

END THE IMMIGRATION DETENTION OF CHILDREN AND NO TO DNA DATABASE DISCRIMINATION CAMPAIGNS

In accordance with our strategic aim to promote equality and diversity by undertaking anti-racial discrimination campaigns, APA launched two campaigns this year. The first was **No to DNA Database Discrimination**, which we started in September 2009.

Following the case of **Damian Green MP**, the then shadow Immigration Minister, who had his DNA profile removed from the national database after a few weeks in August 2009, our organisation launched the **No to DNA Database Discrimination (No 2 DNAD) campaign** to demand the removal of all innocent people from the national database. One in four black people are on the DNA database in the UK, as opposed to one in twenty white people.

We wrote to several policy and decision-makers, to raise awareness of our concerns, and enlist their support for the No 2 DNAD campaign. We were delighted to receive the backing of **Lord Jones of Cheltenham**, who highlighted our concerns at the House of Lords in October 2009. Details of his questions are available online on the below link:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200809/minutes/091019/ldordpap.htm>

The second campaign launched by APA was **End the Immigration of Children in the UK**. We began this campaign in October 2009 following the case of **Adeoti Ogunsola**. Adeoti, a 10-year-old Nigerian girl placed in immigration detention for a second time against advice of medical experts, was found trying to hang herself at Tinsley House immigration removal centre near Gatwick on Sunday 18th October 2009.

APA collaborated with like-minded organisations including **Migrants Rights Network** and **AFRUCA** (Africans Unite Against Child Abuse) to condemn the mistreatment of Adeoti, and organise a meeting at the Houses of Parliament to enable members of African communities to express their support for Adeoti, as well as demand the end of the immigration detention of children.

We were able to secure the support of **Keith Vaz MP**, Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee, who agreed to host us at the House of Commons in January 2010. Unfortunately, following the case of Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the “Christmas Day Bomber” in the US, and the subsequent international anti-terror meetings, Keith Vaz’s schedule became too busy. Furthermore, by November 2009, Adeoti and her mother had already been granted leave to remain in the UK, albeit temporarily.

After carrying out further research on this issue, we discovered that the overwhelming majority of children detained for immigration purposes in the UK were of African origin. APA decided to continue the campaign to end the immigration detention of all children. To maximize our chances of success, we joined the **OutCry! campaign**, led by **the Children’s Society and Bail for Immigration Detainees**, in February 2010. We were thrilled at the agreed policy of the new coalition Government, published on 12th May 2010, which included commitments to “**end the detention of children for immigration purposes**” and adopt “**the protections of the Scottish model for the DNA database**”. The adoption of the Scottish model for the DNA database means that except in very specific, special cases, all innocent people will have their profile removed from the database.

We wrote to **Rehman Chishti, new MP for Gillingham and Rainham**, in May 2010, to thank and congratulate the new Government for taking these overdue steps towards a more humane treatment of vulnerable children, and the preservation of innocent people’s rights and privacy. We did also express our desire to know exactly how the planned changes would be implemented, and how long it would take for them to become effective.

Rehman Chishti forwarded our letter to the **Home Secretary, Theresa May**. **Damian Green MP**, the Minister for Immigration, replied on behalf of Theresa May in June. He kindly gave details of the Review underway to find alternatives to the detention of children, and explained that the Home Office was seeking Parliamentary time to make changes to legislation to enable the move to the Scottish model of DNA retention.