



CHURCHES' REFUGEE NETWORK

An informal network of

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland



No. 7 (04/06)

CHURCHES' REFUGEE NETWORK THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE *A PLACE OF DANGER, PLACE OF SAFETY*

This conference will reflect on and affirm the prophetic mission of the churches' commitment to be on the side of all those who are forced to leave their homelands for political, economic and environmental reasons.

Keynote speakers for the day will include Anne Owers (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons), Jane Aspden (UNHCR) and Canon Nicholas Sagovsky (Canon Theologian, Westminster Abbey).

As in the past the conference programme will offer opportunities to network, exchange views on advocacy, service and good practice in support of refugees and asylum seekers. There will also be workshops to explore policy issues in depth and an opportunity to pray together.

Saturday 20th May (11am – 4.45pm)

Holy Apostles Church Hall

47 Cumberland Street, London SW1V 4LY

For registration and other details contact: Wendy Cooper

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NATIONAL NEWS

New Asylum Act receives Royal Assent

The *Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006* passed on 30th March 2006 is aimed at implementing many of the measures outlined in the Government's five-year plan on a new asylum and immigration system. The provisions of the Act do not come into force immediately but will be brought in by commencement orders. No information on timescales is yet available. No further amendments were made after the Lords' Third Reading and no updated Bill was published.

Copies of the Act are available at www.opsi.gov.uk

Inter alia the Act contains late amendments introduced in the Lords' including Clause 43 which deals with support for refused asylum seekers who are unable to return home because of safety risks or a personal medical condition (e.g. pregnancy) also known as Section 4 support.

Clause 43 provides for tighter border controls, fast-track asylum procedures, measures to control and detain asylum seekers, counter terrorism measures that could exclude asylum seekers, and that those on Section 4 support not be provided for in cash but in vouchers (see report below).

Although not in the Act, the government seems keen on replacing 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' to those granted refugee status with temporary protection for five years after which the status would be reviewed with a view to removal if conditions in the country of origin prove conducive for return.

More information is available from the Refugee Council at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk



New asylum system to be implemented

Following the enactment of the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act, the Home Office claims the development of a new asylum system is gaining momentum. Ministers say they will consult the UNHCR before implementing a new asylum system in September this year. The new system is expected to see almost 30% of all asylum seekers processed under a new 'fast track' scheme. A new category of 'late and opportunistic claims' will also be introduced with some cases being decided within two weeks. Refused asylum seekers facing removal may be subject to electronic tagging, tighter reporting requirements or detention. Other changes include a case-manager being assigned to each asylum seeker. After the initial screening interview the immigration officer will place each asylum seeker into one of nine asylum routes or segments that will determine how quickly the claim will be decided, the right to legal advice and where asylum seekers will be housed. Ministers hope that in this way the initial decision making system can be improved. Churches and NGOs, especially the Refugee Council, have warned that on paper the system may look good and operable but in practice it may not work that way: "...justice and speed can pull in different directions. To work properly the new model will need well-trained staff, legal advice on the spot and a more open mindset," a Refugee Council statement said.

More information is available at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

The return of vouchers for asylum seekers

Facing criticism with regards refused asylum seekers, particularly families, who are left destitute, the Home Office intends to bring back the policy of 'subsistence by use of food vouchers' instead of the current cash payments. Vouchers for subsistence were first introduced for all asylum seekers in 2000, but the policy was dropped in the face of widespread criticism from Churches, trade unions, NGOs and opposition from within the Labour Party. Much of the criticism was centred on the fact that vouchers were discriminatory and dehumanising of vulnerable people. The policy is being brought back for Section 4 claimants i.e. those whose asylum applications have been refused but continue to remain in the country because the government recognises that they

cannot be returned either due to safety risks, a medical condition (e.g. pregnancy) or are awaiting return documents. Section 4 support consists of full-board accommodation or a weekly allowance of £35 for food and toiletries. Until last year over 5,000 asylum seekers were in receipt of such support.

More information is available at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Coalition Says No to Detention of Children

More than 2,000 children are detained every year in the UK warned a coalition of British NGOs, including Save the Children, Bail for Immigration Detainees and the Refugee Councils of Britain, Scotland and Wales. This is the start of a new campaign to stop the practice of detaining children for immigration purposes. According to research conducted by Save the Children, detention causes children distress and depression, it creates behavioural changes, confusion and physical health problems, it disrupts a child's education and runs contrary to various international standards (the UK has entered a reservation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child subjecting children to the immigration law). This campaign has the support of many church bodies, including the Office for Refugee Policy of the Catholic Bishops' Conference.

Support the campaign at www.noplaceforachild.org

Meanwhile, a report published on 5th April by Ann Owers, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, on the short-term holding facilities at Heathrow, Calais Seaport and the Channel Tunnel terminal at Coquelles, severely criticised conditions in these centres describing them as "treating people like parcels". These centres were used to keep asylum seekers for up to 36 hours, and last year only 17% were granted permission to enter the UK. The report says that it fears safety problems as the facilities are completely unsuitable for detained families and young children. It appears that staff were unaware of health and safety or child protection laws, and whether British or French law applied at these facilities. The report issued 49 recommendations for improvement.

Source: *Independent Newspaper* 06.04.06



Trafficking in Human Beings: Operation Pentameter to catch traffickers

The police have launched a major initiative called *Operation Pentameter* to fight human trafficking, involving law enforcement agencies, the travel industry and the Foreign Office. This initiative is also aimed at raising awareness among victims and those who encounter trafficked women arriving in the UK. Port and airport workers will be encouraged to report any suspicious activity and ask women, particularly those arriving from the Balkans and Eastern Europe, about their well-being. The police would like men who visit brothels to contact them in confidence if they suspect women have been forced into prostitution. Currently, the Home Office funds just one accommodation centre for trafficked women, the London-based Poppy Project, run by Eaves Housing for Women. On 10th April Home Office Minister Paul Goggins announced a new government grant of £2.4m to the Poppy Project to extend its work to include outreach and other work. The government has just completed a period of consultation to elicit views on its proposed National Plan to tackle human trafficking, to be launched later this year.

The government recently ratified the 'UN's *Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children*'. This is welcome but it is important to note that the Protocol is heavily qualified, for example, it allows governments the option of "considering implementing" measures on protection and support of victims of trafficking in "appropriate cases" (Art. 6, 7 and 8). Most NGOs and churches believe that it would be more helpful for victims of trafficking if the government were to sign the Council of Europe's *Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*, because this convention expands the scope of the Palermo Protocol to include a 30-days compulsory period of recovery and reflection for all victims of trafficking. Delegates at the recent UNISON women's conference also called on the UK government to sign the Council of Europe's *Convention*, which has been signed by every EU Member State except the UK and France. UNISON delegates were urged to identify the scale of the problem in their areas and report back to the union.

For more information, visit the Home Office at www.homeoffice.gov.uk or CHASTE (Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking across Europe) www.chaste.org.uk or Sr Ann Teresa at the Medaille Trust (supported by the Conference of Religious) on 02380 233572 or the Anti-Slavery Society at www.antislavery.org

Managed migration scheme overhaul

Low skilled workers from poor countries will face an impossible task getting to the UK to work under the new managed migration scheme announced by the Home Office on 7th March. A new points-based system will give priority to young workers of all nationalities with highly sought after skills in such areas as medicine, science and IT. The new system will make it difficult for temporary migrants from outside the EU, who have previously been able to work legally in Britain on work permits, to come legally to the UK. The new system described by the Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, as "*the most significant change to managed migration in the past 40 years*", will have a five tier immigration structure: Tier 1 – highly skilled (scientists and entrepreneurs); Tier 2 – skilled workers (nurses, teachers and engineers); Tier 3 – low skilled (filling temporary labour shortages e.g. construction workers etc.); Tier 4 – students; and Tier 5 – youth mobility and temporary workers (e.g. musicians, working holiday makers etc.). The new scheme was described by many NGOs as based on a rather mechanical view of migration, the assumption being that migration can be completely controlled and directed by governments. A recent Home Office Study, *Employers' Use of Migrant Labour 04/06*, confirmed that UK employers place considerable reliance on low skilled workers. Under the new scheme there may well be a steady supply of low skilled labour from the new EU Member States or from other East European states, but this will most probably be at the expense of the low skilled from poor countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America – an unfortunate development which removes remittances income for many poor countries. According to World Bank remittances today are around \$300bn and are funds that play a major role in poverty reduction in poor countries.

For more information visit the Institute for Public Policy Research at www.ippr.org.uk or the Home Office at www.homeoffice.gov.uk



Public Accounts Committee:

too many 'illegals' remain in the UK

On 13th March the Public Accounts Committee reprimanded the government on its failure to detain and remove more refused asylum seekers. According to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) refused asylum seekers who continue to remain in the UK stand at between 155,000 and 283,000. The Public Accounts Committee pointed out that this figure may be an underestimation. They warned that given current levels of removals it would take another 10-18 years to clear the backlog. On the other hand the Committee also dismissed the Conservative Party's proposal of detaining all asylum seekers as that would mean a vast expansion of the detention estate at costs of over £180m. Responding to the criticism, Immigration Minister Tony McNulty said that on paper removals may seem easy but in practice it "*is a difficult and complex task*". Maeve Sherlock, Chief Executive of the Refugee Council said that "*crack downs make for good headlines...they are not policy...a policy has to be effective, well-balanced and humane.*"

For more information on the Committee's report visit www.parliament.uk/pac and for the Refugee Council's response visit www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Zimbabwean refugees in legal limbo

NGOs have warned that Zimbabwean asylum seekers have been left in a "legal limbo" after the Court of Appeal effectively allowed the Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, to deport them. The government was challenging a ruling from October 2005 when the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal (AIT) ruled that it was unsafe to deport refugees to Zimbabwe and that refugee status should be given to anyone from that country. Three judges allowed the Appeal but following the Court of Appeal ruling, the cases of the individuals involved, known as AA and LK, will now be referred back to the AIT to be heard. A Refugee Council statement said that although the Home Office claims that it does not intend to begin forcibly returning refugees to Zimbabwe, the decision leaves a question mark over their future.

For more information, visit www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

REGIONAL NEWS – European Union

European Council:

new migration approach to Africa

On 15th December 2005, the European Union adopted a new migration policy framework for Africa and countries around the Mediterranean called "*Global approach to migration: Priority actions focusing on Africa and the Mediterranean*". This approach covers strengthening co-operation and actions between Member States vis-à-vis Africa; increasing dialogue and co-operation with African States; increasing dialogue and co-operation with neighbouring countries covering the Mediterranean; as well as questions of funding and implementation of projects to remove the "push" factors for migration and tackle illegal migration.

For more information, visit

<http://europa.eu.int/abc/doc/off/bull/en/200512/i1015.htm>

European Commission:

adopts roadmap on legal migration

On 21st December 2005 the European Commission adopted a '*Policy Plan on Legal Migration*' which touches on four areas for action viz. a legislative section to regulate the conditions of entry and residence of third country nationals for employment; actions and policies to encourage knowledge building and sharing of information on immigration; policies and funding projects aimed at the integration of Third Country Nationals with particular focus on labour market accessibility; and measures aimed at management and control of international migration flows particularly with the co-operation of sending countries.

For more information, visit www.europa.eu.int/index_en.htm

European Parliament

challenges asylum procedures directive

Following a decision of the Legal Affairs Committee of the European Parliament (EP), a formal application to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) was made to suppress sections of the asylum procedures directive. *Inter alia*, the EP calls for the severance of the Articles on '*safe countries of origin*' and '*super-safe third countries*' on several grounds, including that there has been a violation of the EC Treaty and non-respect of the duty of co-operation



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(i.e. the Council sought the opinion of the EP as it is obliged to do under the EC Treaty, but it subsequently ignored the EP). In its application, the EP argues that if suppression is not possible, the whole directive should be struck down. This directive, also known as the *Minimum Standards on Procedures for the Granting and Withdrawal of Refugee Status*, is one of the “harmonisation building blocks” towards the development of a common European asylum system. Other concerns of the UNHCR, churches and NGOs include the failure to properly guarantee basic rights such as to remain in-country pending appeals, to receive legal advice and to have access to a qualified and impartial interpreter etc.

For a summary of the directive debate search <http://register.consilium.eu.int>. Also search the European Council on Refugee and Exiles at www.ecre.org

Council of Europe: Roma entitled to asylum

The Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe drew special attention to the plight of the Roma in many European countries. In particular, he pointed out that many Roma are having difficulty accessing asylum procedures in Western European countries. He criticised the introduction of more restrictive asylum procedures in many West European countries mainly in response to the arrival of Roma asylum seekers from Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. He affirmed the right of the Roma to make lawful asylum claims on grounds of discrimination or failure of States to protect them against violence.

For more information, visit the Council of Europe website www.coe.int

European Churches respond to Integration Communication

In a joint statement churches in Europe welcomed the European Commission’s Integration Communication (18/04/06 – 2005/389) setting out the need for greater co-ordination of national integration policies and EU initiatives to strengthen social cohesion in the EU. The Churches’ statement stressed the importance of integration being a two-way process involving both new arrivals and the host societies.

One way to ensure the success of integration policies is to mobilise third country nationals and ethnic minorities in formulating and improving on current integration policies. The statement raised fundamental points towards the formulation of a common integration policy for the EU viz. equal rights for all legally resident citizens; close monitoring of the anti-discrimination directive’s transposition into EU Member States and its correct implementation; right to family reunification; right to speedy and efficient asylum and subsidiary protection decisions so as to afford refugees an early opportunity to integrate et al.

For more information, visit www.caritas-europa.org or www.cec-kek.org

Spanish Red Cross reports rising sea deaths

The Spanish Red Cross has said that since the beginning of this year more than 1,200 irregular migrants have drowned off the coast of Mauritania in attempts to get to Spain’s Canary Islands. More than 3,000 migrants have reached the Canary Islands whilst a further 1,000 were detained at sea. The Red Cross says that in the past the irregular migrants left Morocco for the Canary Islands but following a violent crackdown by the Moroccan and Spanish authorities in which 11 migrants died in attempts to climb barbed-wire fences for Ceuta and Mellilla enclaves, two new routes have opened up: one heading towards Libya where they try to reach Italy by sea and the other via Mauritania, which has now become a vast “staging point” for the Canary Islands.

For more information check the annual report of the Asociation Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucia 2005 on <http://www.statewatch.org/news/index.html>

Detention Camps: activists publish Euro-wide map

Migreurop, a coalition of NGOs, academics and individuals from different EU and North African countries has published an updated version of the map on detention camps for foreigners in the EU and Mediterranean countries. Readers will recall the earlier version of July 2004.

The updated map is available at <http://www.migreurop.org/IMG/pdf/carte-en05.pdf>



INTERNATIONAL NEWS

UNHCR attacks rich countries asylum curbs

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres, condemned rich countries' mean attitude to refugees, accusing them of "closing their doors to men, women and children fleeing persecution". The UNHCR confirmed that the number of asylum applications to rich countries fell sharply in 2005, confirming a four-year downward trend. According to the High Commission, the fall was mostly due to the restrictive asylum policies pursued by rich countries; a trend particularly stark in European countries such as the UK, Denmark and Germany. Applications in developed countries dropped by 16% to 336,000, the lowest since 1987, and an almost 50% drop from the numbers four years ago when it was 665,000. Fewer armed conflicts and large scale repatriation to countries such as Afghanistan reduced the number of refugees to nine million in 2004 compared to 18 million in 1992. Mr Guterres said these figures disproved talk in rich countries of "a growing asylum problem". He urged rich countries to focus greater energy on improving conditions for existing refugees rather than cutting numbers, noting that poorer countries were still hosting the majority of the world's refugees. There are, for example, 25 million internally displaced people (IDPs), in their own countries. The 1951 Refugee Convention does not protect them nor does the mandate of the UNHCR.

Nevertheless the UNHCR has been involved in an estimated 30 emergencies to assist the IDPs. If nothing else, the present Dafur conflict is forcing the world to once again confront the issue of IDPs, people effectively abandoned in their own countries and denied basic human rights, described by the UNHCR as "*the biggest failure of the international community*". IDPs are also the focus of the latest edition of the UNHCR's latest magazine REFUGEES – Vol. 4 No. 141.

For more information, visit www.unhcr.org for 'The State of the World's Refugees 2006.'

Theme for World Refugee Day 2006: HOPE

The sixth World Refugee Day, designated for 20th June 2006, will be marked by several high profile international events around the world involving the UNHCR High Commissioner António Guterres and its international and regional ambassadors. The theme of this year's World Refugee Day is HOPE – a reminder to the international community that asylum seekers are ordinary people in extraordinary situations, suffering wars, conflicts and persecution and that they "hope" to get protection in another country; they "hope" to return to their own country one day and if this is not possible they "hope" to start life anew in their adopted countries.

For more information, visit www.unhcr.org

Japan's unconscionable exclusion of refugees

Despite having ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention in 1981, Japan accepts very few refugees compared with other countries. The Japanese Ministry for Internal Affairs reports that between 1982 and 2004 Japan received 3,544 applications for protection, but it granted protection to only 330 applicants. In 2004 Japan only accepted 15 persons as refugees whilst the UK, for example, accepted 12,925.

Source: <http://zmagsite.zmag.org/curTOC.htm>

Australia to recruit overseas skilled workers

Australia is planning its biggest worldwide recruitment drive since the immigration campaigns of the 1950s, to fill over 20,000 skilled job vacancies. The government says that there are enormous shortages in the labour market, from doctors to carpenters, exacerbated by the fact that nearly a million skilled Australians have left the country to work abroad. Europe is regarded as a potential recruiting ground with a recruitment blitz planned for London, Amsterdam and Berlin. Bangkok, Manila and Seoul are also being considered. Europe, particularly the UK, appears to be the target, echoing the post-war immigration preference for Europeans. During that time more than one million Britons migrated to Australia under various Assisted Migration Schemes (e.g. if prospective migrants could raise £10 for their fare, the government paid the rest).



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Churches and NGOs have compared the government's recruitment of workers from abroad to its hard line attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers arriving mostly from the poor countries.

Source: www.guardian.co.uk/australia

US acts on migrant workers

The Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005 is now before the Senate, after clearing the House of Representatives in December 2005. This law, if enacted, will make 12 million undocumented migrant workers, the so-called 'illegals' who are about 5% of the workforce, aggravated felons i.e. criminals, subject to imprisonment and deportation with no access to appeals before deportation. Anyone who helps undocumented migrants will be liable to criminal prosecution as smugglers. However resistance to this proposal is growing. On 10th March more than 100,000 people marched in Chicago in opposition to the law. Church leaders of many traditions and pro-migrant NGOs spoke at marches and rallies held across the US in support of just immigration laws and demanded improved workers rights, progress in civil rights, family reunification and immigration law reform that would "define a path to citizenship for current undocumented and future immigrants to the US." Cardinal Roger Mahony used the first day of the Lenten season to call on all in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to fast, pray and press for humane immigration reform. He said that he was even prepared to ask his priests to defy legislation that would require churches to ask migrants for legal documents before providing assistance.

Source: www.latimes.com and *The Guardian* 20.02.06

CAMPAIGNS / RESOURCES / BRIEFINGS

Civil Society Review of the UK Asylum System – a new project initiated by South London Citizens, aimed at preparing the ground for a comprehensive, authoritative and independent review of the UK asylum system. This project builds on the experience of the inquiry into Lunar House completed last year. The Review, funded by the MB Reckitt Trust, with support of the Churches, is expected to last 18 and

Will conclude with recommendations to the political parties in advance of the next General Election. The Group hopes this will trigger long term political changes which can better serve persecuted peoples/and asylum seekers.

For more information contact Bernadette Farrell, NATCOM Co-ordinator, 112 Cavell Street, London E1 2JA or Bernadette.farrell@virgin.net

The Second World Social Forum on migration will be held in Madrid, Spain, from 22nd-24th June 2006.

For more information and to register, visit <http://www.fsmm2006.org/en/index.htm>

Touching the Margins: a three year project aimed at engaging and supporting disadvantaged young men in London, especially refugees, is now in its third year. A seminar was recently held for practitioners, policymakers and opinion formers to discuss the outcomes of the project and lessons to be learned. The findings were published in *Touching the Margins Report*, copies of which can be obtained by calling 020 7273 5353 or emailing d.kohli@workingwithmen.org

European Immigration and Asylum law: A one year training programme conducted by the Odysseus Academic Network begins in September 2006. The programme, which aims to provide participants with an in-depth understanding of the European Union's legal rules on immigration and asylum law, is designed to appeal to all who wish to acquire specialist knowledge in this area. The programme is based at the European Institute for European Studies in Brussels.

For more information, visit

<http://www.ulb.ac.be/assoc/odysseus/Certificate06.html>

Evening at Westminster Abbey for those caring for asylum seekers or refugees, Tuesday 2nd May from 6pm-9pm. The programme includes a period of quiet 6pm-7pm, then refreshment, networking and sharing of good practice 7pm-9pm. Guests may like to attend Evensong at 5pm before joining the programme. There will be no charge but admission is only through booking and numbers are limited to 60.



Contact Gwen Shaw, Projects Officer at the Abbey, on 020 7654 4823 or at gwen.shaw@westminster-abbey.org

Refugee Council's Comedy Night: No Laughing Matter, to be held at the Comedy Store on the Monday 22nd May is now open for booking. The evening will include contributions from Steve Gribbin, Hils Barker, Jeff Innocent and Ian Stone. Early booking is advised.

For more information, visit

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/Comedy/>

Migration, Citizens and the European Welfare State – A European Dilemma: This new book by Professor Stephen Castles, Director of Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre, together with two other Swedish academics, looks at current dilemmas of liberal anti-racist policies in European societies, particularly those facing migrants. They explore the discourse that is normally quite separate in social science: immigration and ethnic relations vis-à-vis the political economy of European welfare capitalism. The publisher is Oxford University Press.

For more information, visit <http://www.oup.co.uk/isbn/0-19-928402-4>

Asylum Support: A Practitioner's Guide to the EU Reception Directive by Anneliese Baldaccini (Specialist for the House of Lords EU Committee, formerly with JUSTICE and the Foreign Office). Practitioners advising asylum seekers can no longer ignore EU law. The EU Reception Directive, for example, is required under the Amsterdam Treaty to be transposed into UK law; in fact it is now already part of UK law. This book provides a basic idea of how EU law evolves, the minimum reception standards required of all EU Member States, and then critiques the Reception Directive itself. This is important for those advising asylum seekers to challenge domestic asylum support regulations which contravene or fall short of the Reception Directive.

To obtain copies, at £17 each with free p&p, call Justice on 020 7329 5100 or email admin@justice.org.uk

Another book also useful in this context is the Legal Action Groups, **"Support for Asylum Seekers – a Guide to Legal and Welfare Rights"** by Sue Williams, Stephen Knafler and Stephen Pierce, all in

The Deportation Machine: Europe, Asylum and Human Rights – a study from the Institute of Race Relations by Liz Fekete. It is said that this is the first Europe-wide study of the impact of deportations on the human rights of asylum seekers. It cites over 200 cases from around Europe. It discusses removals to war zones and to countries that practice torture, denial of humanitarian protection to some seriously ill and persecuted persons, children, unaccompanied minors etc.

For a copy priced at £10 call 020 7837 004 or order online at www.irr.org.uk

The Ethics and Politics of Asylum by Mathew J Gibney (ISBN 0521009375). A challenging book explaining why asylum has become such a highly charged political issue in the developed world. It also asks some difficult political and ethical questions about the responsibilities of rich countries towards those fleeing persecution, such as is it legitimate to place restrictions on the right to asylum and, if not, are there any qualifications to the right to asylum? The US, the UK, Germany and Australia come under particular attention. It gives some idea of how states can move towards a morally defensible response to refugees.

For more information, visit

www.cambridge.org/uk/catalogue/search.asp

The Annual Justice and Peace Conference will be held at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire, from 21st-23rd July on the theme of *"The desert will bloom – Scattering Seeds of Hope"*. Speakers and workshops, including one on working with asylum seekers, will focus on hopeful projects here and abroad.

For more information, call 020 7901 4864 or visit www.justice-and-peace.org.uk



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the legal profession.

To obtain copies at £10 each, contact LAG on 020 7833

7424 or email books@lag.org.uk

NEWS UPDATE: Removal Centres hunger strike spreads

Refugees held at Haslar removal centre in Portsmouth continued their hunger strike in protest at conditions at the removal centre, with children as young as 15 said to be refusing food. The hunger strike, which started on Easter Sunday, is the second in a removal centre in just over a week and campaign groups say it will spread to other centres throughout the UK if the authorities do not improve conditions at these centres. There are also reports that detainees at Tinsley House, Gatwick are also on hunger strike. The campaign group 'London No Borders' said the conditions at Haslar are "appalling" and that "people who have committed no crimes are being treated like criminals, locked up in some cases for years".

A Home Office spokeswoman confirmed that 125 out of the 130 detainees at Haslar are refusing food, but she said the protest was not linked to similar actions in other centres. "Detention is an essential element in the effective enforcement of immigration control, in particular, in support of our removals policy strategy," she said. Most NGOs would agree, nevertheless the Home Office should be reminded that the UNHCR's ExCom Conclusion 44 specifically states that international standards provide that "the detention of asylum seekers should normally be avoided and that insofar as it occurs, detainees should be able to challenge the lawfulness of the detention...and wherever possible, not be held in prison service accommodation". Furthermore NGOs and Churches have, in the past, called on the government to ensure that alternative non-custodial measures, such as reporting requirements, are always considered first before resorting to detention and to statutorily prohibit the detention of vulnerable people such as torture victims, pregnant women, children, those with serious medical conditions and the elderly.

For more information <http://Indymedia.org.uk/en/2006/04/338929.html>

ERCE urges greater protection for refugees

The European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) which unites more than 80 NGOs across 30 European countries issued a strongly worded report (The Way Forward – An Agenda for Change) calling on European countries to improve refugee protection, have fairer asylum systems and improve integration opportunities. This report follows an equally strong report by UNHCR recently (see above).

For more information www.ecre.org

This Churches' Refugee Network Newsletter was prepared by:

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