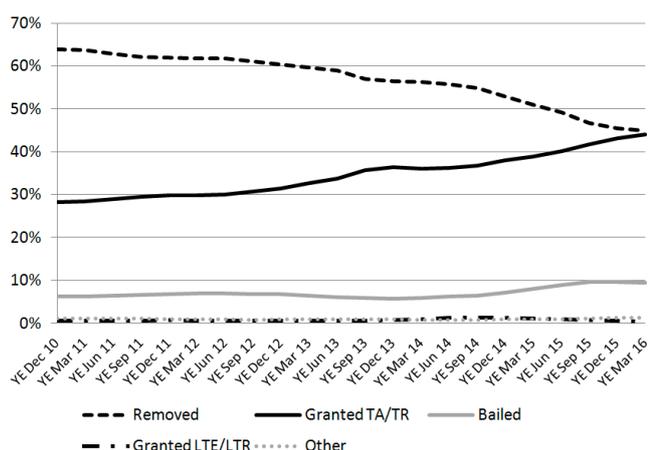
The past couple of years have been crucial in the conversation surrounding the UK immigration detention system. There have been changes – though arguably not enough. As the current ‘refugee crisis’ develops, the need to make the system fairer, more just, more efficient and humane becomes ever more pressing. Despite all the progress, it is still time for a time limit.

René Cassin is a proud member of the [Detention Forum](#). The Detention Forum is a network of organisations working together to challenge the UK’s use of detention.

The Numbers behind Immigration Detention

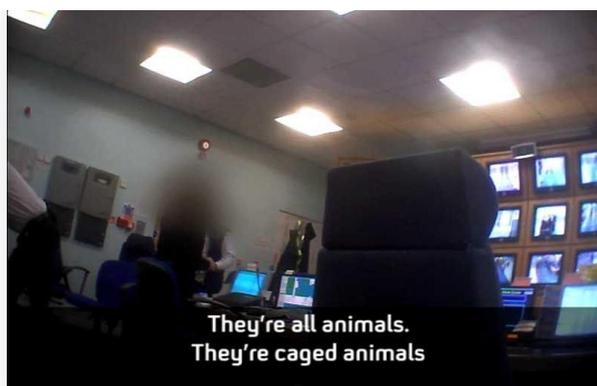
Whilst there has been a 41 per cent fall in the number of people detained for six months or more, the number of people passing through the detention system is still on a rise, as it has been consistently over the past few years. As of March 2016, 32,163 people had been detained over the last 12 months – a four per cent increase. Of this number, only 45 per cent were removed from the UK. Of the 292 people detained for longer than 12 months, only 38 per cent were removed.

Whilst the current system is still woefully inadequate there has been a noted increase in public knowledge and engagement with detention issues has increased over the past 18 months.



Increased Awareness

Mainstream media coverage of detention and campaigns surrounding it has been promising. Channel 4’s [undercover documentary](#) about Yarl’s Wood Detention Centre in March 2015 sparked public outcry and demonstrations with support from high profile figures. This, along with incidents such as Labour MP Catherine West’s denial of entry by the Home Office to visit Yarl’s Wood, brought detention issues even further into the public eye.



Strides were made throughout 2015, with the publication of the cross-party All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) report into the Use of Immigration Detention in the United Kingdom (published in March 2015, to which René Cassin provided evidence) and the [HM Chief Inspector of Prisons’](#)

unannounced inspection of Yarl's Wood. Both of these reports called for a strict time limit, with the APPG report calling for 28 days. Two detention centres were closed (Haslar and Dover) and the expansion of Campsfield House to double the size was suspended by the Home Office. Also, after years of legal challenges, the [Detained Fast Track](#) was suspended.

Coinciding with the discussion of the Immigration Bill (now the 2016 Immigration Act), the Shaw Review brought up many of the concerns shared by René Cassin, though it stopped short of an outright call for a 28 day time limit.

René Cassin has been there at every step of the journey, giving evidence to inquiries and bringing the campaign directly to the community.

Political developments

The Inquiry into the Use of Immigration Detention in the United Kingdom – A Joint Inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Refugees and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Migration

“The current system is seriously detrimental to the individuals who are detained in terms of their mental and physical well-being, as well as hugely costly to the tax-payer.” – APPG report

The APPG inquiry was launched in July 2014 and included thorough evidence submitted by more than 200 individuals and organisations, [including René Cassin](#). Taking into account our recommendations, the report suggested making the use of detention very rare and only to effect removal, a wider range of alternatives to detention, improving health services and legal access, an end to detention of pregnant women and, significantly, a 28 day time limit.

This cross party inquiry from the APPG on Refugees and APPG on Migrants remains an important contribution to the campaign against indefinite detention – the coming together of MPs from across the board on an issue such as this is a powerful message.

Stephen Shaw Review into the Welfare in Detention of Vulnerable Persons

“It was clear from all my discussions with detainees that their immigration status and the fact, length and uncertain duration of their detention was the key determinant of their own sense of welfare.” – Stephen Shaw

By far the most detailed investigation into the detention system, Stephen Shaw's report explores vulnerability across the detention estate and came up with 64 suggestions on how to make it better.

[René Cassin contributed](#) extensive evidence to this report, containing concerns about various abuses that had taken place including inadequate healthcare, inadequate access to legal aid, sexual assaults and deaths. Recommendations as to how the system could be improved were offered, with particular emphasis on the 28 day time limit.

While making no recommendations to this limit, Shaw made it very clear that the current system is failing both ethically and economically, and called for an absolute prohibition on pregnant women, who should never be detained.

The fact that this report was commissioned by the Home Office is a step in the right direction. We are also pleased to see that Stephen Shaw has been commissioned to review the progress in this area in 2017.

2016 Immigration Bill (now Act)

*“Detention should not be a lottery, it should be about justice. And what does justice look like? In the long term it looks like an end to detention centres once and for all. In the short term, it looks like an end to indefinite detention.”-
Ajay, Freed Voices, a group of experts by experience of detention.*

During the discussion of the Immigration Bill, René Cassin and Tzelem brought together an interfaith voice in Parliament to call for an end to indefinite detention. Attended by faith leaders, MPs from all political persuasions and various organisations, the importance of detention reform was thrown into sharp relief by testimonies from Ajay and Justice, two people who use their experiences of detention to campaign for change with Freed Voices.

“...a 28-day time limit should be inserted into the Immigration Bill. This would bring the UK into line with the rest of the European Union, save a significant amount of public money and restore the UK’s proud and longstanding tradition of protecting human rights and civil liberties.” – Evidence submitted by René Cassin

Despite evidence presented by Shaw, the APPG reports and campaigns from numerous organisations, a 28 day time limit did not go through. The Government defied the Lords’ call for a total ban on the detention of pregnant women, instead placing a 72 hour time limit on their detention. They did put in place automatic judicial oversight for the first time, creating a legal obligation to initiate bail hearings for individuals who are detained for over four months without applying for bail.

Engaging with the community

“The promise of this young man's life is darkened by unjust imprisonment and a daily diet of uncertainty about his future.” – Rabbi Alexandra Wright, on meeting Deepak at Harmondsworth

René Cassin has long been committed to making sure people see the human side of the detention campaign. The connection with Freed Voices has



allowed introduction of a number of new people to the human rights abuses in the detention system.

In March 2015, René Cassin introduced Tzelem Rabbis to Michael from Freed Voices, whose story convinced them to involve themselves in the issue. The following month, René Cassin took a group of [Rabbis to Harmondsworth](#) detention centre where they met and spoke with detainees.



The [Interfaith tent](#) event on Harmondsworth Moor in April was another chance to bring Freed Voices together with community members. Coinciding with Ramadan, there were also teachings from Rabbi Natan Levy, Imam Mamadou Seydou Bocoum and Reverend Kevin McDonald, ending with breaking the fast.

The London Churches Refugee Network and JW3 events with Detention Action and Souleyman from

Freed Voices were just a couple of other opportunities to involve more people in the issue.

Given that René Cassin is the Jewish voice for human rights, connecting the issues of modern day immigration detention and detention throughout the history of the Jewish people is very important. On [Mitzvah Day 2015](#), an [event was held](#) at Northwood and Pinner Liberal Synagogue. Thiru, a member of Freed Voices who had recently been through detention in the UK spoke alongside Fritz Lustig, a 96 year old German Jewish refugee who was interned on the Isle of Man after escaping Nazi Germany. We also created a [video detailing Fritz's story](#).



Given that detention happens out of sight and out of mind community events such as these are an essential part of the detention campaign, and the success in attendance of these events shows an increasing awareness of and sympathy with the aims of the campaign from the Jewish and interfaith communities.

Still a way to go...

The issues with immigration detention in the UK are being discussed with greater prevalence now, but there is still a lot to do. Of the recommendations laid out to the APPG report, Shaw review and Immigration Bill by René Cassin, very few have been addressed.

Time for a time limit

Firstly, keeping on with the campaign for a time limit is the priority as all the negative effects of detention are exacerbated by the fact that people are locked up without a trial and without a time limit.

Assumption against detention and alternatives to detention

Secondly, the move should be towards making detention a genuinely last resort, used in rare cases only to effect removal. The Shaw Review and APPG report gave extensive suggestions to introduce alternatives to detention and focus on community-based solutions. This focus on [alternatives to detention](#) will be a big part of our and the broader coalition of NGOs working in this areas work going forward.

No detention of vulnerable groups

There are vulnerable groups that should never be detained in the first place – the 72 hour limit on detaining pregnant women is a step in the right direction, but a ban on detaining certain groups of people should be pushed for – pregnant women, victims of torture, trafficking, survivors of rape and sex- and gender-based violence and those with physical and mental health problems.

Improving detainees' welfare

As long as indefinite detention continues, improving the experience of those who have been detained is very important to ensure their wellbeing. Healthcare reforms are desperately needed, including an overhaul of the screening process, specialised training, improved access to care and a ban on detention of those with severe health problems (physical and mental). Reducing the prison-like experience of detention centres must also happen – they are not criminals.

The priority should continue to be pushing towards a 28 day time limit and to use detention as a last resort rather than an immediate assumed measure.