



All-Party Parliamentary Group on Immigration Detention

Inquiry into quasi-detention

Oral evidence session with current and former residents at Napier Barracks and Penally Camp

Monday 5 July 2021, 13.30 – 15.30 (online via Zoom)

Part One – Former Residents at Napier Barracks and Penally Camp

Notes

The surnames of the former residents who spoke at the session have been removed to protect their identities.

Attendees

Witnesses:

Erfan – former resident at Napier Barracks
Kenan – former resident at Penally Camp
Milad – former resident at Napier Barracks

Parliamentarians:

Alison Thewliss MP (SNP) – Chair
Paul Blomfield MP (Labour)
Mary Kelly Foy MP (Labour)
Helen Hayes MP (Labour)
Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Labour)
Anne McLaughlin MP (SNP)
Bell Ribeiro Addy MP (Labour)

Other attendees:

Idel Hanley – Medical Justice
Kate Hardman – Office of Richard Fuller MP (Conservative)
Elspeth Macdonald – Medical Justice / APPG Secretariat
Andy Murphy – Office of Alison Thewliss MP
Kathryn Sturgeon – Office of Wendy Chamberlain MP (Liberal Democrat)
Lauren Wards – Office of Alison Thewliss MP

Transcript

Alison Thewliss MP Good afternoon everybody, and welcome to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Immigration Detention this afternoon, continuing our inquiry into quasi-detention with some oral evidence from current and former residents at Napier Barracks and Penally Camp.

I'm joined on the call by a number of parliamentarians and we're very grateful to have some former residents on the call as well who are here to help us with the inquiry.

I think everyone will be well used to Zoom protocols now – so if everyone could stay muted except the person speaking. If people have questions, if they could use the hand function, and I will do my best to come to you.

We're recording the session this afternoon, so that we can use this as part of oral evidence and to help us put together a report from this as well.

This is our second session in the APPG's inquiry into the use of sites like Napier Barracks and Penally Camp to house people who are seeking asylum in the UK. Our group is very concerned about what's happening – based on all the information we've gathered so far, it appears to us that the Home Office is putting people into absolutely unacceptable situations at these sites.

But we feel it's very important to hear from people who have had to live at the sites to really understand the extent of what's happening and the impact that this is having on people. So, I'm very grateful to those giving evidence this afternoon and giving us their time to come and speak to us.

What we want is for those giving evidence is that you feel as welcome and as comfortable as possible. We're conscious that we're asking you to talk about difficult experiences, that this can be hard and takes an awful lot of emotional energy, and that there might be topics that people don't want to speak about. So please know that that's absolutely fine - if there are things that you do not wish to speak about, that's not a problem at all. And if you want to take a break at any point or leave the session, you're also very welcome to do that.

So, I will open up the session now with the testimonies. And if we could have the speakers to briefly introduce themselves, first of all, and then we will ask them to give some testimonies about their experiences. So, if we can take Erfan [surname] first.

Erfan Hello everyone, and especially I want to send my regards to the honourable Members of Parliament. I'm really honoured and privileged to be able to talk

to you about our experiences. Not everyone has this opportunity, especially ones who are powerless, voiceless. Thank you so much.

Oh I'm sorry – I'm a former resident of Napier Barracks and I was there for 4 months. Thank you.

Alison Thewliss MP OK, thank you. Now Milad [surname].

Milad Hello, I'm very happy to be here and I'm happy to share what happened there with you. Thank you for having me. I'm Milad [surname] – I'm 32 years old and I was in Napier Barracks for 3 ½ months.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you and welcome Milad. And finally, Kenan [surname] – if you'd like to briefly introduce yourself, Kenan.

Kenan Thank you. Thank you everybody for this opportunity. I am a refugee now and I was an asylum seeker, and I was a former resident of Penally Training Camp in West Wales. I will try my level best today to speak about my own experience and about people who are still in the Napier, and the struggle in Penally. Thank you very much.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you. We're now going to give each of our three witnesses some time to talk a bit more about their cases and what happened within the camps. And then we'll open up to questions from parliamentarians after that.

So, Erfan - if you can go first. Thank you.

Erfan Thank you so much. If I want to begin my story, I would say that I claimed asylum on 30 September 2020. When I claimed asylum, I was accommodated in my initial accommodation, which was a hotel in London. And after three weeks, I was informed on one morning – like 9.00 or 10.00am – the reception called me and said I have to pack my belongings and I'm going to be transferred to somewhere else. And I was really anxious because in that situation you cannot predict where you're going to go. It can be dispersal accommodation. It can be a detention centre. So, I was really anxious.

And when I went down with my belongings, I asked the taxi driver where are we going. And he didn't respond to my question. I mean, at those times even, Napier had a bad reputation. But I just realised when I saw the sign on the road and I realised that I'm going to Napier.

When I got there, I became really shocked by seeing the facade of Napier Barracks. It was totally like a prison with barbed wire fences and security guards and your movements always under their observation. Your time of going out / coming in is always recorded and you always feel that you're

under control and you have to be really disciplined and your daily life is under control basically.

So, when I got there, I was so shocked and surprised by that environment that I called Migrant Help one or two days after I arrived there, and I asked them, are you aware of this accommodation? Are you aware of the conditions? And do you know how long we're going to be here? And they confidently told us that you are going to be there approximately for one month. And this was the thing that we also heard from the staff and the camp managers - that you are going to be here for one month approximately, and your application is going to be processed faster, quicker.

But when people, including me - when the residents heard this news, that we are going to be here for approximately one month, they became hopeful - a little bit. So, they tried to just tolerate and have some patience. And after one month, they thought they were going to be moved out. They tried to do some activities, such as sports, doing English classes. But after a few weeks and after a few months, they just realised that that piece of information wasn't true at all. And that we are going to be there for an unpredictable time.

And when we used to ask the camp managers and staff how long we were going to be here, they said "We don't know" and that the Home Office should inform us. And no-one knew - I mean, Migrant Help didn't know how long we were going to be there. The staff and camp managers didn't know. So we felt quite isolated from the rest of the world or the rest of the United Kingdom.

And it just reminds me – how our mental health became more and more deteriorated over time by realising that there's no answer to our questions. And when we saw that the conditions of Napier, we start complaining. I remember that we had bed-bugs and scabies in the camp and it was quite contagious in the beginning. I was infected with scabies in mid-October. And at the same time, 5 or 6 people in our block were infected with scabies. And we have to consider that 28 people were living in one block and sharing two toilets and two showers in total. And this all happened when there was a pandemic going on. And we were sharing the dining room with more than maybe 200 people. And it's obviously not possible to share a communal area and eat food wearing masks. So, we had no choice but to not wear masks and eat our food. So, it was not really Covid-compliant.

And after a few months, people became more desperate, depressed and not really motivated to socialise with one another. And it was in mid-January that one block - Block 5 - had 5-6 positive cases inside and they were confirmed to be positive, they were infected with Covid. They put fences

around that aforementioned block, Block 5. And after 1 or 2 days, they removed the fences and let the infected ones mixed with everyone else in the camp.

And when I asked the camp manger “why are you doing such a thing?”, he said “it’s because the camp is representing a big house, it’s big house, and people are free to be inside of their house”. So, they let the infected ones mix with everyone. And after a few weeks, we just saw half of the population of the camp become infected, including me.

And I would say that when we realised that most of the population in the camp were infected, we just completely felt we are ignored, we are neglected. No one like doctors or nurses came to ask how we feel or if we need anything. We were just left behind. People were lying on bed. You could hear the sneeze and cough all around the camp. And it was like the apocalypse somehow.

I mean, I always try to be patient and optimistic about the conditions and I don’t really complain that much. But when I saw that it was the residents who were blamed for this Covid outbreak by not practicing social distancing - which was completely impossible - I really felt that this is wrong, people are misinformed about the reality of the camp and what has been happening.

So, I decided to write a letter about the conditions of being inside and explaining to the society what has been happening. And I went to collect signatures from other residents in the camp to show that the majority of the population of the camp are expressing their concern and telling the truth. And when I was collecting the signatures, I would say that in each block - which used to accommodate like 28 people - around 10 or 11 people were infected and were positive. So, it was a horrible scene that you see people from young ages to old ages infected and they were left behind. And no one would ask how they feel.

And I could share the letter with some journalists, and it was shared on social media and people could realise what were the real conditions of the camp.

And I usually hear from some people that the camp was for just young single men. And this is not true. I myself know a few people, a few men, who were about 60. And one of them was also infected with Covid.

By considering the fact that we didn't have any communication with the Home Office - we didn't receive any answers or updates about our asylum claims, about our complaints, and after the Covid outbreak, people were

totally frustrated and anxious and depressed about it, and they really couldn't be active and socialise with one another after some time. And it was a really depressing thing to see.

And I personally remember three suicide attempts when I was there, and I witnessed one of them which took place in the block next to mine.

And it was really horrible conditions. And I keep describing it as frustrating or depressing conditions - but words cannot really describe how we felt. And remembering it is really hard.

But after the Covid outbreak another thing that happened that is worth mentioning is the fire. When the fire happened and the power cut off, we were totally left behind without our basic needs. We didn't have electricity for two or three days, hot water and heaters. And this happened in mid-winter and it was extremely cold. And we didn't have electricity or heater and we couldn't take showers. And also we didn't have water and we had to drink from the tap water – and I mean, tap water is usually safe, but we have to consider that those buildings were 200 years old or even more. And they couldn't even provide water for us and they had to bring food from outside.

And these conditions really made it worse and people were really hopeless. I could really see in their eyes that there is no answer for the questions and complaints. And it was after a few weeks after the fire that they started to move people out.

And I'm still in contact with some former residents and they keep telling me that how being in Napier affected their mental health. They are outside, they were moved out. But they are still suffering from the consequences of the camp. I used to consider myself as a completely healthy person, both physically and mentally. But after being in Napier, I myself am dealing with insomnia and anxiety at some point. And you cannot imagine the people who are victims of torture and persecution, what they are feeling now.

And these people are eventually going to come into the community and society, and this burden, this unbearable pain and this traumatic experience can affect the society. And it's really painful for me to see that there are still some people inside that are bearing these horrible conditions.

This is all I can say. But I would be happy to answer the questions after the others. Thank you.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you so much for sharing that Erfan, that was very powerful indeed.

We now move to Milad [surname] who's going to give us a bit more about his experiences. Thank you.

Milad

First, I want to say that I studied health and safety in engineering, so I know a little bit about how to live health and safe.

So, I want to start a part of my story. It's exactly like what happened to Erfan. One day I was living in a hotel and they come and just knocked the door. And they said that you should be just moved from here to another place. So we went down - we've been, I think, 4 or 5 - and they didn't tell us that where are we going.

So, we went to a place that we don't know where it is and there are gates and fences and barbed wire. So, it's a bit hard for a person who just have, you know, a bit of background and he suffered a lot to reach to a safe place, to see such a thing.

So, one of the problems was the environment of the camp. When I arrived to the camp, I realised that it's a military place. So there are fences and barbed wires. There are many security guards around. And I should wait in a queue for everything, even a shower.

So, I know that this place was used for soldiers. But you should have it in mind that the soldiers should be prepared for battles or war or hard times. But we, the asylum seekers, were just running away from these things.

The other problem in the place was the privacy. There is absolutely no privacy in the camp. Imagine that there are more than 20 people living in the same room. One of them miss his family. He wants to call them. After he finished, the second one wants to call. The third one, the fourth until the end. When the twentieth one finished, the first one he will miss his family again. And so, it's just going on like this.

So, one of the residents wants to sleep. One of them wants to listen to music. It's like drop by drop in a jar. You know - first you will be patient; after that, it will be step by step - it will be over.

So, as you know, most of the asylum seekers looking for a safe place to live and they run for their lives to be in a safe place, in a safe land. We saw more than three suicide attempts in the camp and one of them was in my block. Why should someone looking for refuge want to take his own life? He came here to save his life, not to take his own life. And the best part about

this is most of the people, they doesn't know that that happened in the camp. They don't know about the suicide attempts.

It was very hard time. It's no privacy, no healthcare. You can't even have your own place to just think, because it's too noisy, too much people in a place.

After all what happened, after all the incidents, the residents wants to protest peacefully. And they did. But I remember that day, I went to the dining hall for breakfast. I saw some police officers there. One of the staff told me that after you finished, come to the social room, because there is a meeting there. So we went there, I think we've been 12 or 13 people... my English, sorry for that, it's not very good, but I know a bit... anyway, the officer was telling us, you know, threatening us: if you go out, if you want to do a protest, we will capture you, we'll put you in prison or something.

And we are people - we don't know the rules. We don't know how it's going on. We didn't even have the chance to just tell our voice to the others. OK - because we are living in very hard conditions now.

So that day, no one came out for protest. Because he said it's against the law. We are vulnerable – we don't look for more trouble.

One of the other problems that I want to speak about is the healthcare. Everyone who had the problem there, the only thing that he got was the paracetamol. Nothing more. So, the people has the dental problem or some more problems - I was one of them, I struggled for two days and I had an infection in my mouth and my face was swollen. And I have actually the photos for my face that when I was in the camp. I even couldn't have an antibiotic there because the nurse or the doctor who was in the camp was not allowed to even prescribe antibiotic for us. And they couldn't actually do anything. So, the healthcare one of the problems that we had in the camp.

As you know, most of the asylum seekers sooner or later will be a part of this society. And you know that we are from a different culture and we passed a lot to be here. The camp will make a lot of mental issues for the asylum seekers, and we will take a long time to recover from that. This society doesn't want someone with mental issues. Instead, the government should do something that we will be ready to be a good and useful member of the society. To serve it and to raise it up.

One of the thing that I can mention also it was the place of the camp - it was like, how to say it, a showroom or something. We had roads around – the people was looking at the asylum seekers, you know, behind these fences. “OK, are they prisoners? Probably, mostly” - probably they think like that,

probably not all of them, but they will think that, you know: “There are prisoners in there. What have they done to put them in a place behind those fences?”

So, at the end, I want to say thank you that you are listening to our problems and trying to make our life better, and if there be any question, I'm ready to answer.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you so much Milad - really appreciate that. Thank you.

We'll move now to Kenan [surname], who was in Penally Camp. So, Kenan – over to you.

Kenan Thank you very much. Thank you for this opportunity. First of all, I was transferred to Penally Camp in September last year from a hotel in Bristol. My initial reaction was shock as I was driven through the barbed wire top gates of an army camp and faced with the metal firing target of a soldier.

The anxieties and fears of myself and my colleagues in that coach were evident. I found it so hard to accept that the United Kingdom, which had always been a beacon of good government, was treating us in this way. Between us, we had fled torture, false imprisonment, war and civilian conflicts. And we now found ourselves inside exactly the sort of an institution many of us had an experience in their home country with. And that brought back terrible memories and stirred up traumas.

Living at that camp had a very negative impact on me. Before living at that camp, my mental health was fine. However, I quickly become depressed as a result of the conditions within the camp. I began to lose my hope that the situation would change. I felt abandoned and did not understand why I had been chosen to live in those dire conditions.

I was very glad leaving Penally because while I was there, it was impossible to maintain the Covid security. The living condition was cramped, small room for about six people during the pandemic. There was no social distancing or mask-wearing in the long queue of the meals and the long queue of toilets or having showers. Almost all the time there was no hand sanitizer or even soap in the dispensers. The showers were opens and shared, and to people come from different culture that is something difficult to deal with. The common room where the TV and the only spot of Wi-Fi would become crowded with men. There is no privacy. You can't make a call to your own solicitor without some privacy. The single isolation room for anyone with a Covid or with Covid symptoms had no separate bathroom or toilets. So the man had to use the same toilets and shower with the

uninfected people. There was no privacy at all to just make a family call, for example, or communicate with our solicitors.

I have some photographs and video evidence of those things which I can provide of that group through the coordinator, if you would like to.

I'm still very concerned about the asylum seekers in Napier Barracks. Many of these people are suffered already from torturing in their home countries, being a victim for the human trafficking. And they face the horrible crossing the Channel in a death boat - just to find themselves in this kind of institution, housing asylum seekers, most vulnerable asylum seekers in these situations. Many of the organisations, the NGOs and the medical organisations - respectable ones like the Helen Bamber Foundation, Doctors of the World, Forrest MLS – they did some medical assessment reports in Penally and they have approved for more than 30 cases that most were vulnerable asylum seekers that end up in such conditions. And they were spending months before they were being rescued and moved out of the camp.

For many of us, life inside the camps only increase our insecurities and re-traumatised us. It was obvious to all of us that this was not a sensible, let alone a fair, decent or even good value for the tax payer approach to housing asylum seekers. Added to this were that the continuing delay in obtaining any information from the Home Office concerning our interview or the progress of our cases or any information about the special accommodation.

It would be difficult to design a system that more perfectly delivers despair and deteriorating human health and mental capacity than these asylum camps.

Having always thought that the UK has both competence and conventions, I was shocked to discover that in relation to the asylum claims and housing process, it has neither.

The solution, as people say, it's not rocket science. The existence of those camps will not deter the dispersed people fleeing the thought of the experience I had in Syria - and others they had it in their own country - even if that means travelling in dangerously overloaded and flooded boats across the Channel.

What is needed is a humane treatment and housing for the asylum seeker - that includes stopping using Napier Barracks or similar institutions for housing the asylum seekers; routes for claim asylum without venturing onto the waves of the English Channel; significantly shorter times to decision

queue; investment in better quality permit decisions will significantly shorten the time asylum seekers spend in asylum accommodation, unable to work or pay taxes.

I'm also happy to answer any question regarding Penally. And thank you very much.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you so much, Kenan - I really appreciate your evidence. That's very helpful. Thank you.

We're now moving on to a question and answer session. If my colleagues could pop up their virtual hands if you're wanting to ask questions as well, I will do my best to bring everybody in. And if you can indicate, if possible, who you would like to direct the question to, that would be helpful.

I would just like to kick off and ask first about accessing lawyers and solicitors. Was that easy or difficult? If each of you answer the questions in turn, that would be helpful. Thank you.

Erfan

When we were in Napier, it was really hard to communicate with our immigration solicitors because, as I said, we were quite isolated – so it wasn't possible to talk to our immigration solicitor in person. This is the case for the ones who had immigration solicitors. But for the ones who didn't have immigration solicitors, it wasn't really possible to find one when you are in an isolated place like Napier and so many people were left out without having a solicitor. And some of my friends could find a solicitor after being moved out of the camp, because it was quite impossible.

And also, we didn't have access to Internet and some people didn't have credit to call and communicate with their solicitors. So, this was also a main barrier. We had some Wi-Fi provided in the first one or two months, but then at some point they were disappeared. I don't know why, but we didn't have access to Wi-Fi. So those people who didn't have a SIM card or credit were left without having Internet connection or credit to call.

And also, we weren't aware that there is such a thing as public law solicitors who can help us with regard to accommodation. So, we were also ignorant. I mean, all of us were ignorant about the regulations and how to do these kind of regulations, related to law works in this country.

So, we just I was told by the former Chief Inspector of Immigration when we had a conversation about the camp. He told me that there is such a thing as public law solicitors who could help us. So, we weren't aware of it. I mean, maybe there were some people who already knew, but it wasn't really something we all knew about it.

But you mentioned about solicitors - most of the people didn't have any connection. Thank you.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you. Milad, Kenan - do you have anything to add to that?

Milad The thing is about the solicitor - it's my experience when I arrived here, after a week, I received a phone call about having the solicitor and I asked the person, but they told me that it is from the Home Office, because they brought a phone and I was using that.

So, when I asked, they told me it's better to wait until you go to your permanent accommodation - because you're in temporary accommodation now. Now, it's 11 months that I'm in the UK and I didn't move to my permanent accommodation and now I don't have a solicitor yet. So it's a kind of trouble to have one. Also in the camp.

Alison Thewliss MP OK, thank you. Kenan.

Kenan Yes, first of all, we didn't know that we have right to have a public law solicitor. I didn't hear about that at all 'til I was moved to Penally and met with some activists who explained to me that we are eligible to have a public law solicitor to get us out of that camp.

And many of us leave that camp through the public solicitors' work only.

For the asylum solicitors - 75% from the camp residents were for the first two months without a solicitor at all. That makes everything difficult. They were not having a SIM card to communicate for the first month. They didn't have Wi-Fi inside the camps to communicate even through WhatsApp or some other method. So it was impossible to get them a solicitor.

The first time they allowed a group of solicitors to enter the camp was in the end of December and the camp was open in September. You can imagine that many of the asylum seekers who have to wait like at least for three weeks to get legal aid after having an asylum solicitor or public law solicitor. So being in a very isolated area, far from any kind of legal firm, it was not helping their cases at all.

I know in some cases where the asylum seekers have to speak freely with their own solicitors and talking about their own experience. Like one friend I know, he's one of the LGBT – he had to explain to his solicitor about his case and all the details. And he didn't feel safe to speak front of anybody about that inside the camp. He didn't have privacy. We didn't have a separate room to speak about, you have to speak about that front of everybody, which is not allowing you to be in free communicating or deliver

all the information freely to your own solicitor, which is wrong. I think it's wrong.

Alison Thewliss MP I would agree with that. Thank you, Kenan. Paul Blomfield?

Paul Blomfield MP Thank you, Alison. And thanks to all three of you for sharing what were clearly very distressing experiences with us. It's hugely helpful to us in taking up the issue.

You talked about health issues and mental health issues. Erfan, I think you were fairly clear on the lack of physical health support. And I wondered if any of you would like to say any more about that, given that you were there during a global pandemic.

But specifically on mental health support. We know that being held indefinitely – and you weren't sure of the period you were going to be there - is hugely distressing. And obviously Milad talked about the suicide attempts very movingly. I wonder what help, if any, was available with people's mental health challenges?

Erfan About the mental health, I would say that there was no support at all. The people who were expressing their mental issues with the staff and the camp managers were all just checked by Migrant Help's welfare check. And this all was done by staff who were inexperienced about how to deal with vulnerable people and who weren't therapists, psychologists or social worker.

And if someone wants to see a psychologist, for example, it wasn't possible - they had to make appointment and it would take for a few months to be able to make an appointment with a psychologist. And if I want to give you one example: the person who committed suicide in the block next to mine, he was held in one of those isolation rooms and the security guards were inside of the room for 2 or 3 weeks, keep watching him if he doesn't commit suicide again. And I mean, it's common sense, I mean, it's really logical that if someone is committing suicide in that accommodation because of the condition inside and he feels really bad, you have to remove him and make it available for him to talk to someone expert. But he was left in the camp again for 2 or 3 weeks. And they were always concerned that he will commit suicide again.

And I would say in a really brief response that there was no mental support. I mean, at the time that I was there. I'm not sure about the current time. But when I was there, there was no mental support. And people's mental health deterioration was obvious after some time.

Paul Blomfield MP I'm assuming that that was the experience, Milad and Kenan, that you had too? I don't want to pursue the questions too far because others clearly want to ask their own issues.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you very much for that, Paul. I'll bring in Helen Hayes.

Helen Hayes MP Thank you, and thanks to all of you for sharing your experiences. It's really very difficult to listen to what you've all been through and really genuinely very helpful to us all that you're able to share that today.

I wanted to ask a similar question to Paul's really, which is about the kind of escalation process when things were bad. So I think, Erfan, you talked about just raising complaints about the state of things on a day-to-day basis. And Milad, you talked about having a health crisis with the infection in your mouth. And some of you spoke about the suicide attempts that there were as well. And I'm just keen to understand - on a day-to-day basis when you wanted to raise something, and then there was no response, what happened? With the medical issues – when it got to a point where things were really serious, what eventually happened? What was it that resulted in getting any medical attention at all? And just if you can tell us a little bit more about the lines of communication that there were with those who were responsible for managing the camp? And that experience of trying to escalate? And when there were moments where there was additional support or medical attention or intervention, what was it eventually that got you that – or not. I'm just keen to understand a little bit more about that process on a day-to-day basis, if I can. Thank you.

Erfan Sure - I mean, the first step to escalate your mental health issue was to tell the staff and inform the staff and the camp manager about it, or calling Migrant Help. It's sad to say that we found Migrant Help completely unhelpful about this, because when we used to raise our complaints about our mental health issue and the consequences of it to Migrant Help, staff would come to us and write down what we are experiencing, what problems we are dealing with. And we have to consider that the staff were inexperienced and they were hearing our traumatic experience.

And at some point I was the one who is interpreting for some of the residents because I could speak English and I was also hearing their traumatic experience. So, there was not anybody who provides interpreters or translators and also someone expert to hear those traumatic experiences. So, they would just record what they would hear from the residents and they would prescribe some medicines, which I'm not really aware of what they were. But they would consume medicines.

I remember one of my friends who was one who had some experience or memories about the war between Iran and Iraq. And when he was a kid, he used to hide in the shelter because of the bombings and shootings. And being in Napier Barracks, seeing the environment and living in that environment, completely reminded him of that experience. And he had to consume some pills that helped to help him to sleep, because he couldn't sleep without those pills at all. And this was the case - I mean, it wasn't really a significant support and we would just go to Migrant Help and staff and camp managers to escalate our mental health issues.

Kenan

Can I say something about that? Regarding the complaints - both camps, as you know, it's run by private contractors called Clearspring Ready Homes. And they are using subcontractors to run that site. So, when you want to follow the proper channel for the complaints, you have to go to the Migrant Help over phone and wait for hours to get response. Then they will inform you that they will inform the provider, the housing provider, to solve this issue within 3 to 4 working days.

If you approach the provider immediately about one of the complaints, they will first use the excuse of not understanding your question. You have to speak in English – so, if you are not a good speaker, you have to ask somebody else help, like Erfan said. So you have to do that. Then they have to direct it to the subcontractors. For example, if it's related to the kitchen, there is definitely subcontractors; related to the securities and bad behavior, it's related to security companies; or it's related to maintenance, they are not doing the maintenance, they have subcontractors doing the maintenance.

So that, for example, one of the cases: I have complained about the heating in the winter. I spend more than eight days till their first respond to come and prepare the heating. So, I stayed like eight days without heating. They came to prepare it and they realise they have to change the device. So, we spent two more nights without heating in the middle of the winter.

So, the process itself is very long. And if you are not an English speaker, your chances to achieve something is very less.

Milad

May I add something? About the physical health care - I think we still have some photos that there was not even liquid or soap or any kind of soap in the place. It was in that time, there was nothing to just wash your hands. So, most of the guys was using shampoos or something to do with.

About the mental health - the person who was in my block who attempt for suicide unfortunately he cut his hands and he was in very bad condition and it was in the middle of the night. So just imagine that – just you wake up with

a lot of noise to see what's going on. And someone tried to take his own life. And a lot of blood. And there was an ambulance. They took him away. And after that, the second day, just the day after that, we saw him in the block. It was like nothing happened. This was what I wanted to share with you also.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you Milad. That must have been very distressing for everybody. Thank you for sharing that.

OK, I'll move over to Ruth Lister.

Baroness Lister of Burtersett Well, my thanks as well for sharing. It must be really difficult having to re-live what you've been through with us. But it really helps us understand, listening to you, what it was like. Well, insofar as we can. Thank you.

And my question really is - it's so clear that in terms of health support, be it physical or mental or complaints, the totally inadequate responses. And I think one or two of you have talked about how the staff were inexperienced, didn't have sufficient training and so forth. But I just wonder if you could say at a personal level, was there any - I mean, I think it was Kenan who said that the system should provide humane treatment. Were any of the staff acting humanely? Where they treating you as fellow human beings with dignity, respect and so forth? Or did you feel that somehow they were treating you with, well, "they're just asylum seekers" or whatever, going through their head? I mean, just from that very day-to-day interaction level, did you get any support or feeling of sympathy from the people that were there to run the camps?

Kenan Thank you very much. It will be unfair if I said there is no good staff at all or we didn't have received some help from good securities people or some staff. We received some. But those people are not available all the times. Most of the bad things happen where their supervisors or the main site manager were outside the camps. Sometimes we used to see them once or twice in the week and that makes everything horrible.

Depending on subcontractors - it's obviously that they are not trained in any kind of training to deal with asylum seekers or people who are victims of the human trafficking or tortures, or having some mental or health issue. That was add salt to the open injury I think.

From my point of view, some cases were easy to identify. For example, one of the guys I know, he was having a jaw open like 2 or 3 cm, and that was making him suffer and struggle to eat. And there was stress and the jaw was open more and more, up to 5 cm. Imagine that. Such a case - everybody can notice it and identify these cases as need medical help, for example, or being in camp is not a suitable place for these people. Other

people were having asthma and they were coughing and having difficulty breathing. But yet they were left inside the camps in this condition.

So, they were untrained. And even if they are willing to help, if they are untrained and not too prepared, and they are put under these circumstances and the chain of command, let us say, and the wrong procedures, they were unable to deliver what they are supposed to do. Thank you.

Alison Thewliss MP OK. Erfan?

Erfan About Napier - I would say that it's very unfair to say that all the staff were not sympathetic because we also saw sympathetic and supportive staff and we had a good connection with each other. But there were also some of the staff who were not really caring or, I would say, not really sympathetic in a polite way.

But I mean, we have to consider that they were really inexperienced. They were not aware of who the asylum seekers are, how the asylum system works. So being ignorant and uninformed about it caused so much problems. And I mean, we had some incidents when we were there and that made us think that we are constantly dehumanised or criminalised. But, also, there were some people who made this environment more bearable.

But, yes, you always feel that you are dehumanised. That place and the environment and the treatment you are receiving is just against a human's dignity or decency, I would say.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you. Have you anything to add to that Milad?

Milad No, thank you.

Alison Thewliss MP OK, thank you. Any further questions?

Baroness Lister of Burtsett I think we need to move on. Although there was one point of clarification, if there's time. Milad - you said something about you felt like you were in a showroom and there were people outside looking in, thinking that you must all be criminals.

I may have misunderstood, but I thought that these camps were very isolated. So I just wondered who these people were that were looking in?

Milad Many reporters and journalists came and there are a lot of videos about the camp, from the outside of course.

And if you see them, it's not very kind to say that, but it's putting people like the asylum seekers in a place... you know, it's right, it's isolated. But with

fences, with this barbed wires.... the people they think they see just some people inside this, like they are some kind of criminal or something.

Sometimes we was just speaking with each other outside. The people was just coming around and saying very bad words to us. And, you know, they're saying their opinion - this is a free country. They can say whatever they want. But to put like 400 - I think the maximum people that we was there, I think it was 482 mans - and there was a lot of people around that wasn't feel safe because you are putting some like 480 males in these conditions. Because they have families. They want to take a walk with their children and they see this scene. What will they think? What if I want to take a walk with my friends - one of my friends, not more. How they see me? It happened to me - there was a lady with her two children, she just take their hands and "let's go away". OK, it's no problem - that's the way she wants to think. But this all you know, it just make a reason for the people to change their minds about us.

Alison Thewliss MP It's so sad. Kenan and Erfan, did you want to add to that?

Erfan I just want to add - it was quite isolated, we were one hour away from the closest city, Folkestone. But because the camp was controversial, so many individuals who were against our presence there would come on a daily basis and harass us. They would wait outside. If anyone wanted to go out, they would just shout at them or swear at them, and harass us, asking questions.

So, at some point, some people didn't want to go out because they expected to be harassed. And also, as Milad said, the journalists and the reporters were always outside. I'm sorry to say that we always felt like we are in the zoo. There are fences all around us and people are watching us and pointing their fingers at us, and some people harrassing us.

And the point that Milad raised about the harassment - we have to consider the fact that after the fire happened, so many local people, residents of Folkestone, received letters from the Home Office that "we are trying hard to keep you safe from Napier Barracks residents".

So, it totally tells you that we are all criminals, we are savages, and they are keeping the locals safe from us. And it was really painful - I'm a person, I have my own history and I'm living among you. I'm part of society. And you're introducing us as criminals. Thank you.

Kenan Thank you Erfan. I just want to say that putting asylum seekers in big numbers on such an army camp or barracks without consulting the local societies in this areas – in Napier or in Penally - that was creating an

imbalance and giving us an enemy from the local society without even moving into the camps. We were moved without their consultation at all. So, they were not happy, at least at the beginning.

Additional to that, we were facing a trouble with the far-right people. Putting a big number of asylum seekers in a small area like Penally or Napier Barracks – and we are using one gate only. So it gives them a chance to come to that area to insult and harass the asylum seekers, calling them invaders, for example, or illegal immigrant. We keep hearing that all the time.

Being inside the Penally Camp, I felt all the times I was so exposed to the far-right – they were filming us, shooting us by their own cameras and upload that on YouTube, Facebook all the time. Many of the videos still showing asylum seeker faces with bad comments and racist comment on that video are uploaded already on the video and YouTube till now. And that was making us feel unsafe at all, especially to the people who came from Third World country. They were having a conflict with their own governments and they were made identified now where they are. And it was, you know, something serious. Thank you very much.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you very much for sharing your evidence and your experiences. That was incredibly powerful and I can only apologise for what you have been through. It's absolutely awful. Nobody should be treated the way that you were treated. It's unacceptable.

I want to thank you all for your evidence and for sharing your experiences with us this afternoon. I know you all said that perhaps you have photographs or other things that you would like to share with us. And if there's anything that you want to send on, please do that. And if there's anything that you haven't had the chance to say that you would like us to know you, please send us that as well. That would be very helpful.

But thank you so much for your time and for sharing it this afternoon. And we're all very grateful for your evidence – thank you so much.

If you wish to stay for the second session, you're welcome to do that and but you don't have to, as you've already been through quite a lot here. So, if you feel that you want to go, that's absolutely fine. Thank you so much.

Erfan Can I have one last word? I mean, apart from our experience in Napier, I just want to say when you're in front of me that you have power, you have the ability to raise our voice and influence some other people. I believe that this country has a great history and is great. But its greatness is not because of division or nationalism or being hostile. It's greatness is because

of multiculturalism and its rich diversity. And I think we have to maintain this spirit - and the existence of camps like Napier and Penally is against that spirit. So thank you for giving us this opportunity. Thank you so much.

Alison Thewliss MP Thank you so much. I wish the three of you all the very best in the future. Thank you.

We're a little tight for time here, but I wanted to make sure that everybody had the chance to have their say and to share their experiences. We'll move directly on to Part Two, which is testimonies of residents at Napier Barracks.