

**17 MAY 2005 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
VERDICT AT INQUEST INTO DEATH OF ASYLUM SEEKER**

Today the jury at the inquest into the death of Elmas Ozmico returned a verdict of natural causes.

The two week inquest heard disturbing evidence about the lack of care and medical attention given to asylum seeker Elmas Ozmico and her distressed state as she entered the UK having travelled from Turkey stowed away in the back of a lorry.

Shazia Khan, solicitor for the family said: "Elmas Ozmico required medical attention on her arrival into the UK. Key immigration personnel admitted that they failed to follow guidelines set on accessing medical attention and that there were at least five missed opportunities to dial for an ambulance. Following the death of Elmas Ozmico the Home Office conducted an inquiry into the circumstances of her death. This report remains an unpublished document, yet recognised failures by the immigration service in providing medical attention to Elmas and that 'missed opportunities' inherent within the system were apparent. None of the above conclusions from the Home Office report were drawn to the jury's attention by the Coroner nor were they provided with a copy of the report.

One of the leading UK experts on death by shock stated that if Elmas had been taken to hospital earlier her life could have been saved. The jury's verdict today does not reflect any of the above."

Deborah Coles, Co-Director of INQUEST, said; "This inquest has heard deeply disturbing evidence about the lack of humanity afforded to an asylum seeker in dire need of medical care. The Home Office report into the death must now be published and the lessons must be learnt in order to avoid future deaths."

Milena Buyum, Vice Chair of NAAR, said; "We are appalled at this verdict. Mrs Ozmico's husband and her two young children who were travelling with her are naturally devastated that the responsibility of the authorities, in particular the immigration service and the police, was not acknowledged by the jury. We are outraged that, although some of these failings were clearly accepted by in particular the immigration service, they were not taken into account in the verdict. The National Assembly Against Racism will continue to support Mrs Ozmico's family in their quest for establishing the truth of how an otherwise healthy woman came to lose her life in such tragic circumstances."

Notes to Editors

Key evidence that emerged from the inquest is as follows.

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- That Immigration Officers took the view that Elmas Ozmicic was “unable to walk” and had a “wound in leg” and there were missed opportunities to dial 999 and request an ambulance;
- Evidence that Immigration Officers clearly failed to follow both PMI and Port of Dover guidelines on access to medical attention/calling ambulances;
- It was not until she was placed in the care of Migrant Helpline workers that an ambulance was called to take her to hospital;
- There was no doctor available within the port vicinity despite being the largest port in England;
- Evidence from both surgeons at the William Harvey Hospital as well as medical experts said that the earlier the intervention, the higher the likelihood of survival for someone suffering from Necrotising Fasciitis;
- The evidence of Professor Geddes stated that if Elmas Ozmicic had been conveyed to hospital earlier, she would, on the balance of probabilities, have survived.

Note to editors:

INQUEST is the only non-governmental organisation in England and Wales that works directly with the families of those who die in custody. It provides an independent free legal and advice service to bereaved people on inquest procedures and their rights in the coroner’s courts.

INQUEST has been working with the National Assembly Against Racism who raise awareness against all forms of racism in British society. NAAR, who referred Elmas Ozmicic’s case to INQUEST has been supporting Elmas’ husband Haci Pekkelo since her tragic death.

Leading INQUEST lawyers group barrister Ian MacDonald QC assisted by Sadat Sayeed (2 Garden Court Chambers) and solicitor Shazia Khan (Christian Khan solicitors) represented the family.