**RAPAR**

***The Manchester-based Human Rights organisation working with displaced people***

PRESS RELEASE

10th January 2012

**UKBA SNATCH LYDIA AND BERNARD FOR 4TH TIME**

* **Decision taken on 23 December to refuse their protection claim kept from couple and their lawyer until today**
* **Lydia, who was broadcast live on Women’s Hour in September, now locked up and without critical medication prescribed following emergency eye treatment**
* **Bernard grabbed off Bury street today by 11 police officers**
* **Neither family nor lawyer given reasons for refusal before detention**

At 09.30 this morning, the writer and playwright Lydia Besong reported to the UKBA at Dallas Court in Salford, in line with previously agreed arrangements. She was immediately detained - for the fourth time. 15 minutes later and 12 miles away in Bury, 11 police officers grabbed her husband Bernard off the street just after he had left the family home in Kestrel Drive. Neither Bernard nor Lydia have been accused or convicted of any crime whatsoever, but now, Bernard is now in Morton Hall prison in Lincoln and Lydia is in Yarl’s Wood detention centre in London.

Once they were in custody, a letter from the Home Office dated 23rd December 2010 was handed to each of them separately. However, before this morning, neither Bernard nor Lydia nor their legal representatives, Latitude Law of Manchester, had been told that Bernard’s protection claim, made on 19th October 2010, had been refused and that they have been refused the right to appeal from within the UK. Today they were also, separately, handed removal directions which show that the Home Office intends to force them to leave the UK on an Air France flight to Cameroon that is taking off at 08.20 on 21st January.

Their lawyer, Gary McIndoe, said today: “We have been waiting for a decision on Bernard’s protection claim since 19th October last year. Further materials have been sent to the Home Office, including the report of an expert witness, and so I am surprised that the decision to detain has been made before their legal representatives have been informed in any way.”

Speaking from Yarl’s Wood this afternoon, Lydia said: “The way they are treating us is so mean and so wrong. We comply with all their procedures and then, when they want to, they ignore those very same procedures again and again. I do not know where Bernard has been taken and, also, I am also very worried about my right eye. Recently I had to have an emergency eye operation and there are four different prescribed medicines that I must use at this critical time. I asked the UKBA officers at Dallas Court to make sure I had my right medicines but here I am in Yarls Wood without anything to help my eye at this critical time.”

Lydia and Bernard Must Stay campaign team member from Bury, Angela, explained further: “Lydia has been told that she must continue to take her medication otherwise the eye pressure will rise again.”

When RAPAR was able to speak with Bernard late this afternoon he explained that, from what he can see in the refusal letter “the UKBA caseowner has not told the truth. When I was granted this right to make a protection claim the judges gave the Home Office 3 months to respond. I think they have come up with this because they knew their three months was coming up and they were running out of time.”

RAPAR Matron Dr Rhetta Moran is asking: “Why do the Home Office, through the UKBA, choose to secure and apply all the resources necessary to detain Lydia AND coordinate with Greater Manchester Police so that, almost simultaneously, 11 police officers seize Bernard off the street, AND book seats on an Air France plane, rather than responding in a timely, mature and respectful way that adheres to due legal process: namely that a decision taken on 23rd December 2011 is communicated to the people involved appropriately so that they can exercise their fundamental rights?”

**ENDS**

More details of the campaign can be found at: <http://www.rapar.org.uk/lydia-and-bernard-must-stay.html> AND AT http://lydiaandbernard.wordpress.com/

For further information contact:

Dr Rhetta Moran, RAPAR, on 07776264646

Demand Lydia and Bernard’s immediate release. Quoting case reference: HOB1236372/3:

* Email the Home Secretary Theresa May at mayt@parliament.uk and Privateoffice.external@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk
* Phone and/or fax Yarl’s Wood on Tel: 01234 821 000 Fax (Yarl’s Wood centre):  01234 821 096; Fax (UKBA):  01234 271 349
* Phone and/or fax Morton Hall Prison on Telephone: 01522 666700 Fax: 01522 666750

Please cc your correspondence to RAPAR via admin@rapar.org.uk.