

Black Women's Rape Action Project (BWRAP)

CROSSROADS WOMEN'S CENTRE

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Keith Vaz MP, Chair
Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
7 Millbank
London SW1P 3JA
homeaffcom@parliament.uk

15 July 2014

Dear Keith Vaz,

Re: visit by MPs on the Home Affairs Select Committee to Yarl's Wood IRC.

We write further to the Home Affairs Select Committee meeting on Tues 24 June where the company Serco was asked questions about the rape and sexual abuse of women by guards in Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre which it runs and where you announced that MPs on the Committee would visit the Centre to speak to women detained there. As you know, various MPs appeared to have outstanding concerns about women's safety, after hearing the evidence given by Mr McGuinness and Mr Thorburn, of Serco's management. David Winnick MP said that there should be another session for the Committee to take evidence from detainees and their representatives because he was "*not satisfied*" and "*the allegations are so serious that we can't leave it at that*".

In her subsequent phone conversation with the secretary Tom Healy, my colleague Sian Evans from Women Against Rape, confirmed that there were women inside Yarl's Wood who would want to give evidence. Mr Healy conveyed the Committee's concerns about women's safety and asked under what conditions women would be ready to meet them. He invited us to put this information in writing.

Having discussed with women in Yarl's Wood about the Committee visiting, we have been given the names of twenty women who want to speak to you and your colleagues. Given the serious nature of the allegations and women's vulnerability to reprisals, both from Serco and the Home Office, they have requested the following:

1. That MPs see a delegation of all 20 women, rather than speaking to women individually, so that no-one is identified with any particular complaint.
2. That no Serco or UKBA staff are present.
3. That a representative from Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women Against Rape, are present as women are traumatised by their experiences.
4. That a lawyer of women's choice is also present.
5. That any report of the visit and women's complaints are anonymised (unless women specify otherwise), and that care is taken not to include details that would identify women.
6. That MPs act swiftly to press for the release of any women in Yarl's Wood who is a victim of rape or sexual abuse.

By the way, it seems that even the prospect of a visit from your Committee has led Serco to spruce up Yarl's Wood: women said that within a couple of days of the 24 June hearing, painting started at the Centre and the food menu was improved.

Women want the Committee to hear their complaints, but their concern about reprisals is not without foundation. You may recall that we copied you into a letter which we wrote to Norman Abusin, the Yarl's Wood manager, expressing our concerns about threats and harassment Ms Z received from two female managers (15 June 2014 - attached).

Please could you confirm whether the arrangements that women suggest are possible and when a visit is likely to take place?

Finally, we haven't received a response to our letter of 18 June about ex-detainees being given the opportunity to give evidence to the Committee. Could you let us know when an evidence giving session could be arranged? Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



Cristel Amiss,
Project coordinator

cc John McDonnell MP
David Winnick MP
Women in Yarl's Wood
Women Against Rape
Tom Healey, Clerk of the Committee

From: Black Women's Rape Action Project [<mailto:bwrap@rapeaction.net>]

Sent: 17 June 2014 17:16

To: 'vazk@parliament.uk'; 'homeaffcom@parliament.uk'; 'francish@parliament.uk'; 'jchr@parliament.uk'; 'mcdonnellj@parliament.uk'; 'hmiprison.enquiries@hmiprison.gsi.gov.uk'

Subject: For your information

We have been asked to ensure that you receive a copy of the letter (below) which was signed by over 60 people and posted by recorded delivery to the Yarl's Wood Centre Manager on Monday 16 June.

Yours sincerely,

Cristel Amiss

[Black Women's Rape Action Project](#)

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15 June 2014

RE: Threat to Ms Z by Serco managers

On Friday afternoon 13 June, Ms Z called Black Women Rape Action Project to report that she had been called into the unit office and threatened by two Serco managers. Ms Z is one of the women in Yarl's Wood who wants women inside to be able to speak to

supporters this Sunday, as is their legal right. Given the threat of reprisals, Ms Z cannot reveal her name publicly at the moment.

She said that two unnamed female Serco managers had told her that they knew she was aware of today's protest, and that " *if anything happens inside, if women participate from inside*" they were going to "isolate her" and "then have her moved".

Ms Z has lodged an official complaint as she "*felt threatened and a bit scared, because this is what happened to my friend after they took her to isolation, she was deported.*"

Ms Z is courageously standing her ground. She says that she has the "*right to speak out about anything happening in Yarl's Wood . . . a right to speak to the press and express my views on matters that concern the public.*"

Given previous cover-up of staff brutality towards women detained in Yarl's Wood, some of which was exposed in the *Observer*, we are very concerned about Ms Z's safety. It is illegal to threaten and intimidate detainees who are exercising their legal rights. It contradicts any claims by Serco that they take the wellbeing of women "in their care" seriously or that they "*focus on decency and respect in all aspects of care for our residents (...)* allowing residents as much freedom of movement and choice as possible."

We understand that allegations of sexual assaults by guards at Yarl's Wood are currently being investigated by MPs. We are extremely concerned that these recent threats to Ms Z are part of a widespread policy and practice of harassment and abuse that seems prevalent in Yarl's Wood.

We urge you to:

1. Ensure the managers who threatened Ms Z are named and disciplined.
2. Stop any further threats or attempts to remove Ms Z, or any other detainee who contacts or speaks to supporters, or takes part in this or any protest.

We are in touch with John McDonnell MP and have reported these threats to him. He is very concerned for the rights and wellbeing of Ms Z and of all other detainees in Yarl's Wood, including their right to communicate with the outside and report any intimidation and illegality by Serco.

We look forward for your urgent reply

Yours sincerely

cc Keith Vaz MP Chair Home Affairs Committee, vazk@parliament.uk
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francish@parliament.uk, jchr@parliament.uk
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[Mark Townsend](#), *The Observer*