

Comments from detainees at Hal-Safi, Hal-Far and Floriana detention centres¹
Presented to the Chairman of the National Conference on Irregular Immigration
Malta, 7th February 2005

Detention

The time period of eighteen months of detention is so long that it is no different from a sentence of imprisonment. We are asking that detention of asylum seekers is abolished.

If it is necessary to maintain this policy, we ask that:

- Detention does not exceed two months;
- These two months are not applied across the board, but only where it is required in view of the individual circumstances of the case or if it is strictly required for police investigations. Such investigations should be carried out immediately after arrival;
- This time is put to good use, that is to say we are provided with the opportunity to learn a language or a skill during this time;
- This time is made profitable, in the sense that those of us who have special skills are allowed to exercise them and, in this way, the government will recover some of the expenses incurred.

Conditions

The conditions in detention centres need to be improved. We need adequate facilities including rooms, sanitary facilities and recreation areas such as a library and an adequate place for exercise. Hygiene is also very important for us – we feel that not enough importance is given to this issue.

Asylum procedures

First instance

We request that asylum seekers are provided with legal assistance from the initial stages of the proceedings. It is also important that asylum seekers are informed of the date for their interview in advance.

Appeals procedure

In this area there are many problems. The appeal procedure seems to be of unlimited duration. One could say that here in Malta if one's initial application is rejected, everything seems to be over. The appeal procedure is little more than a formality, something which never really makes a difference.

Although we are entitled to legal aid, so far we have never received this service.

We request that the appeals procedure is expedited and that there is more transparency in the proceedings.

Integration of asylum seekers

Asylum seekers should be prepared for integration in Malta through educational programmes. We also wish that the Maltese public be given the opportunity to see us in a more positive light.

Long-term solutions

We recognize that Malta is a small country with limited resources, and we believe that other countries should be asked to share the responsibility of providing for asylum seekers.

Conclusion

Freedom – all we want is freedom. We believe that our continued detention is unfair and unnecessary.

Malta is a democratic country and a member of the European Union. It is therefore unacceptable that Malta derogates from the laws and conventions to which it is a party.

Detention is a continuation of the suffering that forced us to flee our countries. We fled the dangers in search of safety and fell into an equally hard situation in the place where we are seeking refuge.

1. These comments were compiled from a letter written by the detainees at Floriana detention centre and another written by the detainees at Safi (copies delivered to the Chairman). The detainees at Hal Far sent their comments for inclusion in this document through their legal advisor.