

**STATEMENT BY BISHOP PATRICK O'DONOGHUE FOR REFUGEE WEEK  
(JUNE 14-20, 2004)**

**Bishop Patrick O'Donoghue, Chairman of the Office for Refugee Policy of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, issued the following statement for Refugee Week 2004. It argues for the UK's continued adherence to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, especially at this time, when the world faces increasing conflict-related displacement of people.**

Bishop O'Donoghue said: "Few rights are more fundamental than the right to be free from persecution – a right encapsulated in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, drawn up to address the displacement of people in Europe, caused by World War 11.

"The history of the past 50 years, and the 1990s in particular, has been one of forced migration of people from their countries; hundreds of thousands fleeing wars, ethnic cleansing, human rights' abuses and state and non-state sponsored terrorism.

"These victims of persecution, who are mostly in the South, need the protection of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention just as Europeans did, more than 50 years ago. As Churches, we are in solidarity with all who are compelled to leave their countries and homes to seek protection and claim their human dignity.

"There are currently over 100 conflicts around the world. Most of the victims of these conflicts are women and children. The tragic events in Sudan (Dafur), which has already affected more than 130,000 people, is a case in point. The UN has described the situation in Dafur as one of the 'world's worst humanitarian crises'.

"It is right, therefore, that this year's Refugee Week should focus on 'conflict' as being one of the root causes of forced migration. In this context, it is important to recognise that no solution to the world refugee problem is possible, without a reordering of the North's economic and political relations with the South.

"Finally, in the light of the forthcoming elections to the European Parliament and the Greater London Assembly, I urge the leaders of political parties to maintain their commitment to the 'All-Party Declaration on the Principles of Good Practice for the Debate on Asylum and Immigration.'

"The Catholic Church asks politicians to explain to their constituents, who refugees are, where they come from, the UK obligations under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and the contributions refugees make to the UK's economic, social and cultural life. We also support proper policing and legal mechanisms to combat racist abuse of refugees and asylum seekers."

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To keep informed about refugee week events across the UK, visit the refugee week website at: [www.refugeeweek.org.uk](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk)