

## 21 year old child of detainee ZZ

*Read out to audience at the "Behind Closed Doors: Ten Years of Secret Evidence and Hidden Suffering" public meeting held by Campaign Against Secret Evidence and the Cordoba Foundation at the London Muslim Centre, Whitechapel on 19 December 2011.*

When I was fifteen (August 2005) my father made a trip abroad, and while he was away we received a letter through the post. The letter was from the Home Office and it informed us that an exclusion order was being made against him on the grounds of national security. No explanation was given and we were not given the right to appeal against the decision.

I'm not sure how many months later it was that we received a visit from Scotland Yard. A group of men and women came in to our home and asked us to leave it while it was searched. They set up camp in the hallway of the flats, in front of our neighbours. We were asked to leave our flat and garage while it was searched. We were not allowed to change into our school clothes without one of them present, and our bags were searched before we left. We were not told why they were there or what they were looking for, and we were not given a list of the items they took. My mother's health began to suffer as a result of not knowing. My father, not knowing why this was happening, was suffering in another country too.

The same year my seventy-three year old grandmother, my mother's mother, experienced a stroke that left her temporarily paralysed down one side, unable to walk without assistance and unable to speak as clearly as she once had. My mother began to care for her, at the same time as she was caring for her own eight children. My mother, my father and my grandmother's health, the three pillars of our large family, had deteriorated in different ways and it felt as if we were being dissolved as a people. The concept of a home didn't exist anymore. We lived in, what had been our family home without my father, a 'home' which had now been searched through by a group of strangers' hands, its contents photographed and documented. My

father lived in a cold apartment abroad on his own. My grandmother, who had been as close as a parent, lived between hospitals and her living room which was used to accommodate her illness.

My grandmother passed away and never got to see my father again before she went; my father was struck dumb by her death and my mother carried on caring for us. I was sixteen now and my father was given a right of appeal to the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal. The Home Office decided to rely on evidence that should not be made public in the interests of national security; secret evidence would be used against him. I left secondary school with my GCSEs and entered college.

I was seventeen when his appeal was heard by SIAC. My father was not allowed to be present, and only participated in the form of one statement and some questions asked by our special advocate. Although my whole family and some of my extended family were present we were not allowed to sit in on the majority of the hearing and we were barred from the 'closed evidence'. The 'open judgment' revealed very little of the case against my father and whatever had taken place behind closed sound-proof doors was deemed justifiable. My father, not knowing how or why, was deemed a risk to public security and the Home Office were supported in their decision to refuse him entry to the UK.

I graduated from college with my A-levels, took a year's work experience, and then began university. Within this time we aged. My great-uncle, the last Irishman of my grandmother's generation in our family, became ill and passed away. Our wider family had been scattered by my grandmother's death and my mother cared for him during his illness. My great uncle and father, who had been fond of each other, never got the chance to see each other again. We could only visit my father during school holidays; logistically, this was complicated by the fact that we all had slightly different holidays depending on the school we went to and what stage of education we were at. New friends asked us if our parents were separated, or divorced; they

asked whether or not we lived with our father. I found it difficult to explain how our family was very much together in spirit, it just so happened that my father had been deemed a security risk and the reason why was being hidden from us. They asked us why we didn't go and live abroad with him, and I tell them it is a matter of will and principle; his home is here with us, to move would mean we would be complicit in our own exile.

We put in an application to appeal against SIAC's decision which was granted. Our case is now going to the European Court of Justice but that will take a few more years. Who knows what the outcome will be. I am now twenty-one years old, and I am going to complete my university degree in a few months' time; although I have aged by six years since we last lived together and have progressed accordingly, our family has remained frozen in the moment in which we received the letter from the Home Office. Everything remains to be seen, I do not know what will happen next year or the year after; I do not know when I will live with my father again. I hope this statement does not appear to be a call for pity, because that is not what we want, we would much prefer a fair legal system for all.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank our solicitor and legal representative for all their hard work and patience, to thank the new and special friends we have met as a result of this experience and to commend the work of CASE and its supporters for their wonderful work.