

19 EU citizens detained in the Immigration Center of Bagong Diwa in Bicutan/Manila

HRWF (05.07.2016) - Nineteen EU citizens are stuck in a Catch 22 situation or administrative vacuum at the Immigration Detention Center of Bagong Diwa in Bicutan.

That is what a joint fact-finding mission of *HRWF Int'l* (Brussels) and *FOREF* (Vienna) discovered when visiting the Center on 8 June 2016 to meet Czech citizens **Jaroslav Dobes and Barbora Plaskova**, who have been detained there for more than one year.

In early June 2016, representatives of both European NGOs were in Manila to try to solve the case of the two Czech citizens. They met with Philippines' Commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration, attorney **Ronaldo Geron**, who was very cooperative and welcomed their initiative. He hoped that HRWF Int'l and FOREF could contribute to a solution of the situation of the two Czech detainees and the other EU citizens. He gave his authorization for a visit of the Immigration Detention Center of Bagong Diwa in Bicutan (Manila).

The new warden, **Erwin S. Otanez**, who was appointed in autumn 2015, allowed the mission to visit all the premises, take pictures and talk freely with the detainees without any restrictions or outside the presence of any penitentiary staff. A list of names of prisoners with European citizenship, along with some administrative details about their situation (age or date of birth, date of arrest and legal basis) were speedily provided on request, as well as statistics about the countries of origin of non-EU citizens.

As of 8 June 2016, the total number of detainees was 148. Among them, eight women: 1 Chinese, 1 Czech, 1 South Korean, 4 Taiwanese and 1 American.

Nineteen were from EU countries. Their names hereafter are published with their consent. The other prisoners are identified by their initials.

Detained EU citizens

- **Austria** (1): **Wolfgang Pfuner** (67)
- **Bulgaria** (5): A.N.D., H.S.H., D.H., M.E.S., K.L.G.
- **Czechia** (2): **Jaroslav Dobes (45) and Barbora Plaskova (42)**
- **France** (1): J.P.F.
- **Germany** (2): **Franz Ferdinand Szobotka (60)** and J.L.
- **Great Britain** (4): B.J.H-L., **Michael Freeman (47)**, **Samwells John Edwin alias Gary Lee Johnssons (43)**, **Sattar Razak (61)**
- **Ireland** (1): **May Anthony Francis (40)**
- **Italy** (1): M.D.M.T.P. (69)
- **Poland** (1): **Dariusz Mieczyslaw Rucinski (47)**
- **Slovenia** (1): K.N. (64)

The reasons these EU citizens have been sent to the immigration detention center and why they are stuck in a Catch 22 administrative situation is specific to each case.

A German citizen and a British national, **Michael Freeman**, have been detained for almost three years without a solution in sight.

Five of the detainees are in their sixties, and another one is 59 years old.

The Irish detainee, May Anthony Francis, could be sent back to his country where he was cleared from a crime committed in 2009. However, purchasing a flight ticket was still a problem as his belongings, including a credit card, were taken from him, and his accounts were frozen by the government.

The detention conditions in Bagong Diwa dramatically fail to meet the international standards. Moreover, there is no specific budget for medical assistance in the whole penitentiary system of the Philippines.

The detainees were, however, hailing their good relations with the warden of the detention center, **Mr. Otanez**, and his staff.

While in Manila, the mission met with an ambassador and a consul of two countries concerned by the detention of their citizens in Bicutan.

Regretfully, the Czech embassy in Manila failed to positively answer our repeated requests (by email or telephone) for a meeting. The representatives of the two European NGOs finally showed up at the Czech consulate but were told, despite their insistence, that the consul was busy...

After the mission, HRWF Int'l wrote to the embassies of the EU countries in Manila directly concerned by the immigration detention center to draw their attention to the situation of their nationals, urging them to monitor their situation and find a solution, case by case.

Detainees from non-EU countries

Other nationalities represented among the detainees of the Immigration Detention Center of Bagong Diwa:

- **Australia (1)**
- **Bangladesh (2)**
- **Cameroon (2)**
- **Canada (3)**
- **People's Republic of China (9)**
- **Ethiopia (1)**
- **India (15)**
- **Japan (9)**
- **South Korea (31)**
- **Liberia (1)**
- **Malaysia (2)**
- **New Zealand (1)**
- **Nigeria (3)**
- **Papua New Guinea (1)**
- **Singapore (2)**

- **South Africa (1)**
- **Taiwan (24)**
- **Togo (1)**
- **USA (14)**
- **Unknown (1)**
- **Vietnam (4)**

Recommendations

HRWF Int'l and FOREF urge the embassies of these countries to follow up the situation of their nationals at Bagong Diwa.

HRWF Int'l and FOREF are calling the international human rights community to visit the Immigration Detention Center of Bagong Diwa in Bicutan (Manila) and to regularly monitor the detention conditions.