# Two British men recount ordeal of 100 days in Guinea’s overcrowded political prison



Two British men, Paul Inch and Richard Perham, have recounted their harrowing ordeal of spending 100 days in a West African prison notorious for its inhumane conditions. Both men travelled to Guinea earlier this year as part of a mission for Aerostar International, aimed at recovering a high-altitude research balloon that had veered off course. However, their trip quickly took a dark turn as they were arrested and falsely accused of espionage, sedition, and various other charges.

Once imprisoned in Conakry Central Prison, they faced conditions that were both extreme and dangerous. The facility operates at a shocking 475 per cent of its intended capacity, with overcrowding leading to a breakdown of order and rampant disease. Inmates were confined in stifling heat and forced to share a single toilet, not only with fellow detainees but also those convicted of violent crimes. The absence of guards inside the cell blocks meant that order was maintained by violent prisoner hierarchies, intensifying the sense of insecurity for those within.

Mr Inch described the experience as a "nightmare," highlighting that he had never imagined such a terror could befall him during what was meant to be a straightforward work assignment. The conditions in the prison were so deplorable that they were swarmed with vermin, compounded by limited access to clean water, which led to severe dehydration and illnesses like gastrointestinal infections and skin diseases. The threat of serious diseases, including malaria and tuberculosis, loomed large in a facility notorious for unsanitary conditions, echoing reports by human rights organisations that document systemic abuses within Guinea’s penal system.

Adding to their plight, the pair faced extortion from both prisoners and staff, who demanded payment to prevent them from being moved to even more hazardous areas of the prison. Their desperate situation was exacerbated by a lack of basic legal resources, with systematic corruption within Guinea's justice system hindering their attempts at release. Guinea's political landscape, characterised by a military junta and strained international relations, only complicated diplomatic negotiations for their liberation.

After months of prolonged court hearings, they were released on bail but remained trapped in Guinea without their passports for a subsequent 42 days. Their harrowing journey finally concluded upon their return home, punctuated by endless gratitude to their families, supportive MPs, and staff at the British Embassy, who played pivotal roles in advocating for their release. Liz Saville Roberts MP expressed her relief at their return, remarking on the ordeal as a "nightmare" for both the men and their loved ones.

Reflecting on how ordinary circumstances can turn catastrophic, Mr Perham lamented the life events he missed, including his young daughter's first steps and words, moments that will never come again. His profound sense of loss resonates not only with their individual stories but also highlights the broader implications of inadequate detention conditions and the international community's ongoing responsibility to address such human rights violations, particularly in countries where political instability prevails.

In light of this case, it becomes clear that urgent reforms are necessary in both Guinea's prison system and broader legal framework. Historical perspectives indicate a continuity of colonial-era practices impacting the current treatment of detainees, shaped by a landscape that has failed to evolve to respect the fundamental rights of individuals. As international scrutiny grows around detention practices, the experiences of Mr Inch and Mr Perham serve as a harrowing reminder of the human cost of systemic failures within a justice system in dire need of reform.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14748355/100-nightmare-days-hellhole-African-jail-two-British-men.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/08/22/perverse-side-things/torture-inadequate-detention-conditions-and-excessive-use)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14748355/100-nightmare-days-hellhole-African-jail-two-British-men.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/08/22/perverse-side-things/torture-inadequate-detention-conditions-and-excessive-use), [[3]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/comparative-studies-in-society-and-history/article/abs/guineas-political-prisoners-colonial-models-postcolonial-innovation/5CAEA02986DEF4DD6693608454E00BA1)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14748355/100-nightmare-days-hellhole-African-jail-two-British-men.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/comparative-studies-in-society-and-history/article/abs/guineas-political-prisoners-colonial-models-postcolonial-innovation/5CAEA02986DEF4DD6693608454E00BA1), [[6]](https://www.mronline.org/2009/01/27/torture-at-angola-prison/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14748355/100-nightmare-days-hellhole-African-jail-two-British-men.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/08/22/perverse-side-things/torture-inadequate-detention-conditions-and-excessive-use), [[3]](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/comparative-studies-in-society-and-history/article/abs/guineas-political-prisoners-colonial-models-postcolonial-innovation/5CAEA02986DEF4DD6693608454E00BA1)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14748355/100-nightmare-days-hellhole-African-jail-two-British-men.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/08/22/perverse-side-things/torture-inadequate-detention-conditions-and-excessive-use), [[7]](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2017/10/23/episode-9-of-the-constitutional-podcast-fair-punishment/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14748355/100-nightmare-days-hellhole-African-jail-two-British-men.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/08/22/perverse-side-things/torture-inadequate-detention-conditions-and-excessive-use> - This Human Rights Watch report details the use of torture, inadequate detention conditions, and excessive use of force by Guinean security forces. It highlights systemic abuses within the country's prison system, including overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and physical abuse of detainees. The report underscores the urgent need for reforms to align Guinea's detention practices with international human rights standards.
3. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/comparative-studies-in-society-and-history/article/abs/guineas-political-prisoners-colonial-models-postcolonial-innovation/5CAEA02986DEF4DD6693608454E00BA1> - This academic article examines Guinea's political prisoners, analyzing colonial models and postcolonial innovations. It discusses the evolution of political imprisonment in Guinea, highlighting the persistence of colonial-era practices and the development of new forms of political repression. The study provides a comprehensive overview of the historical and contemporary challenges faced by political detainees in Guinea.
4. <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/publications/2020-annual-report-of-the-prison-environmental-justice-project/> - The 2020 Annual Report of the Prison Environmental Justice Project provides an overview of environmental conditions in U.S. prisons. It highlights issues such as inadequate sanitation, exposure to hazardous materials, and lack of access to clean water. The report emphasizes the need for systemic reforms to address these environmental injustices and improve the health and safety of incarcerated individuals.
5. <https://www.propublica.org/article/lawmakers-refused-to-increase-an-infamous-prisons-funding-then-chaos-erupted> - This ProPublica article investigates the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman, detailing its deteriorating conditions due to underfunding. It describes overcrowding, inadequate medical care, and unsanitary living conditions. The piece underscores the consequences of neglecting prison infrastructure and the urgent need for legislative action to address these systemic issues.
6. <https://www.mronline.org/2009/01/27/torture-at-angola-prison/> - This article discusses the systemic torture at Angola Prison, detailing testimonies from inmates about beatings, sexual assault threats, and inhumane treatment. It highlights the culture of abuse within the prison system and the challenges in addressing these human rights violations. The piece calls for accountability and reforms to protect the rights of incarcerated individuals.
7. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2017/10/23/episode-9-of-the-constitutional-podcast-fair-punishment/> - This episode of The Washington Post's 'The Constitutional' podcast explores the history and conditions of the Parchman Farm prison in Mississippi. It discusses the brutalities suffered by inmates, including beatings, solitary confinement, and inadequate living conditions. The podcast provides historical context and personal accounts, shedding light on the systemic issues within the prison system.