



December 2021

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, Prime Minister and Minister for the Union
Cc: The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Secretary of State for the Home Office
Department

Dear Prime Minister,

Channel Crossings Deaths

We are writing as representatives of civil society, refugee and homelessness organisations, lawyers, social housing providers, trade unions, teachers unions, educational institutions and of faith and belief communities across the United Kingdom, who share common values of care, compassion and fairness.

We wish to express our grave concerns about the way this Government is handling its responsibilities under the International Refugee Convention of 1951, and how it has responded to last week's tragedy in the English Channel, where seventeen men, seven women - one of whom was pregnant - and three young children from Kurdistan drowned while trying to cross to Dover. What is happening now is a choice made by people.

The Refugee Convention enshrines the right to seek protection in a third country. The UK - like most other countries - has willingly undertaken a moral and legal commitment to help those in greatest need, in flight from persecution and abuse, in order that they can be safe and rebuild their lives.

But in contrast to the UK's proud history in refugee protection, this Government's response to recent tragedies has made clear that it is now prepared to stoke and pander to the xenophobia and anti-immigrant hatred of a small section of the population with extreme opposition to refugees, even to the point of leaving human beings to drown in the freezing waters of the Channel.

Your Home Secretary seeks to undermine sympathy for refugees by claiming 70% of Channel crossers are "economic migrants not genuine asylum

seekers.” That is false. Her own Department’s data shows that virtually all seek asylum. And looking at the figures for the top ten nationalities arriving in small boats, 61% of asylum seekers are granted it at the initial stage, and 59% of the rest on appeal. That means that well over 70% of those coming across the Channel in small boats are indeed genuine asylum seekers, and not ‘economic migrants’.

That is hardly surprising. Figures from the Refugee Council show that over 90% of people who arrive on boats are from refugee-producing countries, like Syria, Iran, Iraq and Yemen. These people are fleeing persecution and destitution, and the sea route from France is the only one open to them. The UK schemes in practice no longer exist. We have closed the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme, scrapped the Dubs child refugee scheme, and do not have an Afghan scheme up and running.

In the last 18 months, 3,187 Iranians crossed the Channel - the largest group by nationality. In that same period, just one arrived by the official route. How many came from Yemen, which is riven by civil war and famine, during these 18 months? None by the official route. Not one.

To quote Lord Kerr in the recent Housing of Lords Debate on Channel Crossing Drownings:

*“Mourning the dead has not stopped the UK Government from planning to break with the Refugee Convention. The Nationality and Borders Bill seeks to criminalise those who survive the peril of the seas and those at Dover who try to help them, and is in danger of wreaking murderous consequences for the relatively few who seek sanctuary here. This Anti-Refugee Bill does nothing to increase safe routes. With limited resettlement options, dangerous crossings are the only route for most people claiming asylum in the UK. Further, there is **no** evidence to support the Government’s claims that the changes proposed in the bill will undermine smuggling networks. Of course we can go down that road, and abandon our international reputation and responsibilities. But if we do, let us at least admit that what drives us is prejudice, and not the facts. Because the facts do not support a case for cruelty.*

The facts are that 90% of the world's refugees remain in their own region. Europe does not take its fair share of the world’s refugees, and nor does the UK. We are **not** the preferred destination in Europe. We are well down on the list.

Furthermore, overall UK refugee numbers are currently half of where they were 20 years ago. The reason that boat numbers are up is that people are being

driven more and more to these dangerous sea crossings. Our failure to provide a safe route makes us complicit with the people smugglers. They may make a profit, but our failure to intervene has led to innocent people drowning.

And let us not forget that it was above all UK Government policy that took human smuggling from being a little-known activity to a profitable criminal enterprise. In 1987, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd introduced legislation to fine airlines carrying undocumented passengers. This meant refugees could no longer take flights, because there is no such thing as a refugee visa. People began arriving via ships, lorries, caravans and people carriers. A series of tragedies scarred the next few years, in particular, that of 58 Vietnamese people who suffocated in an airless shipping container.

In 2000, the then Home Secretary Jack Straw and his Prime Minister Tony Blair extended Hurd's legislation to cover every means of transport. The owners of lorries, cars, vans, and trains carrying asylum seekers or migrants - wittingly or unwittingly - would be fined and risk confiscation of their vehicles. Blair's legislation closed off the last legitimate escape routes for tens of thousands of vulnerable people, bringing huge profits to criminals, and murderous consequences for those now forced to use traffickers to reach the UK.

Neither of these government measures stopped desperate people fleeing persecution and death. All that happened is that more people died.

And today the people smugglers are again rubbing their hands in glee as Western governments demand the sealing of borders. We understand that these criminals have no compassion for the plight of refugees, and do not care how many lose their lives. But surely we can expect more from the UK Government? Is it really the policy of this country to deny all responsibility, and stand by while human beings, men, women and children, drown in our seas?

Supporting people who need help is the right thing to do. Wherever we come from, we all have a right to feel safe.

As Prime Minister and Minister for the Union, we urge you to reconsider your approach. We call on you to withdraw the deeply flawed Nationality and Borders Bill currently going through Parliament, and instead introduce a humanitarian visa alongside safe routes to asylum in this country and allow refugees to safely rebuild their lives as part of our communities.

We look forward to your response.

Signed

Robina Qureshi	CEO	Positive Action in Housing
Sabir Zazai	CEO	Scottish Refugee Council
JOHN KERR	LORD KERR OF KINLOCHARD	HOUSE OF LORDS
Tam Dean Burn	Actor/Writer	
Felix Kupay	Chair	ENTRAIDE (MUTUAL AID)
Deborah Rea	Ind. vol. For disabled asylum seekers	partners with British Red Cross, Community care and immigration lawyers.
Amanda Sebestyen	Independent supporter	Central African Refugee Centre
Maria Wilby	Senior Caseworker	Refugee Action - Colchester
Matthew Johnstone	Independent volunteer	Positive Action in Housing
Jude Lancet	Adviser	Haringey Migrant Support Centre
Polly McNamara	Homeless Caseworker	St Mungo's
Jennifer Lindo	Homeless caseworker	St. Mungo's
Durga Sivasathiaseelan	Outreach Lead	Doctors of the World
Anita Holmes	Homeless caseworker	St. Mungos
Grace Burgess	Safeguarding Lead	TimePeace
Kirsty McKee	Independent volunteer	Positive Action in Housing
Clare Moseley	Founder	Care4Calais
Isobel Cairns	NRPF Specialist Caseworker	Solace Women's Aid
Sherri Wong Hearing	Caseworker volunteer	Leicester City of Sanctuary
Favour Herbeet	Pastor/Director	CREEM Glasgow
Helen C Mitchell	PPE Sales Manager	Promotional Warehouse
Pat Joyce	Team Leader	Devon & Cornwall Refugee Support, Plymouth
Michael Shaw	Volunteer	Central Asylum Yorkshire

Eleanor Brown	Director	CARAS
Andrea Cleaver	CEO	Welsh Refugee Council
Nicky Woods	CEO	Yarl's Wood Befrienders
Rosario Guimba-Stewart	CEO	Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network
Sarah Grahame	Chair	Yarl's Wood Befrienders
Eleanor Hitchman	Trustee	Yarl's Wood Befriender
Sheila Melzak	Director	Baobab Centre for Young Survivors in Exile
Dr Razia Shariff	CEO	Kent Refugee Action Network
Debbie Royle	Deputy Director	Nottingham & Notts Refugee Forum
Abil Amir	Casework Coordinator	British Red Cross, Refugee Services
Nicola Lawton	Freelance Producer	
Caroline O'Connor	CEO	Migrant Help
Amanda Church-Mcfarlane	Co-CEO	Abigail Housing
Suzanne Fletcher	Housing stream convenor	Tees Valley of Sanctuary
Stephen Smellie	Depute Convenor	UNISON Scotland
Ian Doig	Treasurer	Unison South Lanarkshire Branch
ShumonFarhad	Development Manager	SOLA Arts, Liverpool
Craig Sanderson	Commissioner	Edinburgh Poverty Commission
Rosario Guimba-Stewart <u>This is a duplicate</u>	Chief Executive Officer	Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network
Magdalena Szlenkier	volunteer	Lewisham Donation Hub, Host and Home Visitor for Rooms for Refugees and Refugees at Home
Kiven Emmanuel	Operations and Strategy	Plymouth Hope

	Officer	
Dr Janet Gilbert	General Manager	The Cotton Tree Trust
Kate Ramsden	Branch co-chair,	Aberdeenshire UNISON
Dr Rachel Smith	Lecturer	
Lynn McCulloch FCIH	Social Housing Consultant	Lynn McCulloch Ltd
Stella Shyanguya	Trustee	Yarl's Wood Befrienders
Josh Treacher	Homeless Caseworker	St Mungo's
Catherine Kirk	Trustee	Yarl's Wood Befrienders
Angela Huddart	Trustee	Yarl's Wood Befrienders
Adam Baker	Director	Refugee Roots
Holly Donald	Homeless Caseworker	St Mungo's
Aaron Leung	TEDx Coach, Corporate Trainer & Advocate for Refugees Worldwide	Global (Once part of Trinity Church)
Jessica Anslow	Coordinator	Yarl's Wood Befrienders
David Brannan	Crisis intervention worker	The Marie Trust
Tom Ballantyne		
Robert Swinfen	Convenor	The Iona Community Migration Network
Ashley More	Social Worker	Local Authority
Kirsten Hey	Occupational Therapist	City of Edinburgh Council
Jane Gibson	Social Worker	City of Edinburgh Council
Trishna Singh OBE	Director	Sikh Sanjog
Arthur Nicoll	Co-Chair	Dundee City UNISON
Karen Phillips	Service Coordinator	Amma Birth Companions

Roddy Hutchison	Community Care Assistant	Edinburgh City Council
Carolyn Housman	CEO	Children and Families Across Borders
Fraser Sutherland	CEO	Humanist Society Scotland
Sheza Afzal	Partnership Manager	EqualiTeach
Anne Sanderson		
Ciara Shouldice	Allied Health	
Abi Kingstone	Case worker	Community Cook Up, Haringey
Brian Smith	Branch Secretary	UNISON Glasgow
Michae		
Michael Carberry	Director	Blochairn Housing Association
Najimee Parveen	Director	PATH (Scotland
Naomi Webb	Executive Director	Good Chance Theatre
Callum Loughrie	CEC	COT
Beth Wilson	CEO	Bristol Refugee Rights
Victoria Stelikou	Victims of Slavery Client Adviser	Migrant Help
Karen Pearse	Director	Positive Action For Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Alison Summers	Volunteer	Torture ID and Freedom from Torture
John McFadden	Stand up to racism Scotland	
Emma Baillie	Volunteer	Positive Action in Housing
Eunice Duthie	Social worker	CEC
Elli Free	Director	Room to Heal
Miriam Richardson	Psychotherapist	
Margaret Gallacher	Chairperson	South Lanarkshire Unison branch

Paul Stuart	Branch Secretary	Unison Housing & Care Scotland Branch
Shirley Buchanan	Dep Welfare Officer	Glasgow City Unison
Danielle Grufferty	PTS Coach	Mayday Trust
Brian Cunningham	Co-ordinator	Bedfordshire Refugee & Asylum Seeker support
Ingrid Bain	Job Analyst	GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL