

September 2013

## My story: indefinite detention in the UK

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**When I fled civil war to come to the UK, I thought that I would be free but instead of helping me, the UK detained me for three years.**

On 19 September 2001, I was sitting on a plane from Abidjan to the UK. As I looked out the window, I thought that nothing worse than fighting against Charles Taylor's army at home in Liberia could happen to me. I thought that the mental images from witnessing horrendous physically and morally degrading acts inflicted on others by the army would go away. I thought that I would now be safe from arrest for exposing wrong-doing by Taylor's government. I thought that the memory of my fiancée being raped and killed would be dulled.

But I did not know then that a dark shadow from the events in Liberia had followed me. I now know it to be post-traumatic stress disorder and bipolar disorder. If only I had known that I had PTSD, things I went through would have been different.

I claimed asylum in the UK. I did tell the UK Border Agency about my torture and experiences in Liberia but nothing was given to me, no assistance. I was refused asylum but given temporary leave to remain. I was left in the community with no-one to help me. And as my mental health declined, I turned to a world of drink and drugs. I lost my job and committed crimes to support my drug habit.

In 2006 I was sectioned under the Mental Health Act. I stayed three months in a mental institution in Salford. No-one had time to go into the reason why I was enduring psychotic episodes. After I was released, I had no care plan initiated.

I was then arrested again and sent to Durham prison. After the completion of my sentence in October 2008, I was detained by immigration in the prison, rather than a detention centre, for an additional three months. I was then taken to the Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre in Scotland. At this time my mother died. I was confused, I was under so much

pressure, so I just signed a disclaimer to go back, to see my mother's grave. They moved me to another detention centre – Oakington – which was even worse; they didn't have facilities for my mental health there either, so they sent me to Harmondsworth.

Even after I was finally diagnosed with mental health difficulties in 2010, proven to have gone through torture by an independent medical report, and my asylum claim was validated by a country expert report, I was still detained. By now I had been detained for almost three years. I gave up to the extent that I tried to commit suicide. I thought that was the easiest way out of my pain and misery.

Detention means no entry. The locked door is a normal thing that we have to endure. In detention, we are like a herd of sheep, being chased by a pack of wolves. One of the officers said to me "you either go to your country or you die in here."

I was released by the courts in 2011, because the Home Office had no grounds to keep me in detention any longer. I have now been given three years' leave to remain in the UK. The Home Office withdrew from the hearing on my unlawful detention case, and agreed to give me compensation.

Every country has a right to control its borders. But human rights law says that a person should only be detained when there is a legitimate reason, not just administrative convenience. There is a moral obligation to give the detainee the right to a free trial, with legal representation, to fully consider whether he or she must be detained.

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