

They're all out! Wow!

In 2008 there were seven Zimbabweans in Haslar Removal Centre though they could not, in fact, be removed. Since a court case some years ago there has been a stay on removals to Zimbabwe. The general rule is that if a man cannot be removed he should not be detained. Clearly something was amiss.

On 21st April there was a video conference with Lin Homer, head of the UK Border Agency. HVG asked what purpose was served by the long term detention of people from places like Zimbabwe? Ms Homer gave a bland answer about the difficulty of removing people.

In June the seven men wrote a joint letter to the Prime Minister, their MPs and the press: "It is extremely distressful to us to find ourselves in a situation where we face what appears to be indefinite detention". The Guardian reported this on 24th June.

The Haslar Coordinator asked the Home Office Director of Detention Services about this. He replied that the Zimbabweans in Haslar were all ex-prisoners considered "a danger to the UK". Never-the-less two weeks later four had been released from Haslar with tags.

Haslar Trustee and BID Coordinator Frances Pilling then went to work. Using notes supplied by Michael Woolley and with the assistance of Laura del Nevo she had a meeting within Haslar with the Zimbabweans. Bail applications were made, sureties found (the Canon Theologian of Westminster Abbey, a Haslar Visitor Trustee, the Haslar Visitor Coordinator).

On 13th August we went to court. The place was packed with observers from different charities and a reporter from the Independent newspaper. One by one the cases were considered and one by one bail was granted! As we go to press all the men are free in the UK.

DEAR VISITORS AND FRIENDS,

They're all out! Wow!

You will remember that seven Zimbabweans have been held in Haslar long after their criminal sentences ended and with no prospect of being deported. A few weeks ago we started a campaign to help them get released. Despite some tough talking the Home Office quietly freed four. Today we went to court - with terrific help and support by BID and from you - and won three separate bail applications for the three who remained in Haslar. The Independent newspaper had a reporter and photographer present so we're hoping there will be a full report in it tomorrow (Thursday 14th). I've been up since five this morning with this so forgive me if I close now.

There are no Zimbabweans in Haslar tonight!

MICHAEL

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Above: George, one of the men bailed.

Left: A jubilant e-mail which speaks for itself.