



Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Home Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

10 February 2020

Dear Home Secretary,

I write in my capacity as Chair of the APPG on Immigration Detention. The group was re-established on 28 January 2020 and comprises over 30 parliamentarians from across the political spectrum, all of whom share concerns about the use of immigration detention in the UK.

My colleagues and I are extremely concerned by the various developments last week relating to removal of detainees from the UK. As you will know, a removal charter flight to Jamaica is scheduled for tomorrow (Tuesday 11 February). In light of the leaked Windrush 'Lessons Learned Review' recommendation that the UK Government consider ending the practice of deporting people who arrived in the UK as children, we join with other parliamentary colleagues in urging you to halt all upcoming removal flights – both charter and commercial – until the review is published and its recommendations implemented.

We are also very concerned by reports of ongoing O2 mobile phone signal outage at Harmondsworth and Colnbrook Immigration Removal Centres (IRCs). We gather that the outage adversely impacted customers of Lycamobile, a virtual network that relies on O2 for its signal and is used by many detainees at the centres.

As a result of a legal challenge by the charity Detention Action, we now know that the Home Office first learned of the outage on 13 January 2020, but failed to take remedial action.¹

In addition to the planned flight tomorrow, two removal charter flights have taken place since that date (on 29 January to Nigeria and Ghana, and 30 January to

¹ See Detention Action press release, 7 February 2020: <https://detentionaction.org.uk/2020/02/07/press-release-home-office-admits-mobile-phone-outage-affected-hundreds-in-immigration-detention-including-those-facing-jamaica-removal-flight/>

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France). Detainees have also been removed from the UK on individual commercial flights. Other detainees will have had urgent deadlines on their immigration cases, such as appeals.

Mobile phones provided by the Home Office are the primary way for detainees to communicate with their legal representatives and access legal advice and representation whilst being held at an IRC. Such advice is vital and can include, for example, information on the merits of challenging an order for a person's removal. Indeed, the Home Office has acknowledged the importance of ensuring access to legal advice in its 'Detention Services Operating Standards' manual for IRCs.²

I am sure you will agree that the situation at Harmondsworth and Colnbrook has fallen far below acceptable standards. It is important to note that problems with communications are not limited to these two centres, but occur regularly throughout the detention estate. It is essential that anyone being held at an IRC is afforded, at a minimum, adequate access to legal advice and representation.

We urge you therefore to ensure that mobile phone access at Harmondsworth and Colnbrook is restored as a matter of the utmost urgency, and to take action to ensure the problem is not repeated at any IRC going forward.

Now that Parliament has returned, my APPG colleagues and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss what steps you will be taking to address this and other concerns regarding detention. We invite you to meet with the group at your earliest convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Alison Thewliss MP

² The Detention Services Operating Standards manual for IRCs stipulates that centres must "ensure that detainees are aware of their right to legal representation and have access to it". The manual is available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/257352/operatingstandards_manual.pdf.