



**Alison Thewliss MP**

Member of Parliament for Glasgow Central

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Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Secretary of State for the Home Department  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

24 June 2021

Dear Home Secretary,

We write to express our grave concern at the government's plans to open a new Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) at the Hassockfield secure training facility in County Durham. The Minister for Immigration Compliance and Justice Chris Philp has confirmed that the new IRC will have capacity to hold up to 80 people at any one time, will begin operating in autumn 2021 and will be used to detain women.<sup>[1]</sup>

In addition to Hassockfield, women will continue to be detained in units at Yarl's Wood, Dungavel and Colnbrook IRCs.<sup>[2]</sup> Furthermore, we have heard suggestions that women and men will be detained together at the new Short-Term Holding Facility that is to be retained at Morton Hall when it converts from an IRC to a prison later this year.<sup>[3]</sup>

We note that the opening of the new IRC and other shifts in the detention estate are occurring in tandem with a range of other Home Office changes that look set to increase the number of people liable for detention at any time. This includes new Immigration Rules that give the government greater scope to treat as inadmissible asylum claims from people who have passed through, or have a connection with, a "safe third country";<sup>[4]</sup> a reduction in the safeguards against detention for survivors of trafficking;<sup>[5]</sup> and many of the proposals in the government's New Plan for Immigration.<sup>[6]</sup>

It also includes the Home Office's decision to end the 'Action Access' alternative to detention pilot scheme for women.<sup>[7]</sup> We gather that this decision was taken despite the fact that only 20 women were able to take part in it instead of the 50 originally intended, and before the completion or publication of an ongoing independent evaluation of this scheme, suggesting that the evidence from the evaluation has not been taken into account. Additionally, we understand that two further alternatives to detention pilots that the Home Office had promised to implement have been cancelled.

Such developments are extremely concerning. They suggest that the government has abandoned its commitment to reducing the use of detention, made following the publication of Stephen Shaw's 2016 and 2018 reviews of detention.<sup>[8]</sup> Given what is known about the harm that detention causes, including the damaging impacts on the mental health of those subjected to it,<sup>[9]</sup> this would be a highly regrettable policy reversal and one for which we can see no justification.

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We are alarmed too by the fact that the new IRC at Hassockfield will be used to detain women. As you will be aware, the detention of women has been raised as an issue of concern by parliamentarians across the political spectrum for many years. Many people detained by the Home Office are survivors of torture, trafficking and/or other serious abuses, and their mental health can be negatively affected by the experience of detention in profound and lasting ways. This is the situation for many of the women detained.

At a meeting of the APPG on Immigration Detention in April this year, for example, parliamentarians heard evidence from Agnes Tanoh, a campaigner with Women for Refugee Women who was held at Yarl's Wood IRC after claiming asylum.<sup>[10]</sup> She was subsequently granted refugee status by the UK Government. Agnes described her experience in detention as “re-traumatising” and explained that, eight years after leaving the IRC, she still becomes upset when speaking about it. To expose a person to further suffering at a time when they were seeking sanctuary is deeply shocking. Yet it is just one example of the harm experienced by thousands of people, many of whom are vulnerable, detained in the UK each year.

We note that the site for the new IRC at Hassockfield is in a remote, rural location. This has serious implications for the ability of the women detained there to access legal advice and other specialist support, and to receive visits, including from children and other family members. This is in turn likely to lead to greater distress and other mental health harms amongst detainees, and impact on their ability to access justice.

The Minister for Immigration Compliance and Justice recently confirmed that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is “being developed” in relation to Hassockfield and would be published “in due course”.<sup>[11]</sup> He also confirmed that an EIA “will be completed” for the change of Yarl's Wood into a majority male IRC that still accommodates women.<sup>[12]</sup> Alarmingly these answers suggest the Home Office is proceeding with implementation of the new IRC and other related changes in the detention estate before it has fully evaluated the possible impacts on those with protected characteristics, including sex, disability and pregnancy/maternity. Such an approach is unacceptable and risks exposing already vulnerable women to yet more discrimination and harm.

**In light of the points raised above, we urge you to reconsider your approach, to cancel all plans for a new IRC for women at Hassockfield with immediate effect, and to instead refocus the department's resources on efforts to reduce detention, including via community-based alternatives.**

We also ask that you:

- Confirm whether or not the Home Office has reversed its commitment to reducing the use of immigration detention, and if so, on what basis this decision was taken.
- Confirm what plans the Home Office has to ensure that women detained at Hassockfield IRC will have access to mental health facilities, legal advice, visits, and other forms of support.
- Provide a firm date for the publication of the Equality Impact Assessments for Hassockfield IRC and for the repurposing of Yarl's Wood to a majority male IRC that also accommodates women.

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- Confirm whether women and men will be detained together at the new Short-Term Holding Facility at Morton Hall when it is converted from an IRC to a prison; whether or not an Equality Impact Assessment for this change has been completed; and if so, when the assessment will be published.
- Provide a date for completion and publication of the independent evaluation of the Action Access alternatives to detention pilot scheme, and explain why the decision to refuse to extend or cancel three of the schemes was made before its completion and publication.

We look forward to receiving your response as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Thewliss MP – SNP (Glasgow Central);  
Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group on  
Immigration Detention

Mary Kelly Foy MP – Labour (City of Durham)

Rt Hon. Diane Abbott MP – Labour (Hackney North and Stoke Newington)

Hannah Bardell MP – SNP (Livingston)

Paula Barker MP – Labour (Liverpool Wavertree)

Apsana Begum MP – Labour (Poplar and Limehouse)

Paul Blomfield MP – Labour (Sheffield Central)

Baroness Christine Blower – Labour

Deidre Brock MP – SNP (Edinburgh North and Leith)

Baroness Pauline Bryan – Labour

Richard Burgon MP – Labour (Leeds East)

Ian Byrne MP – Labour (Liverpool West Derby)

Rt Hon. Alistair Carmichael MP – Liberal Democrat (Orkney and Shetland)

Baroness Shami Chakrabarti – Labour

Wendy Chamberlain MP – Liberal Democrat (North East Fife)

Joanna Cherry QC MP – SNP (Edinburgh South West)

Daisy Cooper MP – Liberal Democrat (St Albans)

Ronnie Cowan MP – SNP (Inverclyde)

Angela Crawley MP – SNP (Lanark and Hamilton East)

Rt Hon. Ed Davey MP – Liberal Democrat (Kingston and Surbiton)

Martin Docherty-Hughes MP – SNP (West Dunbartonshire)

Allan Dorans MP – SNP (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock)

Tim Farron MP – Liberal Democrat (Westmorland and Lonsdale)

Marion Fellows MP – SNP (Motherwell and Wishaw)

Lord Mike German OBE – Liberal Democrat

Patrick Grady MP – SNP (Glasgow North)

Sarah Green MP – Liberal Democrat (Chesham and Amersham)

Andrew Gwynne MP – Labour (Denton and Reddish)

Rt Hon. Harriet Harman MP – Labour (Camberwell and Peckham)

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Helen Hayes MP – Labour (Dulwich and West Norwood)  
Drew Hendry MP – SNP (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey)  
Lord John Hendy – Labour  
Wera Hobhouse MP – Liberal Democrat (Bath)  
Christine Jardine MP – Liberal Democrat (Edinburgh West)  
Kim Johnson MP – Labour (Liverpool Riverside)  
Baroness Helena Kennedy of the Shaws – Labour  
Ian Lavery MP – Labour (Wansbeck)  
Chris Law MP – SNP (Dundee West)  
Clive Lewis MP – Labour (Norwich South)  
Baroness Ruth Lister of Burtersett – Labour  
Tony Lloyd MP – Labour (Rochdale)  
Caroline Lucas MP – Green (Brighton Pavilion)  
Baroness Sarah Ludford – Liberal Democrat  
Stewart McDonald MP – SNP (Glasgow South)  
Stuart McDonald MP – SNP (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East)  
Rt Hon. John McDonnell MP – Labour (Hayes and Harlington)  
Anne McLaughlin MP – SNP (Glasgow North East)  
Baroness Molly Meacher – Crossbench  
Ian Mearns MP – Labour (Gateshead)  
Carol Monaghan MP – SNP (Glasgow North West)  
Layla Moran MP – Liberal Democrat (Oxford West and Abingdon)  
Grahame Morris MP – Labour (Easington)  
Gavin Newlands MP – SNP (Paisley and Renfrewshire North)  
Brendan O'Hara MP – SNP (Argyll and Bute)  
Sarah Olney MP – Liberal Democrat (Richmond Park)  
Kate Osamor MP – Labour (Edmonton)  
Kate Osborne MP – Labour (Jarrow)  
Kirsten Oswald MP – SNP (East Renfrewshire)  
Anum Qaisar-Javed MP – SNP (Airdrie and Shotts)  
Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP – Labour (Streatham)  
Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP – Labour (Brighton, Kemptown)  
Liz Saville Roberts MP – Plaid Cymru (Dwyfor Meirionnydd)  
Virendra Sharma MP – Labour (Ealing, Southall)  
Tommy Sheppard MP – SNP (Edinburgh East)  
Chris Stephens MP – SNP (Glasgow South West)  
Jamie Stone MP – Liberal Democrat (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)  
Zarah Sultana MP – Labour (Coventry South)  
Richard Thomson MP – SNP (Gordon)  
Claudia Webbe MP – Independent (Leicester East)  
Mick Whitley MP – Labour (Birkenhead)  
Hywel Williams MP – Plaid Cymru (Arfon)  
Munira Wilson MP – Liberal Democrat (Twickenham)  
Beth Winter MP – Labour (Cynon Valley)  
Dr Philippa Whitford MP – SNP (Central Ayrshire)  
Lord Simon Woolley of Woodford – Crossbench  
Mohammad Yasin MP – Labour (Bedford)

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<sup>[1]</sup> See <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-25/158849>

<sup>[2]</sup> Ibid

<sup>[3]</sup> See <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-25/175931>

<sup>[4]</sup> See <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9031/>

<sup>[5]</sup> See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/modern-slavery-trafficking-detention-home-office-b1820549.html>

<sup>[6]</sup> This includes, for example, the proposal whereby people who arrive by irregular means and/or pass through “safe” third countries en route, will be considered inadmissible to the UK’s asylum system, and the Home Office will seek to remove them. See p. 19 of the New Plan for Immigration [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/972517/CCS207\\_CCS0820091708-001\\_Sovereign\\_Borders\\_Web\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972517/CCS207_CCS0820091708-001_Sovereign_Borders_Web_Accessible.pdf)

<sup>[7]</sup> See <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-02-22/HL13464>; and <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-09/165514>

<sup>[8]</sup> See <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2016-01-14/HCWS470> and <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-07-24/debates/03FA26A3-90A1-4E58-826A-1341ABA6D146/ImmigrationDetentionShawReview>

<sup>[9]</sup> *PS02/21 Detention of people with mental disorders in immigration removal centres (IRCs)* (Royal College of Psychiatrists 2021). Available at: <https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/better-mh-policy/position-statements/position-statement-ps02-21---detention-of-people-with-mental-disorders-in-immigration-removal-centres---2021.pdf>; Mary Bosworth, ‘The impact of immigration detention on mental health: A literature review’ in Stephen Shaw, *Review into the Welfare in Detention of Vulnerable Persons* (Home Office 2016) 305-306. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/490782/52532\\_Shaw\\_Review\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/490782/52532_Shaw_Review_Accessible.pdf)

<sup>[10]</sup> Minutes from the meeting are available here: <https://appgdetention.org.uk/agm-planned-new-irc-for-women-april-2021/>

<sup>[11]</sup> See <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-05-13/1150>

<sup>[12]</sup> See <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-03-16/169893>

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