



2010 PRESS RELEASE

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DATE 2nd March 2010

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YARL'S WOOD - MP SEEKS MINISTERS AID IN 'CLEARING THE AIR'

North East Bedfordshire MP Alistair Burt has called on Government Immigration Minister Meg Hillier to announce an Inquiry by HM Prisons Inspector Ann Owers to resolve present unrest at Yarl's Wood. A recent protest by some 70 detainees is the subject of claim and counterclaim as to what happened, and a refusal of food is still continuing by 27 women at the centre. Mr Burt believes the present situation is undermining confidence in the asylum process, when the public need re-assurance.

Alistair Burt said 'Unrest at Yarl's Wood is not new, and much stems from the length of time cases take to be dealt with. A backlog of 450,000 cases ` was found in 2006, which the Government is only part way through resolving, a symptom of a system which satisfies neither the public, who want safe and secure borders, nor those families caught up in the asylum process, who want a just and quick answer to their claims.

Following the recent protest, there has been much in the national press suggesting a difference of opinion in how the protest was handled. It is important to resolve this independently as it seems to me unfair on either staff or detainees if false allegations are made, or genuine grievances ignored.

After asking for action in a recent debate in the House of Commons, I have now written again to the Minister asking for her decision on a short, sharp inquiry.

I do not support refusal of food as a protest, which could cause harm to an individual, and cannot influence policy or a case decision. But the situation should not be allowed to drag on, and I think the intervention of HM Inspector on this occasion would be of benefit to Yarl's Wood, detainees, Serco and all of us.'

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