

Demo at Parliament by international students wrongly accused of cheating by the Home Office

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It's five years since tens of thousands of international students had their lives destroyed by the Home Office, who wrongly accused them of cheating on an English test and revoked their visas. It's a story that has so far not got the attention it deserves.

To mark this anniversary, around 100 of the students will gather in Parliament Square Garden at **11am on Thursday 24 January** to call for the government to take action. They will be wearing graduation gowns and caps and calling for the chance to restart their studies and finally graduate.

It will be a strong visual event, and many of the students demonstrating will be happy to speak to journalists. We can also put you in touch with some of the students before Thursday if that's helpful. I've copied short summaries of some of their stories at the bottom of this email.

The students will then head inside Parliament, still wearing their gowns, for an event where some of them will speak about the impact of the allegation on their lives. A number of MPs, including Stephen Timms MP, a long-time supporter of the campaign, will be present.

This story exposes the hostile environment in all its horror and is far bigger in scale than Windrush.

Here's a reminder of the background:

In 2014, more than 30,000 students had their visas refused or revoked after they were accused of using a proxy on an English language test known as TOEIC. They were told to leave the country and thousands were forcefully deported.

Most had no right of appeal in the UK so no way to defend themselves. But cases that have made it to the courts have shown that the evidence the Home Office relied upon to make the accusations is largely absent – where it does exist, it's deeply flawed.

In the UK, we rely on a justice system based on due process and the principle of “innocent until proven guilty”. In this case, that was wilfully thrown out of the window.

Five years on and many of the students who stayed in the UK to try and clear their names are destitute and suffering severe mental health problems. Many have contemplated or attempted suicide. Unable to travel, most have missed funerals and weddings of close family members back home.

Those who have left the UK can't get work and many have been rejected by their families, who simply can't believe the UK would treat an innocent person this way.

Some of the students have been campaigning for justice for years. In 2017, we at Migrant Voice joined them in their fight. We're calling for their names to be cleared and for them to have the chance to sit a new Secure English Language Test. On Thursday, we and the students are repeating this call.

Last July, we [published a report](#) on the issue that triggered a [Westminster Hall debate](#) in September, where MPs questioned Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes about the debacle.

Wes Streeting MP said it was “Britain’s forgotten immigration scandal” and called for an independent inquiry.

*“This numerically is **a bigger scandal than Windrush** in terms of people removed and lives destroyed,” said Mike Gapes MP. “The injustice is grave, the numbers are huge.”*

Are you interested in covering this story on Thursday? As well as the students, our Director, Nazek Ramadan, is happy to be interviewed, as is Stephen Timms MP and solicitors from Garden Court Chambers, who have represented many of the students in court.

For more information, please email press@migrantvoice.org or call Migrant Voice on 020 7832 5824 or 07467 299335.

Amin came to the UK from Bangladesh as an international student and later started his own business, hiring two British workers. Then he was accused of cheating and everything fell apart. “I came to this country with good character and with dignity,” he said. “I’ve been broken down mentally, slowly losing my family ties.” The evidence against him is totally flawed – he was accused of cheating on a test in Leicester when he has never been there and has proof he was in London on the day in question – but there is still no way to fight the allegation.

Rabi came to UK in 2009 from Nepal. Two years into his fight to clear his name, his wife gave birth to a daughter and the family was immediately faced with a bill for £5,600 – unpayable for someone who isn’t allowed to work. In the same year, his father died and he couldn’t travel to attend the funeral. “I was almost broken,” he said. “It was a heartbreaking situation for me.” He lives with his family in a small room in southeast London. “Life is like an open prison,” he says.

Raja came to the UK from Pakistan in 2011 to study Business Management. He was in his final year when he was accused of cheating. “In June 2014, one day, 5:45am, the Home Office immigration officials came to my home and they arrested me,” he said. “They detained me straight away without telling me the reason.” He was detained for 129 days and shared a cell with a murderer. He has asked the Home Office for the evidence against him many times and they have failed to provide any. But without an appeal right, there’s no way to clear his name in the courts. Raja has spent more than £60,000 on his education and on legal fees, and he’s starting to lose hope.

Fatema came to the UK from Bangladesh in 2010. She finished her Bachelor in Law in 2014 then was faced with the accusation of cheating on the English test known as TOEIC. “My life was shattered,” she said. “The last four years I’ve been waiting to get an opportunity that I haven’t done any wrong thing, I haven’t done any deception... The Home Office never listened to me, they never gave me an opportunity.” Fatema has a young son – she wants to bring him up without this allegation hanging over her. “I hope that one day I will be free, not in a prison in the UK,” she said. “It seems like I will be here forever without any proper life, any happy life.”

Abdul* came to the UK in 2010. “My future was planned,” he said. He wanted to study, go home, get a job and “live peacefully”. In 2013, he suffered a brutal, racial attack on the street and suffered severe trauma – he fell into anxiety and depression and didn’t leave the house for six months. The following year, he was accused of cheating and his right to stay was removed. “I went into a deeper depression and I couldn’t sleep at night,” he said. “I tried to kill myself many times... My life has been destroyed.” But he’s still fighting to clear his name. “All I need is a chance to prove myself,” he said.