

Charities report failings of Section 9 pilot scheme

The Government's controversial pilot scheme has "comprehensively failed" to achieve its objectives, according to a joint report by The Refugee Council and Refugee Action.

Under the legislation, families who have reached the end of the asylum process can lose benefits if they do not

"Section 9 has caused immense distress and panic"

take reasonable steps to leave the UK.

The report has found that, while being "completely incompatible with human rights standards", it has forced underground around one third of the 116 families affected in "immense distress and panic". One family has left the UK, and 3 have signed up for 'voluntary return.'

The Home Office has said

Concerns grow after court ruling: pg.2

that Section 9 is intended to act as an incentive to return voluntarily. It is being urged by refugee charities to seek alternative measures which will instead provide support for these families at the end of their asylum application process. The report can be downloaded at www.refugeecouncil.org.uk.

Detainees punished after protest at suicide



Image courtesy of NCADC (National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns)

The death of Bereket Yohannes, a 25 year old from Eritrea, in the immigration centre at Harmondsworth has caused shock amongst detainees and the refugee community.

Mr Yohannes' body was found on January 19th. He had been in Harmondsworth

for only a few weeks. Fellow detainees had told the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) that Mr. Yohannes was terrified of being returned to Eritrea.

A number of gatherings took place to mark the death, including a vigil organised by 'Barbed Wire Britain Network to End Refugee and

Migration Detention', and a Memorial meeting at The Spitz Gallery, London as a show of opposition to detention in the UK.

61 detainees at Harmondsworth also issued a separate protest statement: "We, the detainees of Harmondsworth, having considered the various ill treatment being meted to us, have come out with the following complaints that need to be addressed and abated immediately"

As a result of this statement, detainees were punished with a period of confined isolation.



High Court ruling upholds 'Section 9' but Government backs amendment

On Tuesday 31st January the High Court overruled the challenge of a failed asylum seeker from The Congo. Her benefits to support her children had been cut under the Government's controversial 'Section 9'.

The Court decided that it was up to Parliament to take decisions on this policy, rather than the legal system, while the claimant argued that cutting benefits was a breach of Human Rights.

Section 9 is condemned entirely by refugee charities as "inhumane and ineffective". Maeve Sherlock of the Refugee Council has said that "this policy of trying to starve out asylum seekers is not the behaviour of a civilised country." Sandy

Buchan of Refugee Action said: "To threaten parents with the loss of their children if they don't sign a form that says they want to go home is unjust and inhumane. The proper place for children, regardless of their immigration status, is with their parents."

However the Government has backed an amendment to the Immigration Bill to allow for the early repeal of Section 9. "This amendment provides for the early repeal ... should it be decided after considering the evaluation that this is an appropriate course of action.", a spokesman said.

The announcement has been greatly welcomed by refugee and asylum charities.

On the receiving end...

A. from India reveals the distresses of the asylum process.

Application: "I had to wait around all day with no food or drink. Often you have to return on other days. If you are fast tracked you are most likely to be detained (for no valid reason). I had to wait to be interviewed by someone who spoke my native language, even though my English was fine. This delayed the process."

Judicial process: "This took a very long time and was very stressful, full of unknowns and doubts."

After being refused asylum: "You are left with no status, no financial support or position in the country, so can do nothing to improve your situation - training to gain qualifications, for example. It is a hugely emotional, distressing and psychologically damaging time."

Contact JRS if you would like more information about the asylum process.

JRS Europe organises journalism prize

JRS Europe is running a competition which encourages prospective journalists and journalism students to write an article about the realities affecting refugees and asylum seekers.

The competition, 'Refugees in Europe', is open to current students or recent graduates studying in Europe.

The authors of the three best articles will be invited to meet the judges, experienced journalists, while the winner will be offered the chance to visit Kenya to gain further knowledge of refugee and asylum issues. The deadline is 21st March!

For more information about this challenging opportunity with an excellent prize, visit www.jrseurope.org, or email press.europe@jrs.net.

A big thanks to all for the generous donations received over Christmas, and for your continuing support!



No Rhinos at Rhino Camp!

There may not be many rhinos at Rhino Camp but there are plenty of mosquitoes. So the 20,000 refugees and JRS are not alone. Although it is called a 'camp' the location is really a series of 42 African villages spread across about 20



miles. People here are not starving but otherwise life is pretty basic - no electricity, no running water, queuing for several hours at the bore holes, pot-holed tracks for roads, crowded primary schools, limited capacity to grow things and 40° heat.

Through all this, most of the refugees seem remarkably happy. They are able to live in peace - not just away from the conflict

in South Sudan but generally at peace among the different tribes and with the Ugandan nationals. Other countries could certainly learn something from the remarkably generous policies that Uganda has towards refugees - this despite having 1 million of their own people internally displaced and an economy in which 'developing' is more of a hope than a reality.



Part of the reason for this is that many of the Ugandans in this West Nile region were themselves refugee

in Sudan in the 1970s; now they are repaying the hospitality. Refugees are allowed to work, use the same schools and health centres as nationals and generally travel around the country with ease.

Most of the JRS work here is *informal* education - unlike other JRS East Africa projects we are not running schools. But we do run a massive literacy programme for 1000 Sudanese who missed out on basic education, a vocational school to empower women with sewing skills and a pedal sewing machine, training for pastoral workers and 'peace education'. The prospect of returning home and building a new Sudan is now very likely and there is no doubt that education is going to be one of the keys to success. Part of the JRS mission is 'to serve' and it is easy to identify how we do that. But it is also clear in this context that we can fulfil the other parts: 'to accompany' by

For your reflection

In the last week of his life, Jesus charged the leaders and lawgivers of his day for their blindness: they strain out a gnat but swallow a camel (Mt. 23v23f). They strained over their concern for collecting taxes, but swallowed the weightier principles of justice, mercy and faith. This charge could apply to the woeful treatment of failed asylum seekers who are now left destitute, without benefits and the rights to work - so not due taxes!

Pope Benedict has issued an encyclical highlighting the central belief that God is Love, a belief that must be put into practice in society. Justice and mercy are blind without this faith, and their blindness shows itself clearly in the treatment of vulnerable groups. In the time of Jesus, they are the widow, the orphan and the foreigner. Now they include the foreigner who is an asylum seeker.

Harry Elias S.J.

living, praying and learning alongside the refugees; and 'to advocate' not by advocating for them but by providing refugees with the tools and the confidence so that they can advocate for themselves.

Raymond Perrier S.J.

Mission Statement

The Jesuit Refugee Service is an international Catholic non-governmental organisation, at work in over 50 countries, with a mission to accompany, serve and defend the rights of refugees and forcibly displaced people.

The purpose of JRS UK is to accompany, to serve and to advocate on behalf of all asylum seekers from their first arrival until they are satisfactorily settled. This work is carried out in collaboration with other JRS offices round the world, other Church and secular organisations, voluntary and governmental, which are active in the same field.

Values

JRS is grounded in Catholic social teaching and draws on the principles of Ignatian spirituality in discerning with whom we work. All

members share a common set of values and principles concerned with justice, the dignity of the person and a responsibility to carry out the social mission of the Church.

DIARY

◇ **Conference: “Working with change, meeting the challenge: An asylum policy and legislation update.”**
 23rd March - Birmingham.

Speakers include: Tony McNulty MP (Immigration, Citizenship & Nationality); Mark Henderson, Barrister, Doughty St. Chambers; Heaven Crawley, Director, AMRE Consulting; Ravi Low-Beer, Solicitor, Refugee Legal Centre. Further information can be found at <http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/refugeecouncil/training/conferences.htm>

◇ **“You know how a stranger feels” -Justice and Peace Retreat.** Fri 21st - Sun 23rd April, Worth Abbey, Crawley, W. Sussex

A Retreat for Christians who work with refugees and asylum

seekers. See the form enclosed with this newsletter for booking and further details. For any enquiries contact Rosemary: 01342 710318; TOC@worthabbey.net

SPONSORS WANTED!

Three Sixth Form pupils from St. Ignatius College, Enfield, are running the 2006 London Marathon for JRS. See the inside Rhino Camp article.



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