

FACTSHEET

Preparing for release

Prisoners Abroad89 – 93 Fonthill Road
London, N4 3JH, United Kingdom

Tel 020 7561 6820 Fax 020 7561 6821

info@prisonersabroad.org.uk www.prisonersabroad.org.uk

Charity Number 1093710



Even if you have only just been arrested, or your earliest possible release date is a long way off, there are aspects of release which will require some preparation or thought on your part. Returning to the UK following imprisonment can be a difficult and stressful experience. If you not have lived there for many years you may be leaving behind your family and your familiar way of life. On the other hand, if you are returning to your family in the UK, you may have to begin the process of re-establishing relationships. This factsheet covers a few of these issues of preparation for release. Prisoners Abroad has produced a number of factsheets dealing with issues and problems which may arise on your return to the UK. For copies, contact us or visit our website.

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1 Deportation, expulsion and country bans

Prisoners who are detained in a country where they are considered foreign nationals are normally required to leave the country when they get to the end of their sentence. You may have been resident there for a number of years before you were detained but if you are not a national of that country, a deportation or expulsion order is likely to be imposed.

- In the case of **deportation**, the prisoner is expected to make arrangements (with the help of their relevant consulate or embassy) to return to their country of origin, usually by airline.
- In the case of **expulsion**, the prisoner is expected to leave the sentencing country of their own accord. They may do this by organising a flight back to their country of origin, or by entering into a neighbouring country.

2 Returning to the country of imprisonment

The deportation or expulsion order is usually accompanied by a ban from returning to that country. The length of the ban varies according to the country imposing the ban, but sometimes may extend to a lifetime ban. You will need to check with your lawyer or with the consular staff how long the ban imposed is likely to be. This information is also sometimes included in the document received from the court when a prisoner is first sentenced. You will also need to bear in mind that, in most cases, returning to a country from which you have been banned is a criminal offence punishable by a further sentence. Again, if you have been living in that country for a number of years, you will seriously need to take into account the possibility that, once you have been deported or expelled, you may not be able to return.

3 Organising flights back to the UK

Prisoners who are to be deported after the end of their sentence are often asked to pay for their own airfare for the return journey to the UK. Some countries (such as the USA) will cover the cost of the flight, but in many places, it is the prisoner or their family who are expected to pay.

It is important to find out as soon as possible whether this will apply to you, as the process can take a long time and you will need plenty of notice to make the necessary arrangements.

In some cases (Thailand, for example), prisoners who have completed their sentence but do not have sufficient funds for the return flight are transferred to an immigration detention centre where they will stay until the money can be raised. General conditions and food provision in immigration detention are often worse than in the prisons, so it is advisable to try and avoid having to spend time here after your sentence has finished.

Prisoners Abroad suggests pursuing the following options well before the end of your sentence:

- If you had a return ticket it is worth making enquiries with the airline to find out if they will agree to revalidate it. The major airlines such as British Airways and Air Jamaica are perhaps more likely to do this (since government ministers called on airlines to do this more often in summer 2001) but smaller budget or last minute deals with airlines are less likely to revalidate tickets. However, the decision is often dependent on whether there are likely to be any spare seats on the plane, and if it is a busy time of year for the airline they will not normally consider this at all. You will not be able to revalidate your return ticket if you made the outward journey more than 12 months previously. Charter airlines do not revalidate tickets at all.
- If there is no chance of revalidating a ticket and you cannot pay the airfare, you should write to any possible family members and friends to ask for help.
- If you are unable to get in contact with relatives or friends, you should make a list of family members and friends who could be asked to contribute and give

this to the British consular staff. The FCO will then make enquiries to find out if these relatives or friends can give some money towards the cost of the ticket. The family members/friends should be asked as early as possible during the sentence if they can start raising funds.

- If family or friends cannot help raise the money to help with the cost of the airfare, there are various options, such as relatives or friends agreeing to save a part of the cost over a period of time or getting a loan.
- The FCO will only consider contributing to or covering the expense of repatriating British nationals in very exceptional circumstances, such as if you require urgent medical treatment. In these cases you will be asked to sign an Undertaking to Repay, which means that the FCO will withhold your passport until you have paid the money back. The decision is always referred to senior management. It is important for to know that proper ID is necessary to claim welfare benefits in the UK, therefore in these cases where the FCO withholds a passport it could potentially cause problems later with resettlement.

Please note that Prisoners Abroad cannot help with the cost of airfares back to the UK.

4 Preparing for return to the UK

It is important for you to try to do some preparation for your resettlement prior to your release. Having identification and information about yourself helps with establishing welfare benefit claims and also accommodation. Here is a checklist to help you:

- Contact the casework team at Prisoners Abroad to inform them of your likely release date and to request an Initial Needs Assessment form.
- Contact your local British Consul to talk over the release process and travel arrangements.
- Make sure you talk to the prison authorities and the Consulate about obtaining a full passport for travel and for identification purposes on return.
- Get together any other forms of identification (especially if it includes a photograph) you may have e.g. Driving Licence and Birth Certificate.
- Obtain copies of any official documentation that maybe available concerning any health problems, drug or alcohol problems or treatment programmes you may have undertaken.
- Try to bring as much money as you can with you, as this will help you during the initial days of your release.
- Check with any relatives or friends in the UK to see if they can offer you any temporary help e.g. a place to sleep for a few days.

We understand that some of the above may be very difficult or even impossible for you to do, but the more you can do the easier things will be on your return.

5 How Prisoners Abroad Resettlement service can help you

When you make contact with Prisoners Abroad following your release, you will be allocated a keyworker. If you arrive in London and come to Prisoners Abroad for direct assistance, your keyworker will conduct an initial assessment to find out about your particular needs. We will then ask you to engage in a plan of work to begin your resettlement. (Please note that you will need to keep appointments and follow your action plan or we may not be able to offer you help) If you are returning to another part of the country, we can advise you by telephone and assist with writing support letters for you and finding services in your area that may be able to help.

The service we provide offers:

- Advice and Assistance with finding emergency accommodation
- Emergency Grants (dependent on individual circumstances)
- Advice on Welfare Benefits
- Referrals to appropriate agencies offering specialist help e.g. with medical or drug problems
- The opportunity to talk through experiences, concerns or worries with your keyworker

We also offer use of:

- a computer
- temporary luggage storage
- shower facility

We can only offer a resettlement service to prisoners who are in contact with us before they arrive back in the UK. If you would like us to help you when you come back please make sure that you get in touch with us at the earliest opportunity. Please be aware that Prisoners Abroad staff are not able to meet you at the airport when you arrive in the UK.

If you require this leaflet in a large print format, please contact us. Our details are below.

Tel: 020 7561 6820

+44 20 7561 6820 from outside the UK

Email: info@PrisonersAbroad.org.uk

Mail: Prisoners Abroad, 89-93 Fonthill Road, London
N4 3JH, United Kingdom