



# L.C.R.M

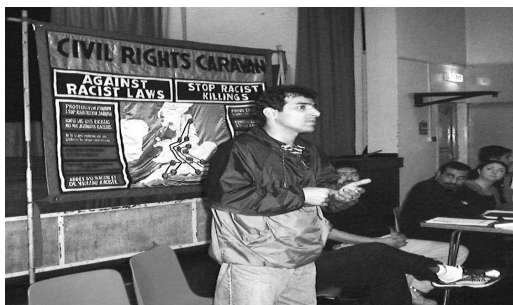
Leicester Civil Rights Movement

Report 2000-2010

10 years on &

**STILL**

Going strong



# Leicester Civil Rights Movement Report 2000-2010

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## Clock Tower protest at bid to deport Iraqi asylum seekers

HUNDREDS of people gathered in the city centre at the weekend to protest against the deportation of Iraqi asylum seekers from the UK.

More than 300 people staged an hour-long demonstration at the Clock Tower on Saturday afternoon against sending Kurdish asylum seekers back to Iraq.

The protest was organised by the Federation of Iraqi Refugees in Leicester and Leicester Social Forum.

The demonstration was joined

by other groups, including Leicester Civil Rights Movement.

Organiser Khalid Mohamed, of the Federation of Iraqi Refugees in Leicester, said the protest had been organised at the same time as others in Manchester and London against the deportation of 12 Kurds to Iraq due to take place today.

He said: "Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers are the victims of war and instability in Iraq."

"Our government is sending people back to where people are being killed every day."

"We will be planning more demonstrations in the future about this."

Bernard Harper, of Leicester Social Forum, said: "Everybody involved was pleased with the atmosphere and solidarity of people from different groups."

"We were protesting about the arrest and deportation of Iraqi Kurds from around the country back to Iraq."



PICTURE: CHRIS GORDON / 1725

**DEMO:** Iraqi refugees stage their protest at the Clock Tower

Leicester Mercury 2000 (1)

## Introduction and Welcome

We're delighted to welcome you to our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event and to introduce this report on LCRM's work and achievements over the last 10 years.

LCRM was formed in September 2000, as a local vehicle for challenging racial and social injustices. It has been particularly concerned about the situation of asylum seekers and refugees, with both an integral part of its development over the past 10 years.

This concern arose with the decision of NASS (National Asylum Support Service) to effectively dump 450 asylum seekers at the so-called International Hotel in Leicester, without any real thought given to those vulnerable people's basic needs of appropriate meals, clean rooms/bedding, activities, etc. This is even before any consideration could be made about those individuals' need for medical (including mental health) care, educational requirements, legal advice and social activities.

Our early focus on challenging the local public service providers did result in some improvements, with several of those services making some provision for these new arrivals in Leicester. Although we took an early decision to not become a service provider, LCRM was largely responsible for initiating and setting up the highly successful Refugees and Asylum Seekers Advice Project (RASAP).

Over the last few years, those gains have largely been reversed, with RASAP's funding terminated and legal advice services decimated. At a time when poor communities have been made poorer and the (physical) attacks on asylum seekers has been whipped up by mainstream politicians invoking moral panics and anti-immigrant/asylum seeker hysteria, we have continued to raise awareness about these issues and challenge some of the untruths propagated by politicians and the media. We have also continued to locate our concerns within the broader context of global struggles for justice and equality. A wonderful aspect of our journey over these last 10 years has been the readiness of LCRM members who have successfully gained their status to remain in the UK, to actively assist others who are experiencing those injustices.

In spite all of our members and supporters efforts, one of our members was deported to the Republic of Congo. At first, we feared the worst but now, after almost a year, he has been in touch to say he has managed to escape from prison and is living in a safe house in a neighbouring country. Let's resolve that today marks the beginning of a campaign to bring Constant Moussavou back to Leicester!

With the exception of a Leicester City Council grant for today's event and an earlier Banner Theatre performance at Highfields Centre, we have not sought any public sector funding for our work. Rather, our financial bedrock has been provided by members' fees and donations/collections at the various events we've held over the 10 years. However, it'll be very remiss of me not to thank both the Highfields Community Association (HCA) and The Race Equality Centre (TREC) for their continued willingness to host and support our meetings and major events, so thanks to both agencies and long may you continue to do so!

On behalf of our members, I'd like to wish you an enjoyable and productive day and look forward to your continued involvement and support for our work over the next 10 years!.

Best wishes,

Priya Thamotheram

## BREAKING NEWS

ASYLUM-SEEKER: 'WE IDENTIFY WITH RAMIN'

# Protest to mark refugee's death

A demonstration takes place on Saturday in Leicester to mark the death of an Iranian refugee, and to protest against the asylum system.

Shokrolah Khaleghi, 27, also known as Ramin, was found dead at the International Hotel in Rutland Street, Leicester, on January 18.

The Leicester Civil Rights Movement - a coalition of justice campaign groups - claims he killed himself because his asylum application had been denied.

The movement, which is heading the demonstration, claims Ramin suffered torture as a political prisoner, and could not face the prospect of going back to Iran.

Police say his death is not being treated as suspicious, but the cause has not been determined and is to be investigated by the coroner.

A spokesman for the Home Office said the department could not comment on individual cases.

Speakers expected at the rally in

BY NICOLA DOWLING  
SOCIAL AFFAIRS  
CORRESPONDENT

clude a spokeswoman for the Federation of Iranian Refugees, Suresh Grover, of the National Civil Rights Movement, who helped champion the cause of Stephen Lawrence's family, is expected to speak.

Priya Thamotheram, spokesman for the Leicester Civil Rights Movement, said: "The Home Office refusal of Ramin's claim was the final straw that led to his decision to take his own life, rather than be subjected to more of the same barbaric treatment in Iran. Effectively the refusal of asylum has become a death sentence for asylum-seekers."

The organisation believes the system of applying for asylum is unfair.

A fellow asylum-seeker also living at the International Hotel, said: "Sometimes you get so frustrated when your life is in other people's hands. You fear your life back home in Iran, but when you get here you live in fear too."

"All of us can identify with Ramin."

Around 150 people are expected at the rally, which is due to start from Town Hall Square at 10.30am. It will move on to the International Hotel for a silent walk past the building, before returning to Town Hall Square.

Those attending are thought to include church organisations, refugees' groups from outside the county, and the National Civil Rights Movement.

The rally will come in the week that a Home Office Select Committee found only about a quarter of those people refused asylum had been forced to go home by the authorities.

A report by the committee said the Home Office has been "dilatory in enforcing removal of people whose claims have been refused, and others who have gained illegal entry into the UK", adding more should be done to enforce repatriation.

See next Tuesday's Leicester Mercury to read more about Ramin Khaleghi, and the circumstance leading to his death.

## LCRM Timeline 2000-2010

### 27<sup>th</sup> September 2000

Leicester Civil Rights Movement (LCRM) created as a result of National Civil Rights Caravan organising a public meeting at Highfields Centre (HC) on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2000 on Racial justice & rights for asylum seekers & refugees.

### November 2000

Local shops and restaurants in Highfields provide food, especially during the Ramzan period for refugees and asylum seekers attending LCRM's twice monthly meetings.

### 29<sup>th</sup> November 2000

LCRM decide not to become a service provider but rather, to be first and foremost, a campaigning organisation.

**1<sup>st</sup> December 2000**

LCRM arrange meeting with Leicester City Council and its City Catering Department to discuss the concerns about the International Hotel services.

**16<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2000**

LCRM arrange a campaign stall outside Woolworths in the city centre to raise awareness of the government's voucher system for asylum seekers.

**19<sup>th</sup> January 2001**

LCRM support meeting arranged at International Hotel to hear residents concern about Ramin Khaleghi's tragic death.

**3rd February 2001**

March and rally in Leicester organised by LCRM on the death of Ramin Khaleghi at the International Hotel (picture 2)

**April 2001**

First edition of free LCRM newsletter, Insaf ('justice') produced

**26th May 2001**

National Rally at HC with Suresh Grover, Michael Mansfield "Building a United Future"

**August 2001**

LCRM instigate and help set up RASAP (**R**efugees and **A**sylum **S**eekers **A**dvice **P**roject)

**14<sup>th</sup> August 2001**

LCRM arrange memorial meeting at HC for Spencer Weston.

**September 2001**

LCRM effect links with National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns and set up LCRM email group.

**November & December 2001**

LCRM stalls set up at Haymarket & Phoenix theatre events

**14<sup>th</sup> October 2001**

LCRM attend a national demonstration in London to demand a 'Stop to Racist Killings and against Racist Laws and Support families fighting racism.

**19th January 2002**

Support for demonstration in Northampton for justice for Abde Dorre, killed in a night club there.

**23<sup>rd</sup> March 2002**

LCRM organise an Awareness Raising Event at Highfields Centre for local statutory and voluntary sector agencies about Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

**26<sup>th</sup> May 2002**

LCRM organise Justice for Abdi Dorre meeting @ Highfields Centre

**7<sup>th</sup> October 2002**

LCRM letter to Home Secretary about the double jeopardy faced by Shokat Chenia who had been served with a deportation order, even though his partner and seven children were British citizens.

**12<sup>th</sup> October 2002**

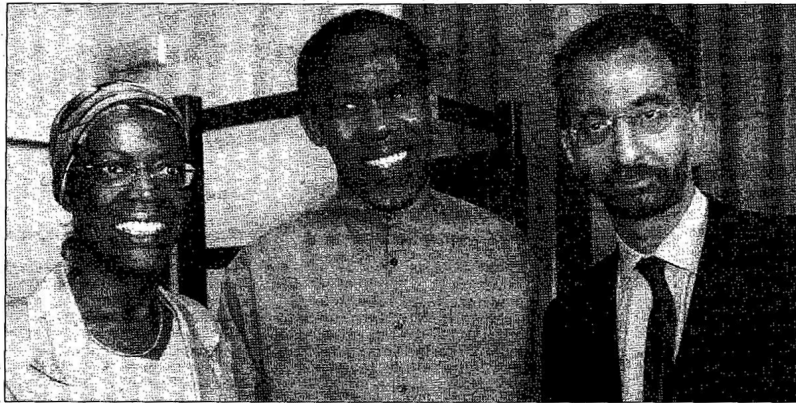
LCRM organise a fund raising social for the Justice for Abde Dorre Campaign.

10<sup>th</sup> December 2002

LCRM meeting at Secular Hall to discuss living conditions for refugees and asylum seekers in Leicester.

**BREAKING NEWS**

**TARGETS: REGION CAN HELP LEAD TO CHANGE**



**CONFERENCE GUESTS:** Iris Lightfoote, chief executive of Leicester Racial Equality Council, Professor Gus John, speaking on race and social cohesion, and civil rights lawyer Imran Khan

# Two-edged fight for racial justice

Leading civil rights representatives today discussed the issues surrounding the fight for racial justice at a major conference in Leicester.

Ten years after the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, experts were examining what has changed in Britain.

Leicester Civil Rights Movement and the National Civil Rights Movement organised the twin-themed conference, which will look at the fight for racial justice and the struggle to defend the rights of asylum seekers.

The event got under way at 9.30am at Highfields Youth and Community Centre, in Melbourne Road.

Key speakers included the Lawrence family solicitor, Imran

**BY REBECCA SHEATH**

Khan, black education campaigner Gus John, and Suresh Grover, spokesman for the national civil rights movement.

The conference is supported by local family campaigns including Leicester Race Equality Council, the Refugees and Asylum Seekers' Advice Project, Highfields Community Association, the Nottingham Robert Hamill Campaign and the Abdi Doree Family Campaign.

Priya Thamotheram, chairman of Leicester Civil Rights Movement, said: "The conference is being held at a particularly poignant time with the arrival of more refugees and asylum seekers and the increase in racially-motivated attacks."

"Leicester, on a comparative basis with other parts of the country, has

improved over the last ten years, but there is still room for much more improvement."

Mr Khan said: "Society and communities have changed and accepted racism exists, but there are still problems with institutional racism."

Workshops throughout the day included dealing with issues including access to justice for asylum seekers, the hysteria over asylum seekers, and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Mr John said: "Leicester and the East and West Midlands are important for effecting the change and creating a social cohesion, not least because of the make-up of the population."

"I would like the groups, which have been building bridges in this area, to expand and succeed nationally."

Leicester Mercury 2003 (3)

12<sup>th</sup> April 2003

National Civil Rights Movement (NCRM) & LCRM jointly organise a conference @ the Highfields Centre 'Ten years on the fight for racial justice and defending the rights of Asylum seekers' (picture 3)



**TRAGEDY:** STUDENT WAS KILLED AS HE FLED FIGHT SCENE

# Spencer's final night is relived at inquest

BY JENNIFER SYM

The night a student was killed after he ran in front of a car while fleeing a fight has been relived at an inquest.

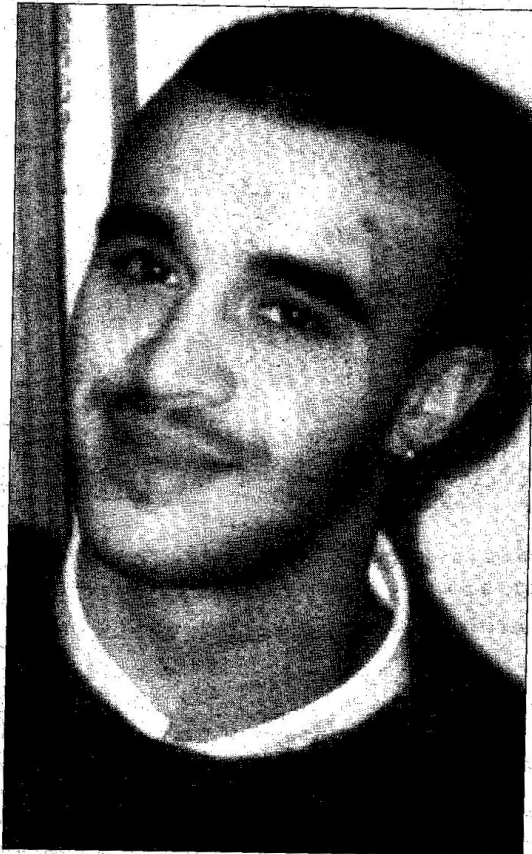
Spencer Weston, 21, from Beaumont Leys, was hit by a Toyota Lexus after he leapt over the central reservation in Vaughan Way on August 14, 1999.

The inquest comes after a lengthy police investigation and a probe by the Police Complaints Authority into how the Leicestershire force dealt with the incident, which is still ongoing.

Mr Weston's father, Walcott Hill, said yesterday on behalf of himself and Spencer's mother Denise: "We feel that from day



**INQUEST:** Walcott Hill, above, and Denise Weston, below, parents of Spencer Weston, main picture



## A knife was found on the carriageway, together with a piece of Mr Weston's belt.

one our concerns over Spencer's death have neither been properly addressed or answered and the non-attendance of any significant witnesses only serves to strengthen our view that we will not get justice from this inquest."

The opening evidence revealed how Mr Weston's friend Stephen Phillips had seen Mr Weston being kicked on the ground outside the Circle taxi office on St Nicholas Circle during a fight involving about 15 people.

The mixed race student and other black youths then ran from the scene. Police have previously said Mr Weston had been subjected to racist abuse.

A statement from a witness, taxi driver Craig Westhead, was

read to yesterday's inquest at the town hall. He said: "I saw approximately three youths run across Vaughan Way towards the central reservation barrier. I then noticed a number of police officers, more than two, running after these youths."

"I saw one youth run over the barrier of the central reservation. I carried on driving towards St Nicholas Place and be-

came aware in seconds of a white-coloured Ford Transit police van in front of me which braked suddenly and a number of police got out and ran towards the central reservation."

Video footage showed the student appeared to trip and fall, then he was hit by a car.

A knife was found on the carriageway, together with a piece of Mr Weston's belt.

The fight and car accident followed an incident in Highcross Street in which a white man was beaten unconscious.

A police report into the incident said: "The available evidence clearly indicates immediately before the accident he was running from the scene of a large fight and also running to avoid being arrested."

The inquest continues at 3.

Leicester Mercury 2003 (4)

May 2003

LCRM support family of Spencer Weston at the inquest into his death after being pursued by the Police in Leicester city centre

**June 2003**

Asylum seekers including LCRM members protest outside the International Hotel "short of food and overcrowded"

**29th July 2003**

Public Meeting organised by LCRM at Secular Hall *'Asylum seekers - No forced deportations'*

**August 2003**

LCRM lead protest against BNP fronted 'Neighbour' magazine being distributed in the Clarendon Park area.

**February 2004**

Support for demo against closure of Hitslink advice centre.

**11<sup>th</sup> February 2004**

Joint public meeting chaired by David Taylor (ex MP, now deceased) with Leicester Campaign to Stop the War on Iraq and Palestine @ Highfields Centre

**8<sup>th</sup> May 2004**

'STOP DEPORTATIONS! END DESTITUTION!' Open meeting organised by LCRM @ Secular Hall

**January 2005**

March in Leicester against deportation to Zimbabwe supported by LCRM

**26<sup>th</sup> April 2005**

LCRM & Leicester Social Forum hold public meeting with Leicester's parliamentary candidates on racism, asylum seekers & immigration @ Secular Hall

**29<sup>th</sup> April 2005**

LCRM set up a stall at May Day rally organised by Leicester Social Forum.

**11th July 2005**

LCRM addresses *'No to Cuts to Community Services or Lifelong learning'* Rally at New Walk Centre

**November 2005**

Charity Commission's investigation into complaint against TREC's involvement in LCRM results in their recommendation that TREC should not host LCRM meetings but this is successfully challenged.

**1st October 2005**

LCRM members attended a national demonstration in Bolton against removals.

**18<sup>th</sup> December 2005**

LCRM support march against deportations to Zimbabwe

**28<sup>th</sup> December 2005**

LCRM's 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary event @ Highfields Centre

**15<sup>th</sup> February 2006**

LCRM support Refugee & Asylum Seekers Advice Project (RASAP) march from the Clock Tower to New Walk protesting against the closure of the project and cuts in funds

**28<sup>th</sup> June 2006**

LCRM affiliate to the Iraqi Anti-Deportations Campaign

**11<sup>th</sup> July 2006**

LCRM support public meeting at Secular Hall about Palestine.



**30<sup>th</sup> August 2006**

LCRM meeting with senior Leicester Partnership (LP) representatives to discuss concerns about LP's New Arrivals Strategy and related Action Plan, especially the section relating to their intention to replace RASAP's long standing, effective and valued services by the City Council's Customer Services.

**28th March 2007**

Demo against Deportations to Congo supported by LCRM

**10th February 2007**

LCRM support rally of 400 people against deportations to Iraq at the Clock Tower in Leicester City Centre

**March 2007**

LCRM support march against deportations to Congo.

**31<sup>st</sup> March 2007**

LCRM support 'No one is illegal' conference in Liverpool

**21<sup>st</sup> April 2007**

LCRM organise meeting at Leicester Adult Education Centre against proposed cuts to English for Speakers of Other Languages courses.

**23<sup>rd</sup> February 2008**

Performance of '*They get free mobile... Don't they?*' by Banner Theatre organised by LCRM @ Highfields Centre

**6<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

LCRM host a book launch 'The End of Tolerance – Racism in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain' with author Arun Kundnani @ Secular Hall

**10<sup>th</sup> May 2008**

LCRM members attend as speakers at the regional Amnesty International conference in Kettering.

**19<sup>th</sup> June 2008**

LCRM support 'Barefoot Walk from Derby to London'

**13<sup>th</sup> March 2009**

LCRM support play ('Hearts and Minds') about the thoughts and feelings of young Muslims at Highfields Centre

**21<sup>st</sup> March 2009**

LCRM join national demonstration against Yarlswood Immigration Detention Centre, near Bedford.

**13<sup>th</sup> September 2009**

LCRM member, Constant Moussavou is deported to the Republic of Congo, with the UK government's first four deportation attempts thwarted by LCRM's campaign to allow him to remain in Leicester.

**18<sup>th</sup> September 2009**

LCRM speakers address conference on 'Security and Migration in Europe' at University of Leicester.

**14<sup>th</sup> November 2009**

LCRM organise public meeting at Secular Hall about Loughborough Immigration Reporting Centre.

**8<sup>th</sup> December 2009**

LCRM hold joint public meeting with Leicester and District Trade Unions Council at Secular Hall on 'Asylum and the Right to Work'.

**15<sup>th</sup> May 2010**

LCRM support 'Remembrance and Justice Day' at Highfields Centre, organised by United 4 Justice

**12<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

LCRM speakers address conference at Moat Community College on 'Celebration of Internationalism' organised by Leicester and District Trade Unions Council.

**19<sup>th</sup> June 2010**

LCRM host Banner theatre performance (We share the same sky) at Highfields Centre.

**What we've done so far:**

- Campaigned for decent, accessible and fair treatment and services for asylum seekers in Leicester
- Taken part in local, regional and national campaigns and demonstrations for racial and social justice
- Through demonstrations, rallies, petitions and meetings, helped set up and support specific campaigns for individuals and families fighting racial and social injustice
- Held public meetings, seminars and theatrical events on tackling issues of racial and social injustice
- Attended and spoken at local, regional and national meetings and conferences
- Hosted 3 major national conferences on civil rights
- Supported asylum seekers in their (legal) actions to gain status and resist deportation
- Instigated and oversaw the creation of the Refugees and Asylum Seekers Advice Project
- Produced a regular free newsletter, INSAF (justice)
- For the last 10 years, retained a broad coalition of concerned individuals and groups to continue the struggle for racial and social justice, with asylum seekers who have gained status to remain in the UK and those still in limbo with their applications, a key part of our group.

## Extracts from Insaf

### Why I Can't Go Back To Guinea – August 2010

After losing mum in my childhood, I always knew that the situation around me and later in my ethnicity was not normal. Those personal experiences pushed me to do something. I started to think about the war in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Paradoxically, I found links between what happened in my ethnicity and Liberian experiments in my country and what happened to Sierra Leone refugees in my country because of the bad judgement of the prisoner of my country. The soldiers from Guinea were to Liberia to protect the civilians but I was surprised to see that they came back with the belongings of the people that they were sent to protect. As I saw what happened to our neighbours what happened in Guinea was not surprising. When I found this analysis I started to spread the news to show people the danger of military power by criticising the recruitment system and denouncing soldiers with odd pasts. As that wasn't friendly I had a lot of enemies among them.

### Asylum Seekers speak out about the Loughborough Immigration Centre – June 2008

Me and my wife are Zimbabwean and we were waiting for our asylum claim to be dealt with. My wife was signing at the Immigration Centre from 2005. She had to travel by bus. Her appointment was between 3-4pm. The bus took about an hour to get to Loughborough. So there was no one to collect my son from school. She was not allowed to go into the Centre after 4pm. The bus arrived in Loughborough at 12am and then we had to wander the streets.

We have seen some people with children and crossing the street near the Immigration Centre is dangerous especially for people with pushchairs. Its dangerous hanging around in Loughborough and the shopkeepers look at you in a very funny way as if you are a thief or something. The people in the shops treat you badly. If you use the train it is too far away and the Immigration Centre will only give you a bus ticket. There are road works, so the bus is often delayed and people feel the need to leave early. My wife has never complained about her treatment at the Centre but sometimes she had to wait there as well.

### An interview with Sarwar Gareb – April 2008

Since I was in this country I studied many courses including teaching courses for further education, and I am now studying a further level in teaching to become a professional teacher to UK requirements. At the same time I worked as a volunteer for Relive magazine, Long Journey Home and LCRM. In 2002, the Home Office gave me the right to work. From this time until the beginning of 2008, I was working as an interpreter for Leicester City Council, the NHS and the police. Suddenly, the Home Office contacted my employer without contacting me and told them to dismiss me. They said I had no permission to work because I had failed my asylum application. However, I have written to the Home Office and to my M.P. Peter Soulsby and told them I am a teacher and my workplace is MKLC and the Tresham Institute. Peter Soulsby M.P. wrote to the Home Office for an explanation but I have received no reply. Since I fled Kurdistan, the PUK and KDP are still in power and I would also be persecuted by Islamic extremists because I am a communist. In 2007 the PUK harassed my wife and forced her to divorce me. The divorce has been completed. At the end of 2000 they imprisoned my father, who was non-political, because of my activities. He died in prison.

### Safe to return to Iraq! – December 2003

I come from Kurdistan in the north of Iraq. I am a member of the Workers Communist Party of Iraq. I joined during my study at university in 1995. After I finished I worked in the media until I got leadership of that party. I was working as a journalist on a newspaper and the radio. So I talked against the feudalist and Islamic fundamentalist parties. Through this my life became at risk. A lot of time Islamic purists wanted to assassinate me and arrest me but by chance I got past. **In 1998 I was arrested by the KDP and tortured** in their presence. You can still see the scars on my right hand where they had a hook on the ceiling. And you can see the scars of cigarette burns on my body. I was freed by a huge amount of money, some of it coming from my family, donations from pupils and members of the party.

**In July 2000 the PUK surrounded our bases and cut electricity and water in our bases.** Our party just made peaceful marches and used peaceful means to solve our problems. But unfortunately the

PUK used force against us. Some of our members were scarred in the gun battle. Some of the people with the Communist leadership were arrested. By chance some of us saved ourselves.

### **Starved and forced out of Britain? – October 2003**

My wife had problems first. We came to Britain separately. We were arranging for a big white wedding in Zimbabwe when she was tortured and threatened with death. This was because she was involved in politics opposed to the government. So eventually she was helped by her father who disguised her and took her to the airport. They had to make special arrangements that involved bribing a lot of people. One of my most trying times because I couldn't stand to lose my wife. We were not yet living together but were close to being married and I thought I'd lost her.

I got involved in the MDC because I thought they would solve my problems and get my wife back. I had a big influence on youth because I was a teacher. I was also tortured and in the process lost my grandfather. I was teaching in the rural areas of Roula but in the end flew to Bulawayo. Members of the terror organisation were looking for me. I knew my fate would be death and I had no option but to flee the country. It was difficult to raise the money from friends and relatives while I was in hiding but eventually I succeeded and came here. I was re-united with my wife. I couldn't believe it. **My worst ordeal was to come.** They didn't believe my story. They have the facts but they turn you down. My wife had already been refused when I arrived in October 2002. Then in November 2002 all support was taken from us.



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