



Patrick Vernon and, far left, immigrants arrive on the Empire Windrush in 1954

'Prime Minister's Windrush apology doesn't go far enough'

BY KIRSTY PURNELL
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The instigator of the petition demanding an amnesty for Windrush immigrants is calling on Theresa May to make a public apology for the debacle.

Patrick Vernon, director of Brixton-based organisation Black Thrive, said the Prime Minister's apology to Commonwealth leaders did not go far enough.

Mr Vernon, whose parents arrived from Jamaica in the 1950s, is demanding Mrs May meet affected families personally.

The petition had gathered 170,681 signatures at the time of going to press, and will be debated in Parliament on April 30 having surpassed the 100,000 backers to spark a debate.

Mr Vernon has also set up the

Justice for Windrush appeal to crowdfund costs for people who need legal advice.

Mr Vernon said: "Even though she's apologised to Caribbean leaders, she's not done an apology to the families affected. She needs to go out and meet the families affected and apologise, as she did with Grenfell."

"These individuals were brave enough to share their stories and without them the Government wouldn't be reviewing the situation as they are. The impact on people has been tremendous. Imagine you've been here your whole life and you're deported to a country you have never known. Your children and family are here."

The difficulty that Windrush migrants face is that they cannot prove they are legally here, which means some have been deported, denied healthcare, fired from jobs

and had their benefits stopped.

They cannot prove their right to remain because the Home Office did not keep a record of those granted leave to remain, nor did they issue any paperwork.

In 2010, the Home Office destroyed the landing cards belonging to Windrush migrants, consigning a vital piece of evidence to the dustbin.

A Home Office task force was set up in response to the outcry, and is looking at 113 cases.

Lambeth Law Centre director Michael Tamoky said that before this week, his team had already helped four Windrush arrivals prove and secure a right to remain.

It has supported 12 others with gathering documentation in order to prove their right to be here.

He said: "I knew there were individual cases but I didn't realise the severity of it until people started

getting deported.

"The community already has enough to deal with. I didn't realise the Home Office would stoop so low."

Lambeth Law Centre will be working with Diaspora Support Network on a project to help Commonwealth citizens prove and obtain right to remain.

Black Cultural Archives plans a community event on May 6 where information and advice on getting help will be provided.

Windrush deportations and documentation issues will be debated by Parliament on April 30.

A Facebook group has been set up to invite supporters of the petition to gather in Parliament Square at <https://www.facebook.com/events/186644592137225>.

The petition can be signed at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/216539>.

Brixton has been the heartbeat of London's Afro-Caribbean community since the HMT Windrush first docked on the south coast in 1948.

So it has been profoundly affected by the Home Office's threat of deportation for people who cannot prove they are able to live here – even though that Government department, in 2010, approved the destruction of its own records of their legal arrival.

Home Secretary Amber Rudd has apologised to many Afro-Caribbean citizens – a large portion of them in South London – who were harassed by immigration staff who claimed legitimate residents were living in the UK without any documentation.

Many have been working in the UK and raising children and grandchildren here for decades.

Windrush Square in Brixton was given that name in 1998 – the 50th anniversary of the Windrush's arrival – to recognise the important contribution the Afro Caribbean community has played in the area.

Some first made their homes in makeshift shelters in the 1950s and many were housed in disused Underground tunnels under Clapham High Street. The nearest labour exchange was in Brixton, which has led to the happy accident of a big influx of West Indian culture in Lambeth.



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