

## ABUSE OF IMMIGRATION DETAINEES

On 2 March, the *BBC's Undercover Asylum Programme* revealed the shameful levels of racism and violence which detainees suffer. In response Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue issued the following statement from the Office of Refugee Policy at the Catholic Bishops' Conference:

"I was deeply shocked by the BBC's revelation of the horrific levels of racism, violence and abuse within the immigration detention and removal system. I was saddened by the attitude of those in charge of some of the most vulnerable and traumatised people - many of whom suffered persecution, imprisonment and torture in their countries of origin. Detention in these circumstances can have serious psychiatric and medical consequences particularly when they are held in 'prison-like' conditions and abused.

It is not enough to claim that "it's only a few rotten apples." It has gone beyond that. The immigration minister, Des Browne, is right in calling for an investigation into what has happened. However, I would go further and call for a full independent inquiry into the whole immigration detention regime.

It is unacceptable that people who have not committed a crime or brought before a court are detained without time limits and only limited rights to bail. Under these circumstances there must



be safeguards, especially in the light of the government's intention to further increase the use of detention and removals.

It is right that detention and removals are part of any fair, efficient and humane asylum system. But as the UNHCR concluded the detention of asylum seekers *'should normally be avoided and that, insofar as it occurs, detainees should be able to challenge the lawfulness of their detention...'* Removals ought to be in conditions of safety and dignity.

Providing protection to vulnerable and violated people must always be central to our asylum system.

**Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue**

### JRS Europe Detention Project

JRS Europe are focusing on detention as one of its key campaigning and lobbying issues. They have published a new website dedicated to this topic: [www.detention-in-europe.org](http://www.detention-in-europe.org) Regularly updated, it contains lots of information about detention practices across Europe and latest information on campaigns and lobbying initiatives.

## No Place for a Child

Increasing numbers of asylum seeking children are being detained by the UK Government for immigration purposes. Little is known about the reasons for their detention, the length of time they are detained, or the impact it has on their well being.

There is growing concern that this use of detention contravenes a range of international human rights standards relating to the treatment of children, and impacts negatively on already vulnerable children.

*No Place for a Child* sets out to analyse current UK detention policy and practice, its impact on children, and to offer viable alternatives to the immigration detention of children. It also identifies safeguards for children already in detention that would reduce the length of their detention.

By making specific recommendations, this report not only contributes to the policy debate on immigration detention, but also seeks to make the immigration detention of children a thing of the past in the UK.

Copies of *No Place for a Child* (96 pages) can be downloaded for free from [www.savethechildren.org.uk/noplace](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/noplace) or for £8.95 plus postage and packing from Save the Children on 020-70126400.



## Sleepless in Glasgow...

John is a failed asylum seeker from Nigeria. He currently lives in Glasgow with a retired priest. His path to Scotland's second city has taken him via Dungavel Detention Centre in Lanarkshire and Harmondsworth Detention Centre 'doon south', and these days he receives no support at all from the British Government. And yet, in a way, John can count himself amongst the luckier of failed asylum seekers. Most don't even have a roof over their heads, and instead of seeking asylum, they spend their days seeking their next meal, and the hours of darkness sleepless in bus shelters or riding the night buses.

This situation is the creation of the 1999 Asylum and Immigration Act and subsequent legislation. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is not obliged to support an asylum seeker whose asylum application and appeal have failed. This means that the weekly £38.26 – 2/3 of weekly income support benefits and far below the poverty line – is withdrawn, along with the rent paid on accommodation. Save for the intervention of well-intentioned individuals such as the priest with whom John now stays, the asylum seeker is left absolutely destitute.

This was one of the situations with which I was confronted upon arrival in Glasgow as this year's Jesuit Volunteer for the Glasgow Campaign To Welcome Refugees. Lobbying and campaigning against destitution is one ongoing *raison d'être* of the GCTWR. In the December issue of this newsletter you heard

from fellow volunteer Ian Quigg in Manchester, who is also engaged in a project concerning destitution. In the face of such nationwide legislation, there can be no doubting the need for responses to destitution in every city in Britain where asylum seekers are found.

The GCTWR is a completely independent, politically motivated organisation. Membership is not a formal affair; anyone interested in the well being of asylum seekers can send us an email and stay in touch. It has no religious affiliations, though those active in the Campaign come from all religious backgrounds. We have the broad aim of publicly highlighting injustice in both the asylum system and in individual cases.

I myself have now been in Glasgow for five months, and my position within the Campaign has grown more familiar. There is an administrative side to my work, which involves keeping minutes of meetings and maintaining communications, so anyone who emails is likely to hear back from yours truly! Over and above this, I am involved in organising our demonstrations, alongside which comes the part I play in the ongoing process of creating a website – [www.gctwr.org](http://www.gctwr.org) – containing details of our work. I also help out where I can in individual cases, either in terms of personally befriending those concerned or in moving their case on.

Nothing prepared me for the realisation that asylum seekers were being made destitute. Asylum policy is obviously much in the news and I was aware of the existence of Removal Centres such as

Dungavel. Deliberate creation of destitution, however, is not something that people know so much about – and no wonder, for it is not really the sort of policy that a humane government can trumpet. Yet it happens, in all our major cities. If you are interested in the situation in Glasgow, you can visit our website or get in touch with us at [glascam-ref@hotmail.com](mailto:glascam-ref@hotmail.com). As awareness of the problems faced by asylum seekers grows, perhaps somebody elected to represent us will feel driven to make changes. In the meantime let us hope that enough kind-hearted people come forward to offer a bed to the likes of John. It surely has to be more comfortable than a seat on the night bus.

Peter Cousins

### Nectar Vouchers

Thank you for continuing to send unwanted Nectar Vouchers to us, so that they can be distributed to asylum seekers and refugees in need!

### Thank you!

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the travel fund for the Ugandan family.

We hope that our refugee friend's wife and children will be able to join him in the UK in the next few weeks.





## DETAINEES DIG DEEP FOR TSUNAMI VICTIMS

Alongside the millions of pounds that have been donated to help rebuild the lives of the victims of the Boxing Day tsunami, some of Britain's poorest and least advantaged people have collected money to send to Sri Lanka.

Pentecostal detainees at Harmondsworth Detention Centre, Heathrow, raised £220.47 which is being sent to the Sri Lankan Universal Pentecostal Church. Some of the Christian ministers who visit inmates at the centre have connections with the coastal region of Sri Lanka that was devastated by the tsunami.

A visitor from the Jesuit Refugee Service, whose staff and volunteers regularly visit Harmondsworth, described their generosity as "the detainees' mite". "Considering the individual allowance for a detainee is less than £1 per day, their generosity must have been no less mighty than that of those who gave out of their riches," he said.

Harmondsworth Immigration Removal Centre near Heathrow Airport opened in September 2001. It holds those detained by the Immigration Service as overstayers, illegal entrants or failed asylum seekers prior to their removal from the country. It also holds a smaller proportion of detainees whose cases have not yet been determined, but who are considered to be at risk of absconding or whose identities are being established.

### JRS Tsunami Appeal

JRS has worked for many years in the Aceh region of Indonesia. Aceh is a conflict zone, and the JRS has been working among the internally displaced people, who are now facing this new tragedy. It is natural for many families in Aceh and the rest of Indonesia to take in their relatives whenever a disaster occurs and displaces them. When disaster happens, this system provides a cushion for the vulnerable. The host family pools all resources available in the extended family to help their relatives. The cushion, however, is not strong enough to sustain all the victims of the recent disaster. As thousands of refugees are now relying solely on their relatives, the situation is getting more difficult. Wir, an

activist with the local NGO, described the situation: "The refugee situation ... is like a person leaning against a tree. Only now the tree is not a strong mango tree but a fragile banana tree. Once the burden is a bit too heavy, the tree will instantly fall. When combined with the rising prices of food and basic supplies owing to the much stronger demand than supply, the kinship system that has provided a crucial safety net is unlikely to survive the increasing strain."

Please help us in our work either by donating online through: <http://www.just.giving.com/jrstsunamiappeal> or by sending your donation to the JRS UK Office, clearly marking it for Indonesia.

## FOR YOUR REFLECTION

### Prayer to make poverty history

Christ our Lord,  
your light shines into the shadows,  
and shows us  
where the obstacles to change lie.  
We know that often  
they are in our own hearts,  
in the way we live,  
and in our daily choices and actions.

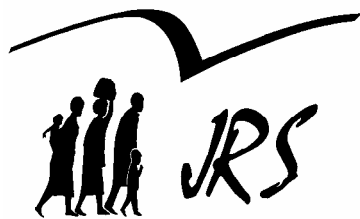
We pray that we may accept  
the light of your love  
as a challenge to change  
ourselves  
and our world.

We pray that each day,  
we make the choices  
and take the actions  
that will bring an end to poverty  
and hunger,  
and lead us all  
towards a fairer world.

Be with us, Lord,  
as we face your challenge  
and learn how to live our lives in love.  
Amen



*Building banner at the 2005 World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil*



## 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.

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[www.detention-in-europe.org](http://www.detention-in-europe.org)

## Diary

**23<sup>rd</sup> April (Saturday)**  
**COVENTRY UNIVERSITY**  
**10.00-16.30**

**Peace Education Network Conference: Culture, Conflict, Creativity and Change - Teaching Peace and Global Citizenship in our Multi-Cultural Society** Speakers including: Julia Jarman, children's writer; Margot Brown, National Co-ordinator of Centre for Global Education; Sandra Ship-ton, Adviser, Coventry LEA. There will also be practical workshops on offer for teachers and those who work with young people. Cost: £25.00 waged or £10.00 unwaged. Includes lunch. Bookings/further information: Pax Christi, 020-82034884 or [paxchristi@gn.apc.org](mailto:paxchristi@gn.apc.org)

**18<sup>th</sup> June (Saturday) LEEDS**  
**12.30 – 17.00**

**Just Befriending?** National Catholic Refugee Forum AGM and seminar on befriending refugees. Venue: Cathedral Hall, Great George Street, Leeds. Further information and bookings: 077-89014819 or [info@refugee-forum.org.uk](mailto:info@refugee-forum.org.uk)

**18<sup>th</sup> June (Saturday) LONDON**  
**12.00-17.00**

**Refugee Party** organised by JRS. Venue: St Ignatius Parish

Parish, Stamford Hill. Please contact JRS for further information: 020-73570974 or [uk@jrs.net](mailto:uk@jrs.net)

**8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> July, SWANICK**  
**We are the Stewards of Creation.** The National Justice and Peace Conference. Venue: Hayes Conference Centre. Speakers include Sean McDonagh SSC, Ed Echlin and Ellen Teague. For further information, pricing structure and bookings: National J& P Network, 020-79014864.

## General Election

We expect that the General Election will take place in early May. Unfortunately asylum and immigration matters often figure highly within election campaigns. The Churches Commission for Racial Justice have put together an election briefing on wider race issues which is available from them on 020-76547244. A briefing will also be available soon from JRS. Please email [uk@jrs.net](mailto:uk@jrs.net) to request a copy or phone us on



020-73570974.

- Please add me to your mailing list
- Donation enclosed Amount: £ \_\_\_\_\_
- I am a UK taxpayer and would like to gift aid my donation to JRS (*Gift aid increases the value of your donation to us by 28p in every pound*)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_