

Green Party pledges to end immigration detention at women's manifesto launch at Yarl's Wood



13 May 2017

***Greens launch manifesto for gender equality at Yarl's Wood detention centre ahead of major demonstration [1]**

***Pledges to shut down detention centres, protect sex workers through decriminalisation, and save women's healthcare**

***Deputy leader Amelia Womack: "The detention of asylum seekers in centres such as Yarl's Wood is inhumane, costly and totally unnecessary"**

The Green Party will launch its women's manifesto at 11am today (May 13) outside Yarl's Wood detention centre in Bedfordshire. The manifesto's three key policies all relate to providing safety for all, regardless of gender.

The party is calling for an end to immigration detention, leading to the closing of Yarl's Wood where the majority of female asylum seekers are held while their claims are being processed. In the short term, the Green Party are calling for the release of women who have experienced sexual violence so that their claim can be processed in the community, and would ban male staff from coming into contact with female detainees, who currently supervise detainees while showering, dressing and using the toilet. Hundreds of complaints about sexual abuse and mistreatment have been raised by Yarl's Wood detainees over the last decade [2].

The Greens are also promising to provide safety for sex workers through decriminalisation of both the sale and purchase of sex. This comes after UN [3] and Amnesty International [4] recommendations over the last year, showing that making sex work illegal only reduces safety.

The Green Party has also pledged to reverse the cuts to health care that have disproportionately affected women and other marginalised groups [5] [6].

The full pledges are to:

End immigration detention

- Immediately act to protect the most vulnerable asylum seekers who have experienced rape, sexual abuse or torture, by allowing their claims to be processed in the community
- Implement a three month maximum processing time for asylum applications
- Funding for integrated support for asylum seekers
- In the long term work to abolish immigration detention centres to enable all claims to be processed in the community

Keep sex workers safe

- Decriminalise sex work, in line with research from Amnesty International and the UN
- Amend existing criminal records held by sex workers
- Zero tolerance of coercion, violence or sexual abuse

Save women's healthcare

- End pay freezes for public sector workers
- Introduce safe levels of staffing across the NHS
- Reinstate sexual health services

The Green Party's other pledges to stand up for safety also include the role roll out a UK-wide strategy to tackle domestic violence, scrapping the "rape clause" for those wishing to claim child benefit, and restoring legal aid to prevent victims being forced to represent themselves against their abusers in court.

The women's manifesto goes on to announce measures to improve mental health services, close the gender pay gap and support unpaid carers, those who are disabled and older women, and policies to increase gender parity in government.

Amelia Womack, Green Party deputy leader, said:

"Detaining asylum seekers is inhumane, costly and totally unnecessary. Women who are coming to the UK seeking refuge are being detained in appalling conditions in centres like Yarl's Wood, often for years with no end to their incarceration in sight. We can be so much better than this, a confident and caring country that welcomes people in need instead of closing our borders, building walls and locking up vulnerable people who need help. The bold policies we're announcing today show that the Green Party is committed to standing up for everyone, and we are not afraid to speak out about issues other parties would rather shy away from. From asylum seekers to sex workers, as well as all of us who use the NHS, these policies set us on the path to building a tolerant, inclusive society."

Notes:

1. Amelia Womack, Green Party deputy leader, will launch the women's manifesto at 11am on May 13 at the entrance of Twinwoods Business Park, Thurleigh Rd, Milton Ernest MK44 1FD. Movement for Justice is organising a demonstration at Yarl's Wood on the same day from 1pm to 4pm. More information is available here:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/1397760473581688/>
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/15/yarls-wood-report-calling-for-closure-decade-abuse-complaints>
3. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hiv-aids/sex-work-and-the-law-in-asia-and-the-pacific.html>
4. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/amnesty-international-publishes-policy-and-research-on-protection-of-sex-workers-rights/>

5. <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/women/key-issues/women-and-public-spending-cuts/>
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/19/austerity-women-men-low-income>
7. Green Party Women is a subgroup of the Green Party of England and Wales and welcomes both women, including trans women, as well as gender variant members.
8. The full women's manifesto will be available after the launch.

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