

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## Media Briefing

AI Index: EUR 45/020/2002 (Public)  
News Service No: 155

**Embargo Date: 5 September 2002 00:01 GMT**

## **UK: Conditions of detention of 'security' detainees are unacceptable**

Published

The following document presents some of Amnesty International's concerns in relation to the conditions of detention of those detained in the aftermath of 11 September 2001. Amnesty International believes that the conditions of detention in which they have been held amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

### **Lock-up**

Detainees at Belmarsh Prison are held in small cells for 22 hours a day. They are allowed one-hour for exercise and the other hour must be split between association with other detainees, showers, making telephone calls and using gym facilities.

### **Arbitrary treatment**

One detainee told Amnesty International's representatives that on 18 June 2002 he had been subjected to disciplinary adjudication proceedings for having breached prison rules as a result of allegedly having changed his physical appearance without seeking prior permission from the prison authorities. The change in his appearance was the result of a haircut. He told Amnesty International's representatives that he believed that the treatment meted out to him by the prison authorities was unfair and that he had been punished for purportedly breaching rules of which he had not been made aware in the first place. He and other detainees expressed concern at the fact that there is no information provided about prison rules in a language that the detainees understand.

### **Inadequate health care**

Amnesty International is concerned by reports that detainees are not receiving adequate health care. One detainee was being refused a hospital examination, which had been booked before his arrest, while another was not receiving physiotherapy. Following a prison transfer, one detainee was told he would have to wait and see a doctor before he could be given prescribed medication and put on a special diet again. One man was still waiting, after five months, to receive dental treatment; another for a colon condition.

### **Impeded access to legal advice**

Detainees have been denied prompt access to a solicitor.

For example, upon their arrest and detention at Belmarsh Prison, none of the detainees were provided with the means, information or facilities to contact solicitors. All were refused permission to make telephone calls to solicitors, whether they had pre-existing solicitors or not. It was reported to Amnesty International that some of the detainees had to wait for about a week to see his solicitor. This is despite the fact that the ATCSA detainees received not only an order of certification under the Act, but also an order for deportation, printed in English, informing them they had five days to appeal.

Amnesty International has also been concerned about reports that legal visits were being hampered by the failure of the Belmarsh Prison authorities to ensure that lawyers and their clients were able to avail themselves of the full amount of time allocated for the legal visit.

### **Restricted contact with the outside world**

Even when detainees have been transferred from one prison to another, they must apply to the prison authorities for clearance for each person they wish to call, including a lawyer, even if the people are the same who had previously been approved by the prison authorities. Some detainees were therefore unable to contact their families in London for between 2-3 weeks and it can take over two months to get "clearance" to telephone family members abroad. In February, one detainee stated that although he had been informed that his father had died abroad, he still was not permitted to call his mother, although clearance had been obtained for calls to his mother while he was detained at another prison.

In February, detainees complained to Amnesty International's representatives that they were being subjected to "closed" visits with their family, even more than two months following their arrival at Belmarsh Prison. It was reported that social visits were being tape-recorded, and that a prison officer was present during the whole visit, despite the glass screen. Detainees stated that they were strip-searched before and after every visit.

Detainees also complained in February that they were being denied their full allocation of social visits. Some detainees reported that, although they were allowed two visits per week, in practice they were getting two visits per month.

Initially, they were only allowed to communicate with family members in English or have an interpreter. One detainee complained that on one occasion, although he had applied for his visit and the interpreter two weeks before the visit took place, on the day of the visit he was told that the interpreter would not be present and that he was to conduct his conversations in English. When he inquired further about the absence of the interpreter, he was informed that the interpreter was not being admitted to the unit, as she was refusing to remove her headscarf. The visit was conducted in English, except for the last 30 minutes, when the interpreter appeared.

### **Exercise of religion**

In February 2002, the detainees complained to Amnesty International that they had not had access to an imam in Belmarsh Prison and that initially they had been given extremely limited time for religious worship. The detainees informed Amnesty International representatives that they took turns leading the prayers.

The organization's representatives were also informed that on 23 December 2001, during a prayer service, a prison guard entered the room and told them to finish up earlier than expected; when one of the detainees, who was leading the prayers, did not reply, because -- in accordance with religious custom -- he was unable to do so in the middle of the prayer, he was punished by being placed on "basic regime" for three weeks -- without a hearing and without the right to contest the decision. The "basic

regime" consists of losing one of the two hours to be spent out of the cell and a cut in visiting time.

Many of the complaints received by Amnesty International in February were repeated during Amnesty International's meetings with detainees in June.

**For more information, please see UK: Basic rights denied after 11 September,  
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/eur45019/2002>**

Public Document

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