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Dear Ms Amiss

I am writing to express my concern about the inaccurate reporting by the Black Women's Rape Action Project of the events at Yarl's Wood on 8 February 2010, which have been reported on your website and in the media.

I respect the fact that you may not agree with the way UK Border Agency enforces immigration control but Parliament has passed laws to govern our borders and the Agency has a legal duty to enforce them. We do not wish to use detention to do so, but where persons with no basis of stay, and where the courts have supported our decisions, if they refuse to leave the UK or they pose a risk to community because of the serious offences they have committed and the Courts have deemed their presence to be non-conducive to the public good, we have to use detention to ensure they depart.

Even then, it is not in our interests to detain persons for long periods of time, and the fact that a minority of individuals spend longer periods in detention is invariably down to them either making late appeals against a decision to remove them or because they have failed to comply with the process of securing a travel document for their return. Whilst I respect the right of persons to appeal legitimately against immigration decisions, I equally believe that lawyers and NGOs have a duty to explain carefully the realities of their position and not to give them false hope, which leads to protracted detention. Regrettably, this is not what we see and it is small wonder that residents become frustrated with their predicament.

Even if you do not accept this position, I am extremely disappointed by the fact that BWRAP did not feel that it could rely on facts relating to the incident that occurred at Yarl's Wood on Monday 8 February to further its causes, but relied on sensationalist statements which were either exaggerated, or in many cases totally fabricated, in order to make a point.

The facts are that a small number of residents at Yarl's Wood participated in a passive protest, primarily refusing meals available in the centre's dining facility. Some of those involved congregated in a corridor and, later on, a smaller number of the same group gathered in one of the centre's courtyards. The centre's management team asked the group to return to the centre individually rather than en-masse. This was necessary to ensure the situation did not escalate, and to protect the safety of those who did not wish to be involved. No-one was forced to stay outside, and there was no use of any restraint by officers to resolve the matter. To be clear, there were no beatings as you have falsely alleged.

It is true that four residents were separated from the others. This was not in any way as a punishment as you have alluded to. Rather, we respect the right of residents to undertake protest if they so wish, but it must remain peaceful and must not involve others being bullied into joining in.

In the case of the four ladies concerned their behaviour was unacceptable towards other residents and the safety and security of the Centre. It is for this reason that they were taken to reception, not locked away or placed into a "punishment wing". Furthermore, they were offered food and water throughout this time, but it was they who refused to accept the refreshments, not officers refusing to give it to them.

I think it is worth pointing out that the entire Centre is covered by CCTV, which recorded the events in their totality. The incident was also witnessed by three members of the Independent Monitoring Board, whose appointment by the Home Secretary is to ensure that residents in the Centre are treated with dignity and respect. We have had discussions with the Board about the events, and they have raised no concerns with us whatsoever. It is also telling that not one resident has made a complaint against a member of staff or about their treatment. Of course, if a resident wishes to make a complaint, it will be investigated in accordance with our published complaints procedures.

My concern is to ensure the safety and well-being of those individuals whilst they are detained. Time spent responding to inaccurate and fabricated reports is an unnecessary diversion and such articles do little for the credibility of those organisations who choose to write them, including your own. I also consider such sensationalist reporting to be irresponsible as it causes unnecessary distress to other residents, their families and friends and members of the community, who quite understandably are concerned for the well being of all those in Yarl's Wood. I trust therefore that you will review the content and accuracy of your reports you make in the future, before they are put in the public domain.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Wood', with a horizontal line underneath.

David Wood
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR CDG