

JRS Malta

Personal testimony

Mohamed, originally from Eritrea

"I am writing in a crowded area among almost 90 persons, having a space difference between us of not more than five cm. It is not uncommon to see and expect all the worst when living in such a confined area.

Living conditions in this detention camp are extremely bad, starting from sanitation up to the daily meals provided. Frustration, tension and hopelessness are becoming visible and disruption and violence is a daily occurrence among so many people from different backgrounds living in cramped conditions. A typical example of the tension and stress has occurred in an individual who used to be a soldier and sustained head injuries during service. One day, he fell to the ground and had a seizure. All of us were afraid that he would die, and we beat on the security gates and shouted for help for 45 minutes before soldiers heard us and called an ambulance. There are individuals among us who cannot get access to medical care.

This is the 25th day for me to be without access to sunlight, except for seeing its rays during the early morning and late evening, through the closed windows. It is too difficult for an innocent individual to adjust to living in detention for 18 months, with no access to fresh air. It is not fair to confine someone for anything up to 18 months in a room without proper commodities, like a proper bed, and no access to local or international media, including newspapers and magazines, to at least know what's new in the world. Among us there are elderly people and young children, people who need special care and attention and they too have to live in these same conditions. This is a huge shock for someone crossing thousands of miles to reach Europe, thinking they are heading for stability.

Most of the immigrants in my room are Eritreans, used to being soldiers in forced conscription – we are civilians who escaped from military service. Most of us haven't had any contact with our families for a long time. Nothing of my ambitions and expectations of Europe are happening, but in fact, the reverse is happening in a devastating way. I feel confused when I think that I'm in a country which is supposed to be democratic and which respects human rights.

We are human beings and we are entitled to be treated as human beings. Detention might be an option for Malta because of its problem of size and resources. But detention for such long periods in such bad conditions is not a solution and searching for alternatives would be more productive, both for the immigrants and for the Maltese too."