

"We will end the detention of children for immigration purposes," says the new coalition government (Asylum children will be kept out of 'distressing' detention centres, 14 May). But what about their mothers?

Paediatricians and psychologists have testified to the mental and physical harm caused to children by detention. But separating them from their mother or primary carer is even worse; it may cause "insecurity, depression and anxiety" which lasts throughout life.

The recent six-week hunger strike by women in Yarl's Wood removal centre brought to public attention that many women detained inside are mothers whose children were taken by social services or other family members. Some face deportation and permanent separation, often after years of raising a family in the UK.

One mother tries to shield her seven-year-old daughter from the painful truth by telling her that she's "working away from home". She and many others speak constantly of their anguish at being unable to care for their children, many of whom may already be traumatised by violence in their home country, and experience depression, bed-wetting and fear.

An estimated 1.5 million youngsters suffer abuse each year in the United Kingdom, many of them while in care. This horrifying reality must not be added to by separating yet more children from the mothers who love them and whom they love. Ending the detention of children has to mean ending the detention of families.

Maria Ziwa, All African Women's Group
Cristel Amiss, Black Women's Rape Action Project
Oliver James, Clinical child psychologist
Niki Adams, Legal Action for Women
Frances Swaine, Leigh Day and Co
Professor Sheila Kitzinger
John McDonnell, MP
Dr Jonathan Fluxman
Kristina Brandemo, Women Against Rape
Clare Sambrook, End Child Detention Now
Rev Paul Nicolson, Zacchaeus 2000 Trust

Additional; signatures from Public Meeting: *Women's Hunger Strike – Louder than Words*, Tuesday 29 June, House of Commons

Paul Jeffcoate, Fisher Meredith Solicitors
Anna T, Global Women's Strike
Solveig Francis, International Women Count Network
Jim Curran, Irish Civil Rights Association
Emma Jones, Leigh Day & Co. Solicitors
Dr Frank Arnold, Medical Justice
Jeremy Corbyn, MP
Lily Barson, No Borders, London
Estelle Hart, NUS & two others
Elly Badcock, NUS Women's Committee (Bisexual Rep.)
Natalie Hepperstall, NUS Women's Committee (Women with Caring Responsibilities Rep.)
Cherie Lyster, NUS Women's Committee & two others
Sophia James, NUS National Equalities Council
Portia Roelofs, Oxford University Student Union Women's Campaign
Michael Kalmanovitz, Payday Men's Network
Khalid Omar, S.O.A.S

Kim Sparrow, Single Mother's Self Defence
Henry Wood, Sutovic & Hartigan solicitors
Deesha Chandra, The Testimony project
Dr Felicity de Zulueta, Traumatic Stress Service Clinic
Didi Rossi, Wages Due Lesbians
Claire Glasman. Winvisible, women with visible & invisible disabilities
Vinjiswa Ngaobongwana, Women Radio Group
and 45 individuals