



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Rabbis and Jewish charity mark Pesach by visiting asylum-seekers in detention**

Tzelem, the cross-communal rabbinic call for social justice, and René Cassin, the Jewish human rights charity, are marking the festival of Pesach by visiting asylum-seekers detained in Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre. The visit is being co-ordinated by the charity Detention Action.

The UK is currently the only country in Europe where asylum-seekers can be detained indefinitely. Some are held for years without knowing when they might ultimately be released.

The UK's treatment of asylum-seekers was criticised as 'expensive, ineffective and unjust' by a Parliamentary Inquiry last month. The inquiry's report urged the Government to end the practice of indefinite detention by introducing a maximum time limit of 28 days.

**Rabbi Danny Rich** of Tzelem and René Cassin's Advisory Council said:

*'Locking up people without limit on the time -many of whom are vulnerable and will eventually be granted a temporary or a permanent stay here- is particularly poignant at Pesach, when we Jews commemorate freedom from oppression in Egypt. We hope our visit to Harmondsworth will highlight the plight of these often isolated people who have endured conditions in their own homelands akin to slavery – and give them some assurance that they are not entirely alone.'*

**Sam Grant**, René Cassin's Campaigns Director, said:

*'People escaping violence and persecution arrive in the UK seeking a safe haven. Instead, all too many find themselves in hell – effectively imprisoned on the say-so of an immigration official. Detainees have described how they count the days upwards from detention, not downwards to release.'*

*In June the UK will celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Magna Carta – its famous clause 'to no one will we deny or delay right or justice' will ring very hollow to those we are visiting in Harmondsworth.'*

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## Notes for editors

1. Tzelem is 'the Rabbinic call for Social and Economic Justice in the UK' – more information at <http://www.tzelem.uk/>
2. The charity René Cassin is 'the Jewish voice for human rights'. It is named after the French-Jewish co-drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. More information at <http://www.renecassin.org/>
3. Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre is the largest detention centre in Europe, with a capacity of 615. It holds only men and the security in several of the wings is comparable to a Category B (high security) prison. Harmondsworth is run by private sector company Mitie Group PLC, under contract from the UK Home Office.
4. Magna Carta was sealed on 15 June 1215 at Runnymede – less than 5 miles as the crow flies from Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre
5. For more information contact Sam Grant via [sam.grant@renecassin.org](mailto:sam.grant@renecassin.org) or 07514 239264 or Robyn Ashworth Steen on 07743 897814 or [Tzelem.uk@gmail.com](mailto:Tzelem.uk@gmail.com)