

Independent Asylum Commission

CONDUCTING A NATIONWIDE REVIEW OF THE UK ASYLUM SYSTEM

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE **CITIZEN** ORGANISING FOUNDATION

Call for video testimony

Thank you for your interest in the Independent Asylum Commission.

Asylum is one of the most contentious issues in contemporary politics. It is consistently at the top of the public's list of political concerns. Never far from the headlines, there is a widespread belief that the system is not "fit for purpose".

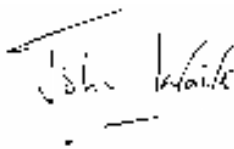
Meanwhile, there are many reports of asylum seekers facing unfair treatment, destitution and a loss of dignity. And a recent citizens' commission into conditions at Lunar House, the headquarters of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, called for an independent review of national asylum policies.

So concerned citizens across the country have asked our team of commissioners to conduct a truly independent review of the UK asylum system, from beginning to end. After eighteen months we will produce a report that will produce recommendations for reform.

Our Commission will be using three methods to inform our work: public hearings; original research; and a call for evidence.

The commissioners will be investigating our asylum system on behalf of a whole range of citizens - from those who believe that asylum seekers are not being treated with humanity, to those who believe our asylum system is too generous.

We want to receive video testimony from those who have experience of the UK asylum system to help shape our final report. If you are an asylum seeker or refugee we would encourage you to let your voice be heard.



Sir John Waite



Ifath Nawaz

Co-chairs, Independent Asylum Commission

About the Independent Asylum Commission

The Commission's approach will be informed by the principle that the asylum system should be fair, just and consistent with the UK's human rights obligations. The review will investigate the following questions

- Are people who need protection able to access the UK asylum procedure?
- Does the asylum determination and appeals procedure provide protection to those who need it in line with the UK's obligations under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention?
- Are asylum seekers treated humanely throughout the asylum process up until and including a final decision on their cases and possible departure or removal from the UK?

The Commission's report will be sent to Government, the major political parties and other interested agencies and institutions, including relevant European institutions, with a view to informing the policies of the political parties in advance of the next general election.

Can I submit video testimony to the Commission?

Anyone can submit evidence but the Commission would particularly like to hear the stories of asylum seekers and refugees who have experience of the asylum system in the UK. Numerous testimonies will be heard at the public hearings the Commission is holding across the UK (see here for more details: www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk), however, the Commission is keen to hear from others too.

The Commission aims to create the largest bank of asylum video testimony in the UK. The testimony bank will give a voice to those with experience of the asylum system and influence the Commission's report.

Submitting video testimony is easy and we would encourage you to submit your story. Evidence should be submitted to the Commission by **1st November 2007**. The earlier the submission, the more influential it is likely to be on the thinking of the Commission, so please submit your evidence as soon as you can before that date.

How should I prepare video evidence?

Your video should last **no longer than three minutes** so it is sensible to prepare what you wish to say before you record the video. In it you should focus on your personal experiences of the asylum system.

You can choose to focus on any aspect of your experience but you may wish to include information on your experiences of any of the following:

- i. access to the asylum determination process;
- ii. the operation of the asylum determination process;
- iii. the asylum appeals process;
- iv. the treatment of vulnerable groups in the asylum process;
- v. the detention of asylum seekers;
- vi. material support and accommodation for asylum seekers including those at the end of the asylum process;
- vii. the removal of refused asylum seekers;
- viii. public attitudes to asylum
- ix. miscellaneous

You may wish just to tell your story.

How to create my video testimony

If you have access to a digital video recorder or a webcam you can record the testimony yourself and then send it to evidence@cof.org.uk.

If you do not have access to this technology you can still record your testimony and submit it to the Commission. Refugee organisations across the UK are holding special video testimony days when you can receive help to prepare and record your testimony, which will then be fed into the Commission. Please email chris@cof.org.uk for more details of the video testimony days in your area.

Guidelines for submitting video testimony

Your video testimony should include a cover sheet with the following details which will be kept confidential:

- full name
- age
- country of origin
- profession or occupation in country of origin
- current immigration status
- hopes and aspirations
- contact email (not for publication)
- short list of words to describe the issues mentioned in your testimony (e.g. legal advice, detention, destitution, integration)

The Commission respects the fact that those submitting video testimony may wish to retain their anonymity. If you would like to remain anonymous please write 'KEEP ANONYMOUS' on the top of your cover sheet. If you wish to a false name to refer to yourself in the video testimony then please include details of your false name on the cover sheet.

Evidence becomes the property of the Commission, and may be broadcast or circulated by the Commission at any stage.

Technical Specification for Video Submissions

Duration: maximum length 3 minutes

Digital Video Submissions

File formats: Preferred .flv .avi

Acceptable .mov .wmv

Delivery format: Preferred data dvd*

Acceptable cd

N.B. Please do not provide your submissions in a dvd file format as they will not be accepted.

More than one file (video interview) can be submitted on a data dvd or cd. Where a disc has more than one submission please include a text file on the disc (word format or similar) listing each file name and identifying the person who is submitting the video evidence together with a contact phone number.

Analogue Video Submissions

Video can be submitted on VHS tape but this is not ideal and all such material will be managed after digital material has been processed.

What happens to video testimony I submit?

All submitted testimonies will be viewed and acknowledged by the Independent Asylum Commission staff. Submissions will then be made available for the consideration of Commissioners and will help shape the Commission's final report. In some cases the Commission may wish to invite contributors as witnesses for Commission hearings. Some of the evidence will be published in the final report.

All suitable submissions will be archived on the Independent Asylum Commission archive on the Human Rights TV website.

Further information

If you have further queries please contact Jonathan Cox or Chris Hobson at the Independent Asylum Commission, 112 Cavell Street, London E1 2JA; tel. 020 7375 1658, e-mail chris@cof.org.uk.

www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk