

H.E. Mr. Guy Hewitt
High Commissioner for Barbados to the
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Mr Tom Tugendhat, MP
Chair
Foreign Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
London, SW1A 0AA

09 April 2018

Dear Chair,

I write to request an opportunity for the victims, migration and human rights advocates, High Commissioners, and other concerned groups to have an interaction with members of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on the situation facing some elderly Commonwealth-born residents in the UK. I write in part as a product of the Commonwealth as I was born in the UK to parents from India and Barbados.

The situation is that these migrants from the Caribbean, and other Commonwealth countries, many of whom have been here since childhood, now, due to their irregular status, face the possibility of destitution, detention, and deportation.

Based on information received from **Migration Observatory** at **Oxford University** we estimate there could be up to 50,000 Commonwealth-born persons in the UK who arrived before 1971 but do not have regularised status.

The situation started with the call from Britain in the 1950s and 1960s to journey here to address labour shortages. Having left the Caribbean for the “Mother Country” as British Subjects, as the islands were still colonies, and having secured leave to remain and subsequently being educated, skilled, worked, taxed and levied in the UK, it never occurred to them that they were not legally British.

The situation changed markedly in 2012, when the Home Office began systematic immigration checks. The real issue is that these long-term undocumented UK residents are not treated as anomalies to be regularised, but as “illegal immigrants” and barred from working and refused access to government services: the denial of NHS treatment, and loss of welfare benefits including housing benefits.

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The situation has been exacerbated by the fact that the Home Office has placed the burden of proof on the individual to demonstrate that their residency predates 1971. Despite the growing awareness and appreciation among undocumented Commonwealth migrants that they need to address their situation, the cuts in legal aid services means that those most likely to face injustice have the least access to the means of securing justice.

We need to change the mind-set that only two groups of residents exist in the UK: legal residents and illegal immigrants. There clearly exists a third grey area grouping made up significantly of Commonwealth-born migrants, who feel personally, and believe morally, and in most cases with support, have subsequently proven legally that they do belong here.

As we approach the Commonwealth Summit, and noting the past and anticipated future significance of Commonwealth relations, I look forward to the possibility of our collaboration towards having this matter resolved in the spirit of the Commonwealth Family of Nations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a horizontal line that curves upwards at the end, followed by a vertical stroke that crosses the horizontal line, and a final vertical stroke to the right.

Guy Hewitt