

CHURCHES' REFUGEE NETWORK - ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Saturday 4th June 2011.

In response to Media comments on the House of Commons' Home Affairs Select Committee's report on the Immigration system, we state as follows:

1. Permission for the 161,000 asylum seekers (from the 'backlog' of 450,000 cases uncovered in 2006) to stay in the UK has been granted over several years.
2. Many of those 161,000 may have had good grounds for claiming sanctuary had their cases been properly assessed in the first place. We draw attention to the following facts.
3. Examination of many determinations by Asylum tribunals and Appeal courts reveals a 'culture of disbelief' prejudicial to those with a genuine claim to sanctuary.
4. Asylum can by law only be claimed from within the UK; by definition those entering the UK to seek sanctuary must needs enter illegally unless already here on some other grounds.
5. Few of those seeking sanctuary in the UK are aware of the precise legalities required for entry into the UK.
6. Many of those fleeing torture and/or rape by abusive regimes are not aware that this is a specific ground on which asylum can be claimed; if they fail to mention such deeply traumatic circumstances in initial interviews in UK, their claim is subsequently held to be "not credible" and that they are liars. Lying is a ground for refusing entry.
7. The numbers of those currently claiming sanctuary is a small proportion of the net ebb and flow of migration, and should be clearly distinguished from it and from the numbers of those overstaying visas. Sanctuary is a specific human right under the UN charter. The fact that net migration has risen, largely due to a fall in emigration from the UK, should have no bearing on the proper claim for sanctuary by those qualified for it.
8. Extreme reduction of the time taken to conclude individual claims for asylum can be prejudicial to proper consideration of genuine claims by people coming from deeply disturbed situations and who are themselves too traumatised to speak easily about what they are fleeing. Sanctuary seekers are further disadvantaged by the restrictions on legal advice available, and the paucity of its provision in many parts of the UK.
9. As wars and revolutions, together with natural disasters, affect an increasing number of countries, it is urgent that the European Union evolves an effective, just and humane way of sharing responsibility for aiding both those who have genuine grounds for sanctuary and also the greater numbers of people who can be classed as 'survival migrants', not travelling simply for economic betterment but in desperation for themselves and their families.

This statement was signed by the following:

Barbara Cottier, Linda Huggett, Susan Herman, Trish Bishop, Valerie Pope, Shari Brown, Peter Swales, Joan Faber, Anna Rowlands, Helmut Ogberi, Crystal Dickinson, Dianne Skerritt, Sarah Harland, Paul Fleetwood, Hasani Hasani, Handsen Chukaware, Margaret Baxter, Anne Elisabeth de Vuyst, Yvonne Coudurier, Grace Sotimrem, Judith Cravitz, Christopher Swyntippier, Yvonne Kassim, Rohine Rafferty, Lul Seyoum, Fleur Houston, Stephanie Jarro, Nicholas Coulton, Herlinde Lukuke, Adele Bomeme, Cecile Weta, Marie Sumbi, Makongo-Ntsheki, Saloti Karela, Josephine Gracia, Lorraine Mudemna, Catherine Gregory, Maggie Hindley, Caron Boulghassarl, Awnia Johnvictory, Dominic Joannou, James Conway, Bruce Stuart, Jackie McLoughlin MBE, Cilla Francis, Sally Wilkins, Frances Webber, David Uhura, Cecilia Taylor-Camaria, Anne Stollenberg, Catherine Ramos, Gealass Alklalefa, Gillian Allnutt.

Organisations represented:

Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, Southampton & Winchester Visitors Group, LewCAS, Rainbow Project (Diocese of Southwell & Nottingham), Restore (Birmingham), Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology, Migrant Resources Centre (Victoria), Yarls Wood Befrienders, Worth Abbey, Jesuit Refugee Service, Harvest of Grace Trinity Centre, Women for Refugee Women, Quaker, BZS, ACTSA, LRFC, Churches' Refugee Network, WAST, SWVG, St. Andrew United Reformed Church (West Kilburn), Balham Baptist Church, New Malden United Reformed Church and Thames Ditton United Reformed Church, Refugee & Migrant Network (Sutton), Detention Action, Asylum Welcome (Oxford), Catholic Bishops' Conference of England & Wales, Migrant Voice, the Medical Foundation (North East), National Board of Catholic Women.