

Monday, 11 May 2020

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP  
Home Secretary  
Home Office  
2 Marsham Street  
London SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary,

### **Death of Syrian Refugee Adnan Olbeh in Glasgow**

I am writing on behalf of Positive Action in Housing, a refugee and migrant homelessness and human rights charity based in Glasgow. Each year, we provide crisis and casework assistance to around 2,500 families and individuals facing poverty or homelessness.

As you may be aware, Adnan Olbeh, a 30-year-old Syrian asylum-seeking gentleman with mental health problems recently died in unexplained circumstances in a Glasgow hotel, having been placed there by the Mears Group. In this instance, we are helping Adnan's family as they wish to repatriate his body so that his mother and siblings can properly grieve and bury him after the Post-mortem that will take place on May 14<sup>th</sup>.

My purpose in writing to you is to raise concerns about the circumstances that surrounded Adnan's death and the current treatment of Glasgow's asylum seekers during the Global pandemic.

Since March 2020, the country has been in the midst of a global pandemic and Lockdown. Millions of us went into self-isolation and non-essential travel was forbidden. Last month, the Mears Group and/or its subcontractors moved around 400 vulnerable men, women and children from self-contained Glasgow flats into empty rundown hotels.

It is beyond comprehension that Mears should act with complete disregard for public health by moving hundreds of vulnerable people - many of whom are survivors of trauma or torture, from the stability of their self-contained flats into empty and presumably dirt cheap hotels (where it's impossible to socially distance or self-isolate) and removing their financial support.

A month later, on Thursday May 7, Mears attended a meeting of the Home Affairs Committee and promised to work very closely with Glasgow city council and NGOs on transitioning out of the pandemic. Nothing of the sort happened and no mention was made of their breach of the Lockdown.

Reports from asylum seekers describe how they were given only minutes to pack before being hurried into vans, 4 or 5 at a time, with no social distancing in place. Some asylum seekers said they were told they were being moved into long term accommodation – not empty hotels vacated because of the Lockdown.

The asylum seekers we have spoken to - on condition of anonymity - are fearful of staying in the hotels because cleanliness and social distancing are impossible. There are large numbers of people needing to use the lift and dining areas several times a day. Bedding and towels are changed only once a week. People cannot open windows to their rooms, they want to clean their own space, cook their own food and have some control over their environment.

Crucially, levels of depression are increasing, and people are being left completely isolated. Many asylum seekers are survivors of trauma and torture and suffering mental health problems because of the length of time they have been in the asylum system. The hotel asylum seekers are isolated in their rooms, unable to cook or wash laundry. Many are too terrified to come out even for exercise because of the virus.

Since the move to the hotels, the asylum seekers have had their meagre card allowance cut from **£35.50 per week to £0**. Because they have no money, it is impossible to top up mobile phones to keep in touch with lawyers, GPs, friends and family. People cannot buy fresh fruit, hand sanitiser, toiletries or travel to Food banks during Ramadan. Women have complained they have no money to buy sanitary protection.

We also understand that around 16 or 17 private accommodation providers in Glasgow were told by relocation agents subcontracted to Mears Group that their self-contained accommodation was no longer needed, and that people were going to be moved into hotels, despite a contract being in place with Mears Group's relocation agents, Business Travel Direct and Situ, who were sourcing accommodation in Glasgow. Most of the Glasgow accommodation providers who went into contract with Mears now fear they will go bankrupt because they had booked their self-contained accommodation for several months. One of the accommodation providers said:

*"We were providing good accommodation for people to self-isolate, but Mears went for the cheapest deal by booking up empty hotels, paying cut price rates and removing the asylum seekers weekly allowance. Mears has taken advantage of the Pandemic to make a giant profit for itself from the Home Office contract at the cost of these vulnerable people's lives".*

I am now writing to you as Home Secretary to:

- Urge you to restore the weekly allowance of £35.50 to Glasgow's "hotel asylum seekers" and to move people back into self-contained accommodation before a further tragedy occurs. Our greatest fear is that there are many people like Adnan currently residing in the hotels without money or proper support. There are many other "Adnans" living in these hotels. This would go some way to ease the hardship they are currently suffering.
- Tell us why Mears and the Home Office ignored the Lockdown restrictions imposed by the UK Government since April by transporting hundreds of vulnerable people 4 or 5 to a van out of the safety of self-contained flats into empty Glasgow hotels (where social distancing is impossible and there is increased risk of catching the Coronavirus in crowded dining rooms and lifts).

Finally, we urge you to investigate the events surrounding Adnan's death and the allegations that Mears Group and/or its subsidiaries, flouted the Lockdown Restrictions in Glasgow, thereby putting vulnerable people and the public at greater risk.

I await your reply,

Yours sincerely,



**Robina Qureshi**  
Director