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Anger as Home Secretary ditches key review recommendations, failing Windrush scandal survivors and campaigners

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This week, the Home Secretary Suella Braverman provided the UK parliament with [an update \(https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-01-26/debates/23012627000014/WindrushLessonsLearnedReviewRecommendations\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-01-26/debates/23012627000014/WindrushLessonsLearnedReviewRecommendations) on the government's delivery of recommendations as outlined in the 2020 [Windrush Lessons Learned Review \(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874022/6.5577_HO_Windrush_Lessons_Learned_Review_WEB_v2.pdf\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874022/6.5577_HO_Windrush_Lessons_Learned_Review_WEB_v2.pdf)

This included the announcement that the Home Office is dropping three of the 30 recommendations provided by the author of the review, Wendy Williams, who was appointed by the government as an independent advisor in the aftermath of the Windrush scandal.

Campaigning for many years about their ill-treatment at the hands of the authorities, the concerns of the Caribbean community continued to fall on deaf ears. Notwithstanding, from 2014 accounts began to emerge about individuals who had arrived in the country as British subjects between 1948 and 1973 yet found they were being detained, deported or blocked by the Home Office upon re-entry.

By 2018, the scandal had reached the front pages. The story was met with outrage and indignation by [Caribbean High Commissioners \(https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/windrush-speech-by-his-excellency-guy-hewitt-barbados-high-commissioner\)](https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/windrush-speech-by-his-excellency-guy-hewitt-barbados-high-commissioner), and ultimately led to the [resignation of then Home Secretary \(https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/apr/29/amber-rudd-resigns-as-home-secretary-after-windrush-scandal\)](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/apr/29/amber-rudd-resigns-as-home-secretary-after-windrush-scandal) Amber Rudd in April that same year.

The three discarded recommendations announced this week included reconciliation with persons affected by the scandal, the introduction of a Migrants' Commissioner and a review of the role of the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration. In her speech, Braverman downplayed the need for reconciliation between survivors with the Home Office and immigration officials, arguing it would not be an effective way to properly address the sensitivities of the scandal. The Windrush rights campaigner Patrick Vernon, disagrees. In an interview with [Channel 4 News \(https://www.channel4.com/news/home-secretary-walking-over-the-dead-bodies-of-26-victims-windrush-campaigner-responds-to-home-office-scrapping-of-inquiry-recommendations\)](https://www.channel4.com/news/home-secretary-walking-over-the-dead-bodies-of-26-victims-windrush-campaigner-responds-to-home-office-scrapping-of-inquiry-recommendations) he stated:

"It's [the Home Office] failed on the recommendations, it's failed the Windrush generation and it's failing the public...I challenge the Home Secretary tonight. Have meetings with survivors, families, lawyers and people connected to it to hear the true story. She's relying on second- and third-hand information to make decisions which is not in the public interest."

A long-time outspoken opponent of the Home Office and advocate of rights for persons affected by the scandal, Labour MP for Tottenham David Lammy, also said:

"After the abominable Windrush scandal, in which Black Britons were detained, deported, denied healthcare, denied housing, denied education...successive Prime Ministers and Home Secretaries came to this house and they said that they would accept, in full, the recommendations of Wendy Williams' inquiry into the scandal and that they would compensate the victims. This morning, slipped out quietly in a written statement, this house finds out that in fact only half of the compensation has been made and that Windrush recommendations have been dropped. Mr Speaker, it tramples on the hopes of the Windrush generation and anyone who believes in our shared, multicultural future."

The timing of the announcement this week is not only cruel but also politically inept, given that a United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (<http://https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/01/uk-discrimination-against-people-african-descent-structural-institutional>) is currently on a [fact-finding mission \(https://www.ohchr.org/en/media-advisories/2023/01/un-experts-people-african-descent-visit-uk\)](https://www.ohchr.org/en/media-advisories/2023/01/un-experts-people-african-descent-visit-uk) in the UK. In its last report, published just three months after Theresa May announced her plans to enforce Mr Cameron's 'hostile environment' in 2012, the UN delegation warned that the government already lacked an understanding of its history and it needed to properly identify and address cases of discrimination and racism:

"The particular history and context of people of African descent should be taken into account and reflected in a comprehensive action agenda of legislation and policies, including special measures to overcome persistent and structural disparities affecting people of African descent." (pg. 17, UN Report of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent).

In the ten years since the UN last wrote its report, the British government has followed through on its goal to make the UK a hostile place to live. The case for Brexit was, in part, won by a campaign awash with xenophobia, fear-mongering and anti-Black, anti-immigrant diatribe. The UN delegation cannot ignore these blatant human rights abuses, nor can it overlook the insultingly half-hearted attempts made by the Home Office to implement real and effective policy change following the scandal.

This year marks 75 years since the arrival of HMT Empire Windrush to the UK. The government has repeatedly agreed to honour the contributions of people from the Caribbean and broader Commonwealth on this special occasion. One might have thought this would at last be a high priority for a government in which both Prime Minister and Home Secretary are the children of economic migrants from British East Africa.

The Home Office's lacklustre promise to right the wrongs of the past, however, is a glaring indictment of the department's continuing failure under Sunak and Braverman to tackle its appalling treatment of Black Britons.

While it continues to play lip service to this commitment, the ditching of these three crucial measures by the Home Secretary this week suggests that Conservative governments will continue to ignore the calls for justice from people whose lives have been turned upside down by these unjust and discriminatory actions.

Please note: Views expressed are those of the author.

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