



Churches Refugee Network Conference – 19 May 2007 (with Enabling Christians in Serving Refugees)

The CRN will hold its annual conference on the theme of "Down but not out: The needs of strangers". *Inter alia*, the conference will have inputs on the question of 'ethics and asylum', a campaign update on the regularisation of undocumented migrants and an exploration of the issue of health needs of asylum seekers in and out of detention. There will also be workshops and opportunities to network, share, worship and learn from each other.

For more information, contact: Wendy Cooper on 020 7916 8632 or email: wendy.cooper@urc.org.uk

Migrants Rally for the Right to Stay

Thousands of migrant workers staged a mass rally in London on 7 May, to demand the legal status to stay. The "Strangers into Citizens" campaign was joined by Church and Trade Union leaders, migrants and community groups and MPs, to call for a one-off 'earned amnesty' for an estimated 500,000 irregular migrants living in the UK. The colourful procession followed a Migrants Mass at Westminster Cathedral, and passed through Whitehall to rally in Trafalgar Square. The event marked the launch of the first broad-based campaign to lobby for a 'pathway into citizenship' through a two-year work permit for migrants who have been in the UK for more than four years. Campaigners say that regularisation would bring thousands out of a 'dehumanising limbo' and clear the asylum log-jams, bringing huge economic benefits to the state. Addressing the rally the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, called on the government and governments all over the world to treat migrant workers with justice and with dignity. Austen Ivereigh, the campaigns co-ordinator, pointed out that regularisation programmes had already been introduced in Spain, Germany and the US. Other speakers included Trade Union leaders Jack Dromey and Dave Prentis and Jon Cruddas MP.

For more information on the campaign, visit: www.strangersintocitizens.org.uk or call 020 7375 1658
Also see campaigns/resources section below.

NATIONAL NEWS

Trafficking victims to get UK protection

To coincide with the abolition of the slave trade, the UK has signed the Council of Europe's 2005 *European Convention on Action Against Trafficking*, designed to give victims, such as women sold into the sex trade, time to recover and decide whether they will help police prosecute their traffickers. All Church Groups and NGOs who had campaigned so hard on this issue agree that this is an important step on the road to eradicating trafficking in the UK. A statement issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales welcomed "this great step in ensuring that victims of this pernicious trade in people receive some protection when they escape their ordeal in the UK." All groups agree that when the government implements the Convention, it must do so quickly. Meanwhile, the government has also published, with the Scottish Executive, a national action plan to tackling trafficking, which will involve posting specialists teams at British ports, setting up telephone helplines for social workers, the police and immigration staff who come into contact with victims. There are an estimated 4,000 victims of trafficking working in prostitution in the UK - a figure

for the year 2003. It is believed that the problem has grown since then; another estimate puts the figure as high as 10,000 in London and the Midlands.

For more information, visit: www.homeoffice.gov.uk, www.chaste.org.uk or www.antislavery.org

Bishops' warning over Home Office split

Church leaders joined forces today in condemning plans to reorganise the Home Office, claiming it would lead to more asylum seekers falling victims to the Governments "increasingly draconian immigration policy". The letter to *The Times* said, "As Church leaders, we are profoundly concerned about the increasing risk to our nation's public and political life of the inhumane and imperfectly processed decisions that are likely to result from the rushed reorganisation of the Home Office... We fear that yet more upheaval in the Home Office may result in greater casualties among those suffering from the brutalities of the Government's increasingly draconian immigration policy." The Home Office is due to be split into two departments, the Ministry of Justice and the Borders and Immigration Agency. The letter was signed by the Bishops of Winchester, Durham, Guildford, Worcester



and Rev David Cornick of the United Reform Church.

Source: Hampshire Echo 14 April 2007

New Australian-style points-based immigration system starts in 2008

On 18 April 2007, the government unveiled the timetable for the start of the UK's tough new points-based 5-Tier immigration system. The announcement came as the Immigration Minister Liam Byrne was on a visit to Australia, to study that country's border controls. The new scheme, which will affect visas for those wishing to move to the UK, will be phased in from early 2008. According to the Home Office, "once in place, it will help with managing immigration more effectively, cutting down on abuse and cheating and ensuring that the most talented international workers are allowed to relocate to the UK." The new system also favours the most highly skilled and the most educated. All other workers would be expected to have a sponsor when they apply for a work visa. A new £20-million-backed network of Border and Immigration Agency officers will ensure all applications are accurate. The schedule: Tier 1: Highly Skilled including scientists and entrepreneurs, begins 2008; Tier 2: affects skilled workers with a job offer, such as nurses, teachers and engineers; Tier 3: low skilled and temporary workers; Tier 4: affects students to begin 2009; Tier 5 affects young people and temporary workers such as "working holiday makers", begins third quarter 2008.

For more information, visit: www.homeoffice.gov.uk or www.jcwi.org.uk

New Asylum Model (NAM) in operation with UNHCR blessing

Since April 2007, the Home Office has introduced a new process for dealing with asylum claims. What this means is that all asylum claims will be assigned one case officer throughout the determination process. This, the Home Office claims, with better training for case officers will ensure speedy and good quality decisions. However, the Home Office estimates that there are about 450,000 asylum claims that remain unresolved. The Home Office calls them 'legacy cases' i.e. asylum seekers who have not left the country, neither have they been granted settlement. The NAM is not expected to deal with such cases; instead a special Legacy Directorate within the Home Office will deal with them, with work to finish by 2011. The Directorate has warned that dealing with legacy cases

does not mean regularisation, as is commonly presumed by many NGOs. At the launch of NAM, Ms Bemma Donkoh, the UNHCR representative to the UK, welcomed the government's efforts to improve and streamline asylum procedures so that there is much closer and consistent contact between the asylum seekers and the case officer handling the case.

For more information, visit: www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Parliamentary Committee condemns 'forced destitution' of asylum seekers

Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights issued a report in late March 2007, criticising the asylum system as overly complex, poorly administered and offering inadequate information and advice about the support to which asylum seekers are entitled; in some cases denying all support to people who are desperate and destitute. The Committee condemned the significant increase in the detention of asylum seekers, and expressed serious concern about the detention of vulnerable people such as children, victims of torture, pregnant women and those with serious health problems. The Report provides several recommendations to improve the asylum procedure and the treatment of asylum seekers. But in a statement the Home Office said: "We simply do not think that it is right that those without any right to be in the UK should be given the right to work or access other services." Earlier in the week, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, following the Leeds Destitution Inquiry, called on the government "to change policy so as to allow asylum seekers to work and contribute to society rather than rely on precarious handouts."

For more information, visit:

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt/jtrights.htm or www.jrct.org.uk

Government climbs down on ESOL

On 8 March, Bill Rammell, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further Education and Higher Education, announced concessions to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) funding for refugees and asylum seekers. These include: a) asylum seekers after a wait of six months will be eligible for Learning and Skills Council funding; b) refused asylum seekers who cannot leave because of circumstances beyond their control and who are eligible for Section 4 support will receive funding for ESOL and Further Education. The Minister also announced that he is initiating a Cross Government Review to look at current activities and



responsibilities in support of asylum seekers and ESOL.

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

NGOs urge UK do more for Iraqi refugees

Ahead of the UNHCR special conference on the refugee situation in Iraq on 17 April, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Refugee Council wrote to the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, demanding action to alleviate the severe refugee crisis developing in and around Iraq. The NGOs demands included: UK extension of the support to countries in the region that are sheltering the majority of the Iraqi refugees; expand the options for resettlement to the UK, following the US example; follow the Swedish example and suspend all forcible removals to Iraq; and to offer a status that would entitle them to work or be supported. At the same time three former Iraqi interpreters for the UK Army, who were forced to flee to Syria after receiving death threats have also appealed to the British Prime Minister not to abandon them and thousands of other Iraqis refugees facing a bleak futures in neighbouring countries. On an average between 40-50,000 Iraqis are fleeing the country every month. The Home Office said that it is in discussion with the UNHCR about ways to respond within the existing 'Gateway Resettlement Programme' for some Iraqi refugees. No figures were provided. The EU Interior Ministers also known as the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council decided on 19 April, that there was no urgent need to accept more Iraqi refugees into the EU. Instead they proposed offering financial help to Iraq's neighbours who host refugees.

Source: Agence Europe, 23rd April or visit: www.unhcr.ch

REGIONAL NEWS – European Union

Berlin Declaration includes “fight against illegal immigration”

Under pressure from several EU countries, at the last minute the German EU presidency added a line about the EU desire to combat irregular migration to its Berlin Declaration marking the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty that founded the European Community (now EU). The final Declaration that was supposed to encapsulate the past achievements and future aspirations of the EU now reads: “we will fight terrorism, organised crime and illegal immigration together”.

Besides this reference, there were no other major changes made to the Declaration. The protection of refugees is not explicitly mentioned. However there was a vague commitment to “stand up for liberties and civil rights and also in the struggle against those who oppose them” to ensure “that people do not become victims of war, terrorism and violence”. When asked by the media as to how the EU was planning to carry out this promise, the EU Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner, Mr Franco Frattini, referred to the Regulation on the Rapid Border Intervention Teams (RABITs) operating under the auspices of the Border Management Agency, FRONTEX; the proposed European Patrols Network and the European Surveillance System; and more readmission agreements with migrants' countries of origin and transit. Meanwhile, Mr Frattini and Germany's Interior Minister, Mr Wolfgang Schäuble speaking at the opening of FRONTEX* talked about the launch of a “spring offensive” to stem the flow of “illegal immigrants” heading for Europe.** Mr Frattini said, “The demographic data indicates that migration is set to rise as the population of the 50 least developed countries is likely to double from 800 million in 2007 to 1.7billion in 2050. Mr Schäuble added that “monitoring the external borders had to be increased, not only because of the migratory pressures from the South but also from Eastern Europe.”

* FRONTEX co-ordinates all EU activities related to border security. Its role is likely to increase over the coming months, especially with the extension of the Schengen area planned for December 2007.

** According to Asociacion Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucia, a Spanish Human Rights Group “the number of verified deaths of migrants attempting the crossing from Africa to Spain tripled from 369 in 2005 to 1,167 in 2006, the real figure could be as high as 7,000.”

For more information, visit:

<http://europa.eu/rapid> or

http://www.eu2007.de/en/About_the_EU/Constitutional_Treaty/BerlinerErklaerung.html

European Commission sets forthcoming migration policy proposals for 2007

In late April 2007 the European Commission announced the following publications:

- a) A paper on the EU Global Approach to Migration, particularly on the links between the EU external relations vis-à-vis legal migration potentials, to be published on 16 May 2007;
- b) A Green Paper on Asylum – a report on Dublin II and Eurodac, a proposal for long-term residence for refugees and others in need



of protection and a proposal on sanctions for hiring illegal migrants, to be published on 6 June 2007; c) a proposal for the admission of highly skilled migrant workers and a possible legal status for all migrant workers, to be published on 25 September 2007. It has also been reported that the Portuguese Presidency in the second half of 2007 will initiate two programmes related to migration viz. the EU-Africa Summit (December 2007) and the Ministerial Conference on Migration as a follow-up to the Morocco and Libya Ministerial meetings (dates not specified for the latter).

For more information, visit: http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

The rise and rise of the 2005 Prum Convention

Finland is the latest EU country to sign the Prum Convention, thereby joining the five founding member states viz. Belgium, Germany, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands plus Austria and Spain. This Convention, often referred to as Schengen III, is aimed at closer collaboration on cross-border co-operation in combating terrorism, cross-border crime and irregular migration.

For more information see CRN Newsletter No 2 (02/07)

EU launches the Fundamental Rights Agency

On 1 March 2007, the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) was officially launched in Vienna, incorporating the existing EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). The new body has a consultative role tasked with monitoring human rights across the EU, gathering information, providing EU institutions with analysis and expert opinion on fundamental rights issues. Critics of the FRA, including Amnesty International, believe that it should not have been formed because one of its core functions is to enforce the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which formed part of the EU Constitution that was voted down by France and the Netherlands and the Charter's future therefore remains unclear. Critics also argued that there is a risk that the FRA would duplicate the activities of the Council of Europe's 46-strong human rights watch-dog founded in 1955. Mr Franco Frattini, the EU Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner however rejected the criticisms saying that the FRA "embodies the values rejected in the EU Constitution." He continued: "a Europe that refuses to embrace its values, the values of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, is a Europe condemned to lose." Meanwhile, the FRA has called on the EU to act speedily to remove the discrimination and disadvantages faced by the

Roma people in the EU. It also called for stronger EU-wide actions to combat racism.

For more information, visit: <http://fra.europa.eu>

Joint EU migrant deportations in full force

The Federal Interior Ministry of Germany hailed as a major success an EU deportation operation of 26 migrants on 25 April 2007, organised jointly with authorities from Spain, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Italy and the Czech Republic. The migrants were flown to Togo and the Cameroon from Düsseldorf airport. This is the fourth joint deportation within the framework of an EU funded project which actually began in September 2006. Since then it has removed 121 migrants from participating countries (Germany, Spain, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Italy, the UK, Malta, Austria, Czech Republic and Switzerland). Following the deportation the German EU Presidency issued a statement saying that it sees these deportations as steps towards a coherent EU Returns Policy and an important instrument in the fight against illegal immigration. There was particular delight in the participation of the new EU member States.

For more information, visit: www.eu2007.de/en/

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: relocation proposals

The UNHCR is considering relocating several of its administrative and support functions it currently carries out at its Geneva headquarters to new centres outside Switzerland. The services concerned are in the areas of human resources, financial and supply management; the aim is to ensure that services are located where they are most efficient, cost effective and nearer to places where they are needed. UNHCR considers that it has a moral obligation to keep its administrative costs to a minimum and to redirect as many of its resources to its protection and assistance programmes for refugees and other people of concern. The short list of potential locations includes two cities in Asia (Chennai and Kuala Lumpur) and two in Europe (Bucharest and Budapest).

For more information, visit: www.unhcr.ch



International Organisation of Migrants warns on human trafficking in Iraq

The IOM said that it is extremely worried about new patterns of labour exploitation and human trafficking that are emerging in Iraq. The IOM said that many workers are taken against their will to work in Iraq and others are falsely lured there by promises of well-paid jobs and onward migration. An IOM spokesman, Jean-Philippe Chaury, said the "once there they are forced to work under extreme conditions, working 16 hours a day, seven days a week in domestic servitude, doing menial jobs with no possibility of getting out. In some cases kept under lock and key or their passports are confiscated." Many of the victims are from developing countries especially from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Somalia and Ethiopia. IOM is working with the Iraqi government and consular authorities on ways to help the victims of trafficking.

For more information, visit: www.iom.int

UNHCR: Worldwide refugee numbers fall but Iraqi refugee numbers rise

According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees about 22,000 Iraqis applied for asylum in developed countries in 2006 - the largest number since the US-led invasion in 2003. This represents a 77% increase from the previous year, but it falls short of the 50,000 Iraqis who filed asylum claims in developed countries in 2002, the year before the invasion. The asylum figures would be even higher, if Iraqis fleeing abroad were able to reach Western destinations, said a UNHCR spokesperson William Spindler. Over two million Iraqis are hosted by Syria, Jordan and other countries of the Middle East and a further 1.9 million Iraqis are internally displaced. The sharp increase in asylum claims from Iraq contrasts with the general trend around the world, where asylum applications fell by 10%. Last year about 300,000 refugees applied for asylum in the 50 developed countries that UNHCR monitors, compared with 340,000 in 2005. UNHCR said that it was the fifth consecutive year that the refugee numbers had fallen, leading to a decrease of more than 50% over the five year period. The US was the top destination for asylum seekers in 2006, receiving 17% of all applications. However, per capita, the US only took in a third as many asylum seekers as European countries. France fell from top destination to second, followed by the UK.

For more information, visit: www.unhcr.ch

CAMPAIGNS / RESOURCES / BRIEFINGS

Independent Asylum Commission

As reported in previous CRN newsletters this is a citizen's initiative conducting a nation-wide review of the UK Asylum System. The best way to keep up with future dates for Commission Hearings and Roadshows and all the latest news and developments is to visit www.independentasylumcommission.org.uk or subscribe to its updates by emailing 'SUBSCRIBE' to chris@cof.org.uk

TELCO campaign for regularisation of the 'undocumented' continues

Telco's year-long campaign 'Strangers to Citizens', launched in November 2006, is set to continue following concrete support expressed at the National Day of Action and Celebration - justice for migrant workers in Trafalgar Square on 7 May 2007. The campaign will press the government hard to introduce a one-off limited regularisation of the thousands of undocumented migrants who have made new lives in the UK. The proposal is not unlimited, it is for those who meet certain criteria (proficiency in English, community ties, no criminal record) to be offered a two-year 'pathway to citizenship' during which they could work and pay taxes. Such regularisations have already been adopted in several EU countries, including Italy, France, Germany, Belgium with the latest being Spain.* Another aim of the campaign is to sensitise British society to the plight of undocumented migrants. *It was leaked to the media recently (reports not confirmed) that the Dutch Coalition Government has adopted a policy blueprint pledging to allow around 30,000 'illegal' immigrants who have been in the country for more than five years to acquire residency permits.

For more information, call 020 7375 1658 or visit: www.strangersintocitizens.org.uk

London Churches Refugee Network launches Refugee Fund

All are welcome to this open event, for the launch of the London Churches Refugee Fund. This is an ecumenical initiative to raise funds to assist destitute asylum seekers through Church-based bodies. The patrons include Rt Rev Bernard Longley, Rt Revd Peter Wheatley, Revd Roberta Rominger and Revd the Baroness Richardson of Calow.

For more information ring Geoffrey Duncan 020 7799 5000 or email geoffrey.duncan@urc10.org



European Union provides asylum and immigration training courses

The 7th Odysseus Network's Summer School on Immigration and Asylum Policy of the EU will take place at Brussels University from 2-13 July 2007. The two week programme will provide a comprehensive analysis of the EU's immigration and asylum policy from a legal point of view and include the most up-to-date policy developments emanating from the Council, Parliament and the Commission. There will be lecturers from all these EU institutions. In addition, there is also a one-year EU law programme on the same subjects.

For more information, visit:

www.ulb.ac.be/assoc/odysseus/Summer07UK.html

or for the one year programme, visit:

www.ulb.ac.be/assoc/odysseus/Certificate07.html

Refugees Study Centre (University of Oxford)

Trinity Term 2007 is underway and includes lectures, workshops and courses, the topics covered include migratory effects of underdevelopment; rereading detention and deportation in Europe; Palestinian refugees et al.

For more information email Dominique Attala at rscmst@geh.ox.ac.uk or visit www.rsc.ox.ac.uk

Enough! End the Israeli occupation, justice for Palestinians

National rally and demonstration on 9 June 2007, organised by the Enough Occupation Coalition which *inter alia* includes the All Party Parliamentary Group, Friends of the Earth, the Jewish Socialist Group, the Muslim Council of Britain, Pax Christi, Quaker Peace and Social Witness and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

For more information, visit: www.enoughoccupation.org

Churches Alert to Sex Trafficking Across Europe: Not for Sale Sunday – 20 May 2007

This is an opportunity to say that women, children and men are Not for Sale. A time to reflect, respond and start to make a difference in a world where women, children and young men are being commoditised - subject to abuse, privation, labour and sexual exploitation and violence. It is estimated that over 4,000 women are trafficked into the UK every year. CHASTE has evidence of over 80 young people who have been trafficked into the UK for sexual exploitation alone over the last three years.

For more information, email: notforsale@chates.org.uk or visit www.notforsalesunday.org

Book: From Outside In

This anthology of short stories, memoirs and poems, articulating the complex relationship of refugees and migrants to their adopted home: gratitude and appreciation mixed with alienation and pain caused by racism, societal arrogance and exclusion, could not be more timely given the 'charged political atmosphere' surrounding the debate on migration and asylum in the UK. Published in association with the British Council, edited by Nushin Arbabzadah, it also has an introduction by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown.

The book costs £11.99 and is available from Arcadia Books. Call 020 7436 9898 or visit: www.arcadiabooks.co.uk

National Day of Action in Defence of Asylum Rights – 19 May 2007:

The Tyneside Community Action for Refugees communiqué notes that up and down the country there have been being protests against the attacks on asylum rights from churches, NGOs, student groups, spontaneous 'uprisings' in Colnbrook, Yarlswood and community groups (Zimbabwean, Eritrean, Congolese). The communiqué suggests that it is time to give this protest movement a boost. The idea, said to be simple, is for each group to have their own local demands but to manifest it at the same time and in solidarity with each other. If your groups aim to do anything let the organisers know.

For more information, email tynesidecarn@yahoo.co.uk or visit: www.indymedia.org.uk

A Conference on 'People on the Move'

Organised by the South West Churches Regional Forum and chaired by Rt Rev Declan Lang, Bishop of Clifton, this conference will explore the various categories of people on the move, their impact on South West Britain and what Churches can do to respond. To be held on Wednesday 27 June 2007 at the Albemarle Centre, Taunton (10am-4pm) with lunch.

For more information, contact Vena Prater on 0117 955 7430

ECSR (Enabling Christians in Serving Refugees) is organising a National Conference on 8-9 September 2007 at the University of Sheffield on the theme: "Refugee Integration Reality Check".

For more information, visit: www.ecsr.org.uk or email admin@ecsr.org.uk or phone 020 8778 7788



The UK Borders Bill

This is expected to go to its Report Stage on 8 May 2007. The *Still Human Still Here* campaign is lobbying to amend Clause 17 of the Bill to end destitution of refused asylum seekers.

For more information, visit: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk or www.stillhuman.org.uk

Refugee Week 18 – 24 June 2007

This will have nationwide high profile events.

For more information on how to participate or contribute, visit: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

This Churches' Refugee Network Newsletter was prepared by:

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