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UK: Windrush scandal survivors deliver petition to No 10

Friday 26 June 2020, by [GENTLEMAN Amelia](#) (Date first published: 19 June 2020).

Call to speed up compensation for people wrongly detained and deported by government.

Survivors of the [Windrush scandal](#) have delivered a petition to Downing Street signed by 130,000 people calling on the government to speed up compensation payments and implement all the recommendations in the Windrush Lessons Learned review.

Paulette Wilson and Anthony Bryan – who were wrongly held in immigration detention centres and threatened with deportation to Jamaica, a country they both left as children in the 1960s and had not visited in more than 50 years – handed the petition to police officers at the gates of Downing Street on Friday.

They both expressed their anger that so few people affected had received compensation in the two years since the government first apologised for wrongly classifying thousands of legal residents as being in the country illegally.

They were joined by [Michael Braithwaite](#), a special needs teaching assistant, who was sacked from the primary school he had worked at for 15 years; Glenda Caesar, who was sacked from her job as a GP administrator after more than 20 years working for the NHS; and Elwaldo Romeo, who was told by the Home Office he was facing detention and should return to Antigua, a country he left 59 years earlier as a four-year-old boy.

Bryan received an interim compensation payment last week, a few days after the broadcast of the BBC film [Sitting in Limbo](#), which dramatised the events which led to him being held for five weeks in immigration detention. “I think the film made them [speed it up](#),” he said. “I know they are trying to make amends, but it is taking so long.”

[Caesar](#) rejected an offer of £22,000 last year, describing it as “crumbs for peasants”. She argues that as a result of the Home Office’s refusal to believe that she was in the UK legally, she was out of work for 10 years, unable to claim benefits, and had to rely on her daughter’s disability benefits to survive.

The compensation scheme has promised to review the payment, but she is dismayed by the slow progress. She remains £10,000 in arrears on her rent as a direct consequence of being forced out of work for a decade by the government’s mistake, and is facing action over unpaid council taxes. “Nobody questioned whether I was British when I paid taxes and national insurance for decades,” she said. “I feel so angry at the way we’ve been treated.”

Wilson, who used to work in the canteen at the House of Commons, said she felt sad to be back in Westminster campaigning on this issue; she had hoped two years ago that there would be a swifter resolution of everyone’s difficulties. “The word ‘sorry’ can roll off anyone’s tongue easily, but we

don't want more apologies," she said.

Wilson has had an interim compensation payment but is gathering further evidence to apply under the scheme. Romeo is waiting to hear back from the compensation scheme and Braithwaite is in the process of applying.

The [Windrush Lessons Learned](#) review, written by Wendy Williams, set out 30 recommendations, including a full review of the hostile environment policy that formed the backdrop to the scandal, and called on ministers and Home Office staff to be educated in Britain's colonial past. The home secretary, Priti Patel, promised to consider the recommendations in March but has since made no further comment.

Patrick Vernon, the Windrush campaigner who organised the [petition](#), which remains open, said apologies had already been offered by three home secretaries, and it was time for action.

"The Home Office can no longer ignore the true scale of the scandal and its impact on people - from being made homeless or unemployed to being denied access to the NHS or unfairly deported," he said. "The Home Office must urgently stop any racial discrimination and learn from the lessons published, so this never happens again."

A Home Office spokesperson said: "The home secretary has been clear that the mistreatment of the Windrush generation by successive governments was completely unacceptable and she will right those wrongs." However, they added, Williams had recommended that the Home Office consider the review carefully before responding, "and we are committed to honouring that request". Patel had said she would update parliament before the summer recess.

Officials in charge of organising the compensation scheme stressed that claimants should not feel discouraged by the difficulties experienced by others and should persist with making claims. A spokesperson said assistance in completing the claim form was available via the free Windrush helpline on 0800 678 1925.

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