**PRESS RELEASE: The campaign to shut Hassockfield/Derwentside Immigration Detention Centre for Women moves on after women have been moved there**

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11am Saturday 15th January 2022

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Human rights campaigners will be at the Hassockfield/Derwentside Immigration Removal Centre (IRC) on Saturday 15th January 12-2pm to demonstrate their support for the women who were transferred to the prison between Christmas and New Year. Home Secretary Priti Patel announced the opening of the new detention centre for women on 23rd November 2021, two days before 27 people drowned in the English Channel trying to reach safety. The IRC near Consett, County Durham had been scheduled to open mid-Autumn, however, it finally received its first prisoners in the last days of 2021, presumably so that the Home Office could say the facility had opened before the end of the year. The protest is the 7th monthly demonstration and follows a successful emergency demonstration on Sunday 2nd January, which although called at short notice, had over 70 participants who sang and spoke loudly enough for the women inside to hear that they have support from local people who want to see an end to detention at the site.

The Home Office intends to use the facility as an Immigration Removal Centre for women asylum seekers they label as 'illegals' or 'foreign criminals'. The facility has been renamed Derwentside IRC in a blatant attempt to erase the appalling history of abuse that occurred when hundreds of boys were locked up there over several decades. Five former officers have already been jailed for their part in the abuse with many more thought to have been involved in what was probably an organised paedophile ring.

Agnes Tanoh from Women for Refugee Women has worked tirelessly to get Hassockfield/Derwentside closed down. You can find her petition at:

<https://www.change.org/p/the-home-secretary-stop-the-new-detention-centre-for-women>

Agnes said:

*“Detention tears families apart, destroys women’s mental health and achieves nothing other than extreme harm. It is a real evil act by the Home Office to move women to the new Derwentside detention centre just after Christmas. Imagine their terror as they were transported on that long journey from Yarl’s Wood in Bedfordshire to this new detention centre in County Durham.*

*I am speaking at the demo on Saturday because I want the Home Office to shut down Derwentside and to treat women seeking asylum with humanity and kindness. Women seeking asylum need protection and freedom, they should never be locked up like this. It’s time to shut down all detention centres.”*

Emma Pearson, from Durham People’s Assembly, said:

*“Many women imprisoned within immigration detention centres are victims of unimaginable violence and trauma like human trafficking, torture, gender-based abuse and sexual and physical assault.  Detention and incarceration render women extremely vulnerable to further, disproportionate, gendered violence.*

*Many people in detention have committed no criminal wrongdoing and are instead imprisoned for unjustifiable and inhumane administrative purposes. Majority of those in immigration detention are released back into UK communities, in 2020 this figure was 74% of people. – that means - 74% of people were imprisoned indefinitely, unnecessarily and then set free.*

*We know that women were transferred to this site around the busy times of Christmas and New Year, and it is our utmost hope that the women can hear us and know that we don’t want them to be imprisoned. We will continue to raise our voices in the public domain and will not stop until this site is closed and all the women are released.”*

Dr. Helen Groom from the No To Hassockfield campaign said:

*“Unfortunately, we feared the day would come when women would be moved to be imprisoned on this site, given Home Office support for the site. The moving of women seeking sanctuary to this prison gives us added impetus to increase the campaign to get this dreadful place closed down once and for all. The site could be put to a much more powerful and imaginative use such as a science park or green energy development business, things that look forward and give the area hope, instead of continuing to be a place of hell for those imprisoned there.”*

The centre will be a category 3 style prison for women. Some of the women imprisoned will have committed a crime, but they will have already served a prison sentence. Research by Women for Refugee Women shows that over 85% who had been detained in Yarl’s Wood had experienced rape, domestic violence, forced marriage, forced prostitution or female genital mutilation. Category 3 means that the government know that these women are very unlikely to try to escape. However, they will be locked up and be denied their basic freedoms, with no certainty of when they will be released.

The opening of Derwentside IRC is the epitome of an inhumane Tory government who have lost their moral compass. Women asylum seekers are amongst the most vulnerable people in our society and they deserve our attention and compassion. Campaigners have committed to continuing regular demonstrations and vigils at the site in support of the women locked up there. You can find out more and support the campaigns here:

**Details of campaigns:**

Durham People’s Assembly

Email - durhampeoplesassembly@gmail.com

Facebook - @durhampeoplesassembly

Abolish Detention

Facebook - Abolish Detention - Hassockfield

Email - abolishdetention@gmail.com

No to Hassockfield

Email - No2Hassockfield@outlook.com

Facebook - @No2Hassockfield

Women for Refugee Women

Email gemma@refugeewomen.co.uk

Facebook @4refugeewomen

**Contact details:**

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**References**

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/derwentside-immigration-removal-centre-durham-b1981969.html>

<https://www.change.org/p/the-home-secretary-stop-the-new-detention-centre-for-women>

http://www.refugeewomen.co.uk/2016/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/We-are-still-here-report-WEB.pdf

ENDS.