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NEWS RELEASE

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PUT PEOPLE FIRST – NOT BUDGETS, SAYS JRS

The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in the UK has described proposals to impose time limits on publicly funded advice for asylum seekers as “unduly harsh”, and warned that they will place “undue burdens on immigration legal practitioners”.

Responding to a Consultation Paper from the Lord Chancellor’s Department/ Department for Constitutional Affairs, the JRS says there is already a shortage of legal advisers who are publicly or charitably funded in England and Wales. It predicts that lawyers will abandon cases involving asylum seekers and switch to “more lucrative areas of the law”, if proposed changes to publicly funded Immigration and Asylum work are implemented.

JRS UK works with and helps people seeking asylum from their arrival in the UK until they are satisfactorily settled. Its Director, Louise Zanré has reacted strongly to proposals that maximum limits should be placed on how much immigration and asylum work can be publicly funded, saying they are “woefully inadequate”.

“It takes time to build up the necessary levels of trust and time limits will prevent this,” she says. “Despite the best will in the world, the legal adviser won’t be able to act with due care and consideration of the asylum seeker’s needs. And the maximum limits conveniently disregard the problem in numerous cases of interminable delays, which require repeated following up of the Home Office by legal advisers.”

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The JRS submission to the government department calls on the Home Office to review the entire asylum process, putting the individual's needs and protection first. "Once the process has been put right, then there will be fewer appeals and considerably fewer costs to the public purse," it argues. "It seems unduly hard that asylum seekers be forced to pay the price of the budget overspend through a decreased chance of getting legal advice in their cases, and the likely decrease in standards of care taken in their case by legal advisers".

"The period of consultation is now over," says Louise Zanré, "and we await with interest to learn what decisions will be made. Our overriding concerns are for the asylum seekers. The Government should show concern and compassion for them too – not just an obsession with reducing the burden on the public purse."

End

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The full submission by JRS UK to the Lord Chancellor's Dept/Department for Constitutional Affairs can be viewed and downloaded from www.jrsuk.net (Publications/ Legal Aid Consultation).
 2. For further information, contact Louise Zanré (Director, JRS UK) on 020 8847 3555 or Ged Clapson (Jesuit Communications Officer, British Province) on 07778 218671.
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