

IT'S TIME TO BRING THEM HOME

Right now, approximately 25 British families are unlawfully detained in northeast Syria. The majority of the British detainees are children and of these, most are under 10 years old.

These British families should not be unlawfully detained in conditions that have been found to amount to cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment and even torture, but instead should be brought back to the UK. These British families have been abandoned by their governments and live in squalid conditions where they are exposed daily to life-threatening violence, disease and other deprivations. Young British boys and girls are growing up in this dangerous environment, with very limited access to education, sufficient food, clean water and shelter and medical care simply because the government-refuse to bring these families back to their home country.

Many British women residing in the camps have been sexually abused and exploited, trafficked to Syria as children or coerced into travelling there. Boys as young as eleven are being forcibly separated from their families and moved to other facilities, including male prisons, where they endure horrific conditions, are at heightened risk of abuse and have little to no contact with the outside world.

Like all children held in the region, British children have lived through conflict, bombardment, and acute deprivation. They need specialised help to recover from their experiences and return to normality, which is impossible in overcrowded displacement camps with little access to basic services in a volatile war zone.

Britain's key allies have recognised that the best response from a security perspective is to repatriate. The US has brought almost all of its citizens home. Since 2019, at least 38 countries have repatriated or allowed home -some or many of their nationals including, in the last year alone, France, Spain, Australia, Canada, Germany, Belgium and, the Netherlands.-The US has brought almost all of its citizens home, including men.

These British children should be reintegrated and given the opportunity to rebuild their lives. Research has shown that notwithstanding the ordeals they've experienced, many of the children are successfully reintegrating and are back in school. Where there is a case to answer for the adults, British courts are more than capable of delivering justice. The authorities in northeast Syria have clearly stated that they lack the resources to manage the camps effectively and have called on countries to take responsibility for their citizens. The authorities have written to MPs and Peers, making clear that they will facilitate repatriations - all the UK Government has to do is ask. The successful repatriation of a British woman and her child last year, and previous repatriations of British children, have demonstrated that it is possible.

The UK government is renegeing on its human rights obligations, abdicating responsibility for its citizens and risking damage to its global reputation. Even as the UK government was willing to spend at least \$20 million to build a new prison in northeast Syria where boys, among other foreigners, have been unlawfully detained without charge, it remains unwilling to put resources into bringing home more of its nationals for rehabilitation, reintegration, and investigations and prosecutions of adults as appropriate. Governments that place direct or indirect obstacles to their nationals' returns risk being complicit in these unlawful detentions.

Britain should take responsibility for its citizens, not seek to cast them out into a legal black hole in dire conditions. Repatriating poses less risk than abandoning them in northeast Syria, where hardliners could break out and regroup and children would fall prey to ISIS overtures, as a host of counter-terrorism experts including a former director of MI6 have stated. It is also morally the right thing to do. It is shameful that narrow political considerations have triumphed over common sense and respect for the rule of law for so long, but there is still time for the Government to follow the example of many of its allies and rethink this unconscionable policy.

It is long past time to bring these British families home.

War Child

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Action on Armed Violence

Steve Harvey, International Law Enforcement and Counter-Trafficking Expert

Paul Jordan, International Expert on National Security and Counter-Terrorism

Richard Barrett, CBG OBE, Former head of the United Nations Al Qaeda/Daesh Monitoring Team

Rt Hon Baroness Warsi PC

Dr Nisha Kapoor, Lecturer

Gillian Anderson, War Child Global Ambassador

Vanessa Kirby, War Child Global Ambassador

Jack Savoretti, War Child Global Ambassador

Stephen Fry, Actor, Writer, Presenter

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Riz Ahmed, Actor and Musician

Shaun Evans, Actor

Stanley Tucci, Actor

Jonathan Pryce, Actor

Tessa Gregory, Partner, Leigh Day

Dr Emma Butcher – Academic and Senior Project Officer at the Royal United Service Institute.

Nimco Ali OBE, CEO of the Five Foundation

